



YOUR SUMMER NEWSLETTER

FROM

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News & Views



HUDSON/PARK, WASHINGTON PARK, PARK SOUTH, CENTER SQUARE & THE MANSION NEIGHBORHOODS

It is my pleasure to distribute my county newsletter to you. Throughout my term in office I intend to use this newsletter to keep in touch and share my perspective on what's happening in our county. I believe that an important aspect of public service is responding to constituent concerns and providing relevant information. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

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ALBANY COUNTY ETHICS OVERHAUL

I am co-sponsor of a proposal to modernize the county's ethics and financial disclosure laws.

I believe that we need to take steps to enhance trust and confidence in county government. We can do this by establishing a clear and comprehensive code of conduct for county officials and by requiring policymakers to disclose their financial interests. Frankly, these changes are long overdue.

The current laws are just too vague, and are therefore unenforceable, especially with respect to conflicts of interest. This proposal will draw a bright line between a public official's private interests and his or her official conduct. It will make it clear that the county's public officials work for you, not for themselves or for anyone else.

But an ethics law is only as good as its enforcement. That's why we

need to make sure that the county's ethics rules are vigorously enforced. The Albany County Ethics Commission has the authority to conduct investigations and impose penalties, but it isn't performing these functions. This proposal will change this system by requiring policymakers to take ethics training, and will turn the County Ethics Commission into a real ethics "cop on the beat."

Restaurant Inspection Reporting

Following up on the enactment of Albany's calorie posting law, earlier this year I introduced legislation to require restaurants and eateries to post the inspection reports that are drafted by the county health department. Initially, I wanted the measure to parallel the restaurant grading system currently in place in New York City, however after discussions with the County Health Commissioner it was determined that such a system would be too costly to implement.

Under the adopted resolution, the board of health is creating an inspection report card which will out-

line any egregious violations a restaurant may have and then require its posting in a conspicuous location near the entrance. Restaurants will have a chance to cure these egregious violations prior to posting. The idea behind the proposal is to provide consumers with as much information about the health and cleanliness of eateries prior to patronizing such establishments. Posting the reports will also give restaurants with poor reviews the incentive to keep their establishments clean and consumers the information they need to make informed choices.

Creation of An Albany County Land Bank

Governor Cuomo recently signed legislation authorizing the creation of "land banks" throughout the state. A land bank is a governmental entity that focuses on turning vacant, abandoned, and tax delinquent properties into productive properties. Land banks can be pivotal in making property redevelopment more efficient and affordable in downward economic cycles as a stimulus for reinvestment, and in

reserving land for targeted purposes.

I believe that this idea can be applied here in our community. I have begun researching how land banks have been used elsewhere, and have reached out to the Historic Albany Foundation and the Center for Community Progress to see how we can work together to make this a reality for Albany. I will be sure to keep you apprised on this important issue as we move forward.

Times Union Center Ends 2010 with Operating Profits Over \$1 Million

Facility Has Generated More than \$17.7 Million in Operating Profits since 1995

The county-owned Times Union Center ended 2010 with an operating profit of \$1,048,660, despite the ongoing economic recession. This marks the 15th consecutive year that the facility has generated a profit.

The County and its management team responded early to the lag in the economy, implementing cost-saving measures in 2008 that

continued thru 2010, including four day work weeks in the summer months and not filling positions that became vacant. Overall, operating expenses were reduced by \$313,546 in 2010. The TU Center generated more than \$1 million despite a reduced number of events in 2010, which is in line with the industry-wide trend of fewer performance tours.

County Study Finds Regional Solid Waste Management Authority Would Save Money and Increase Recycling

The study recommends the formation of a Regional Solid Waste Authority to achieve significant benefits, including cost savings and increased recycling rates. Albany County completed the study with the assistance of a project steering committee consisting of representatives from 13 Capital Region municipalities and was funded by the NYS Dept. of State. The regional landfills in the City of Albany and the Town of Colonie will reach capacity within the next several years and the time to plan for solid waste management is now.

Some of the highlights of the study include:

- The creation of a new regional authority could result in significant cost savings in the range of \$10.8 to \$15.8 million per year in addition to increasing operational and environmental benefits.
- Consolidation of existing local solid waste planning units would pool resources, streamline governance and save time, staff and money.
- A coordinated regional recycling program could quadruple the volume of materials currently recovered in the region.
- Establishing a single collection system for a municipality or a group of municipalities could even reduce the collection costs in areas served by private collectors.

The study recommends the development of an inter-municipal agreement that would allow communities to opt in as part of an authority formation team that can work to address concerns and build consensus. I will be sure to keep you apprised as I get more information on this important issue.

Home Improvement Licensing Proposal

A proposal to regulate home improvement, remodeling and repair businesses and license people engaged in these activities is currently under consideration by the County Legislature.

A licensing requirement would be a critical first step in protecting county residents from shady home improvement contractors. It would enable county residents to determine whether their prospective contractor is a legitimate business. It would also protect consumers by enabling them to file complaints against home improvement businesses where appropriate, and would offer homeowners the ability to review complaints, if any, which have been filed against a home improvement business before signing a contract for home improvement work.

Under the proposal, the Department of General Services would also enable home improvement businesses to respond to complaints filed. Albany County residents will be able to review responses from the home improvement businesses to any complaints filed.