



# News & Views

Your Newsletter From. . .

## Chris Higgins

**Albany County Legislator, 6<sup>th</sup> District**

Hudson/Park ♦ Washington Park ♦ Park South  
Center Square ♦ The Mansion Neighborhoods

News & Views Issue #1

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It is my pleasure to distribute the first edition of my newsletter to you. As I serve you in the Albany County Legislature, I intend to use this newsletter to keep in touch, and to share my perspective on what's happening in our neighborhoods and in Albany County. I believe that an important part of public service is being responsive to constituent needs and concerns and providing constituents with timely and relevant information. If I can be of assistance, please feel free to contact me.

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## Convention Center Update

Planning for a prospective convention center in downtown Albany continues at both the state and local levels of government. Recently, the state authority charged with developing this project set forth a revised cost estimate of approximately \$390 million, nearly double what the initial estimate was. **To date, the state has only provided the project with an initial \$75 million grant and the ability to issue bonds for another \$130 million in financing, leaving a \$200 million funding shortfall.** In addition to the state funding, the county also provides the convention center authority with 1% of the revenue derived from the county Hotel and Occupancy Tax (HOT), currently at 6%.

Last month a resolution, over my opposition, passed the legislature requesting the state to allow the county to recalculate its

HOT tax formula so that an additional 2% from this tax would be steered towards the convention center upon substantial completion. This would result in the county providing approximately 3% of the 6% collected from the HOT tax or approximately \$3 million in funding to this project.

**Given the uncertainty of the convention center altogether,** coupled with the fact that no additional state funds were appropriated for this project in the 08-09 state budget, **I could not in good conscious support sending additional tax-payer dollars to the convention center project.** In the coming months, the state should provide us with a much clearer picture of whether or not they wish to continue with this project and provide the center with the necessary funds to begin construction.

As this issue unfolds, I will do my best to continue keeping you informed of developments.

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## *My Bill Introductions & Co-Sponsorships*

**Plastic Bag Recycling Law** — I introduced a proposal to require “big box” stores (10,000 square feet or larger) in Albany County to establish in-store recycling programs to enable shoppers to recycle their used plastic bags. Currently, the city and some towns do not accept these bags for recycling. The proposal also has an educational component that requires the County Department of Consumer Affairs to undertake a public awareness campaign to make people and businesses aware of the benefits of recycling plastic bags and of proper recycling methods.

If enacted into law, stores that do not comply with the law will be subject to a range of fines starting at \$500.00. My hope is that this proposal will be approved in committee and be taken up by the full County Legislature in May or June.

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**Ethics Reform** — I am co-sponsoring a bill that would significantly update and improve the county ethics law. First adopted in 1992, the original ethics law is ambiguous in many instances and in some respects does not take into consideration many of the major provisions present in state law. This resolution would prohibit officials from accepting gifts, prohibit former employees from conducting business with the county for one year post-employment, and prohibit political involvement by members of the ethics commission.

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### *Resolution Opposing the Iraq War*

**Iraq War Resolution**—In January, the county legislature took up a resolution urging the end of combat operations in Iraq and the return of U.S. Troops back home. While this resolution was merely symbolic in nature, I wholeheartedly supported it in the hopes it would be reviewed and taken into consideration by our national representatives in deliberating foreign policy regarding the war.

Unfortunately, the resolution did not pass the County Legislature, failing by a 22-15 vote.

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## **Albany Resource Numbers**

Police/Fire (non-emergency).....	438-4000
Albany City Hall.....	434-5075
Senior Transportation.....	434-4219
Medical Transportation (for residents 60+ and Medicaid recipients).....	1-866-208-7357
County Aging Services.....	447-7177
Veterans Bureau.....	447-7710
Board of Elections.....	487-5060
County Airport.....	242-2222
Mental Health (Mobile Crisis Unit).....	447-9650
Poison Control.....	1-800-336-6997
Rape Crisis Hotline.....	447-7716
Child Abuse Hotline.....	1-800-342-3720
Domestic Violence Hotline.....	765-4444
Drug Hotline.....	487-5499
West Nile Surveillance.....	447-4620
Rabies Reporting.....	447-4620
Welfare Fraud Hotline.....	447-7380
Medicaid Provider Fraud.....	447-7380

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Albany County [www.albanycounty.com](http://www.albanycounty.com)  
City of Albany [www.albanyny.org](http://www.albanyny.org)

## **Other Recent Actions Taken By the Albany County Legislature**

✓ Approved a 5% county share for the cost of buying ballot marking device (BMD) voting machines for use by disabled voters at the 188 polling sites in the County, starting with the 2008 Primary elections. Non-disabled voters will continue to use the metal lever voting machines until they are replaced by optical scan machines for the 2009 Primary Elections.

✓ Gave \$4,500 to Senior Services of Albany

✓ Gave \$4,500 to the Historic Albany Foundation

✓ Conveyed three parcels of county land in the city of Albany to Capital District Habitat for Humanity to build affordable housing in West Hill and the South End.

✓ Authorized Albany International Airport to complete construction of two T-hangars for 20 corporate and private aircraft and relocate two main electric transformers for increased safety.

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