

Legislative Committee
March 5, 2025

Attendees

Committee: Allen Hinkley, Art Merrill, Eric Wilson, Timothy Kelso, Tina Molé

Absent: Lisa Driscoll

Staff: Maria Kelso, Judith Garrison, Joe Ermeti, Shawn Smith, Penny Bishop

Mr. Hinkley called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

Upon a motion by Wilson, seconded by Mr. Merrill, the draft minutes of the February 5 committee meeting were unanimously approved.

Committee chair referred to emailed questions from County Clerk Haley Gransbury about County Historian records being stored at the County Clerk's office. Clerk of the Board Penny Bishop stated that Mrs. Gransbury was looking to turn over the records that so she can regain that office space. Since the County Clerk is serving on a panel at the Courthouse today, the discussion will continue at the next Legislative meeting. Mr. Kelso said Mrs. Gransbury would be going to Davenport to help with the town's records management as well.

Board of Elections Commissioner Maria Kelso referred to two 2024 Budget amendment resolutions for grants that were approved. The Ballot-by-Mail grant is for \$26,956.87 and the General Election Grant is \$20,490.27. She reported that because they received an extension on a tier grant, they were able to apply \$48,355.54 toward the cost of the new election machines. Ms. Kelso reported that petitioning is underway and there is a schedule of the dates posted on the Board of Elections website which includes voter enrollment, election schedule, first date to sign petitions, when to submit them, when independent petitions are due, etc. She stated enrollment numbers for 2025 increased by 984 over last year. She announced that New York State Board of Elections will visit on March 18 to look at the new location and talk about the new voting machines, security, and day-to-day operations. They will also be meeting with County officials at 11:00 a.m. She said her office has been working on all the voting machines getting them ready for the upcoming elections. There will also be more training for the programming of the ballots for the machines. They also have been preparing for election inspector school. They have ordered new bags that will be purchased with funds from the Center for Tech and Civic Life Foundation Grant as the current bags are very worn.

District Attorney Shawn Smith gave a general update on the traffic diversion program. The first revenue from this program was in December and was approximately \$1,500. January revenue was \$8,500 and February was \$11,000. He expects March to be much higher. It has taken a little while to get the program completely rolled out and at this point all the courts are understanding the program and are working on the platform. They anticipate revenues would be approximately \$40,000 a month once fully utilized. He announced there has been a lot of progress on the drug court program. He has been in many meetings with the Office of Court Administration, and they have agreed essentially to rebuild the program from the ground up.

They are creating a new contract for the drug courts with counsel for the Office of Court Administration. They will rework the handbook to basically develop a whole new drug court. He said they are taking the lead on this as far as all the counties in the state, but already Otsego County is talking about mimicking what we do and he expects a lot of other counties will end up following along. He reported that overall his office is busy and said that last year, they handled 129 felony cases through Grand Jury and County Court. In 2023, they did 106 felony cases and in 2022 and 2021 there were 43 and 42 respectively. So far this year as of March 1, they have done 29 indictment felony cases. If this trend continues it would put them substantially higher than last year.

Public Defender Joe Ermeti said things are going well in his office. He is negotiating a contract with the state to pay the salary for a new attorney. In reply to Ms. Molé, Mr. Ermeti said they are only fully staffed for attorneys. He explained that he cannot hire for a support staff position until the remodeled space is completed. Concerning staffing, Mr. Ermeti stated it would be helpful to know when the District Attorney's Office or the Public Defender's Office is planning to bring in a new lawyer to expand the operation. He believes it would be better if they knew through this committee meeting so not everything is reactionary. He feels his office is at a disadvantage when the DA's office adds another attorney and he is not informed as it takes four to five months to fill a position after the DA's Office has already hired a new attorney. The process should start with the Legislative Committee meeting.

Clerk of the Board Penny Bishop distributed an updated report of Medical Examiner's cases for 2024. The report indicates the number of total unattended deaths in the County was 164.

Mr. Merrill made a motion to enter into executive session to discuss legal matters. The motion was seconded by Mr. Wilson and unanimously carried.

Committee reconvened in regular session.

Upon a motion, the meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.