



Onondaga County Legislature

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Chairman

KATHERINE FRENCH
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PUBLIC HEARING - PROPOSED LOCAL LAW – REAPPORTIONMENT OF COUNTY LEGISLATURE April 13, 2011 - 7:00 P.M.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr. Lesniak, Mr. Dougherty, Mr. Meyer, Mr. Tassone, Mrs. Rapp, Mr. Buckel, Mr. Corbett, Mr. Stanczyk, Mr. Holmquist, Mr. Kilmartin, Mr. Warner, Mr. Jordan, Mr. Laguzza, Mr. Masterpole, Ms. Williams, Mrs. Ervin, Mr. Rhinehart.

Chairman Rhinehart called the public hearing to order at 7:10 P.M. He noted that the public hearing is for Local Law A, which was proposed and sent forward from the Reapportionment Commission.

Mr. Dougherty led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Rhinehart noted that the legislators would like to hear any comments on the other proposals that have been submitted and invite participants to do so. He pointed out maps of Plan B, which were posted in the Chamber. He noted that legislator would be happy to hear comments from taxpayers on either plan.

JOAN JOHNSON, SYRACUSE METRO LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS - (STATEMENT ON FILE)

DOUG GREENLEE, CITIZEN – in looking at current proposed plans A & B, and seeing the plan in the newspaper for the first time yesterday, it is laughable to see lines going all over the county and splitting villages, and sudden bumps in an area of a district to include another village or piece of a village. There should have been time given for an independent group of citizens. If 3 people, a registered Democrat, registered Republican, and an independent voter, from each legislative district, 51 people total, they could have sat down and gone back to square one and try to make sense in laying out the various districts. He would like that to still be considered, if possible.

WALT DIXIE, NATION/ACTION NETWORK – Gave an example of when the County Executive endorsed Andrew Cuomo; and at that time tried to really bring folks together. The citizen of the state applaud who he is today; why he has done in a short time to balance a budget, to bring both aisles together to do what has been done to balance the budget. The message here is that the opportunity is to be progressive, proactive, inclusive, transparent, and citizens win at the end of the day versus partisanism. The voters in the city and county are feeling that they want all working together. He is concerned about people of color; census tells us that the community is changing and all voices need to be heard. At the end of the day, he is reminded of Ed Cotch and what he did in league of voters in terms of uprising and in terms of a state level – what they are trying to do. Even though there is jockeying back and forth; we know that our governor is going to find a better product that everyone can live with of accountability. Elmwood School was closed down – the way it was done was in the night, no communication with the citizens. There was lack of communication and transparency as to why it should happen. It took two City councilors – one Democrat and one Republican, who leveraged that it was not right – they came together and stopped it from happening. At the end of the day, legislators can come together and do what is bigger than themselves – do what it morally right; learn from past examples when we didn't get it right. These citizens all want accountability and transparency – thanked the legislature for their time; hope they take it seriously and not do it again in the dark.

DAVID MAGNARELLI, CHAIR, GEDDES DEMOCRAT COMMITTEE – here tonight speaking as a resident of the Town of Geddes. As many of you are aware, the Town of Geddes previously enjoyed a single vote in the County Legislature. It has now been carved up and it is a part of three separate districts, which we are told won't affect its voice in the County Legislature at all. For one, I disagree. It seems to me that we hear the

words reform over and over again when we talk about Washington, when we talk about Albany, but I believe that the Committee for Redistricting had an opportunity to truly bring about some reform here in Onondaga County. Unfortunately, it's my opinion that they failed in that regard. Instead, if the papers are to be believe, if the comments on the streets are to be believed, and the numerous rumors that we are all hearing are to be believed, the majority of that commission chose rather instead to protect incumbents, to try and pit minority party candidates against one another, and in certain instances to actually foster the political ambitions of certain members of the committee itself. We ask ourselves every election, those of us who are involved with politics, why the voter turnout is always so light; why is it that little more than half of the people eligible to vote do even in Presidential elections and in our local elections the voter turnout is even smaller than that. I submit to you that the answer is right before you when you see actions such as those that are being considered tonight. Comments that I hear on the streets are very cynical. People are very epithetic, the job that you have before in either ratifying, passing or rejecting this proposal has already been termed, whether it's true or not, I don't know, but it's already been termed. It's going to be a club vote; it's already a done deal. I submit that this is the reason people lose interest in government, this is the reason people lose their faith in government. As I said, I believe that the commission failed in its responsibilities, but you have an opportunity to make it right. You have the opportunity to reconsider what has been done and to do the right thing by the people that you represent. I ask you to reconsider the redistricting and to truly reconsider its effect on the people of the County and particularly the Towns.

SYLVIA MATOUSEK, Chair, Town of DeWitt Democratic Committee. In looking at the map I can only characterize it as what I hope is an initial attempt to try. DeWitt has been divided into four parts, not even equal parts, they are four unequal jagged absolute nothing--looks a bit like cartoons. Specifically, District 12 was kinda grabbed out of the side of what was the North Syracuse district. Five more districts in the Town of DeWitt are grabbed to another legislator; six more districts in the Town of DeWitt are yet to somebody else; fifteen yet with somebody else -- makes four separate legislative districts in the Town of DeWitt. I don't need to submit to anyone that that makes for bad government for the following reasons: The legislator in charge of one quarter of the Town of DeWitt, give or take several thousand people, will never get to know the people in that geographic area well enough to develop a relationship or to know the issues that face the town. That's bad government. The people in the Town will never have an opportunity to know their legislator or develop a relationship with that legislator, and that's bad government. The Charter sites that any kind of redistricting should be done as nearly compatible with local governmental lines within the County as shall then be practical and that has not been done, clearly has not been done with either of the two plans, although this is the first time I've seen Plan B, I would characterize the plan in its current form as obviously and blatantly self-serving. I think the map makes it very clear, I think the attempt is bush league, no pun intended. I would urge the County Legislature to do the right thing on behalf of the people that elected them, all of who are sitting here, which is to govern fairly and to govern appropriately and to give the people in each town and in each geographic area a chance to speak their collective voice fairly and uninhibited.

JOE FREGA, Town of Geddes resident -- wants to tell legislators that they are doing a great job of marginalizing themselves. This County Legislature was formed in order to give the townships better voices than the Town Supervisors could do in their previous organizations. Yet when I look now, it's hard to say that I can point to something in the last five years that's had a positive impact on the people of the County of Onondaga. You've had the opportunity; you still have the opportunity before this vote to make this organization have the voice of the people they represent. The Charter has spoken to you. Please look back to that Charter with regard to redistricting and realize if you go forward in the fashion that you're doing right now, you will disenfranchise the rest of the people to the point where you won't have to worry about redistricting for county legislators seats, because they won't exist.

SAM YOUNG, attorney, Town of DeWitt resident --- lives in one of the proposed redistricts under proposed Plan A, which was described again in the newspaper as an open district. Under this proposed plan, the Town of DeWitt will be carved up into four legislative districts. My new district would include parts of what are currently parts of at least four other districts. I currently live in the 19th legislative district and am represented well by my friend Linda Ervin. Someone who lives less than a mile from my house and whom I've known for fifteen years. Under the proposed Plan A my neighborhood has been carved out of Ms. Ervin's district and placed into a district which includes some but not all of central DeWitt, currently the 19th Legislative district, the Village of East Syracuse, currently the 9th Legislative District, Colamar Area, currently part of the 5th Legislative District and two sections of the City of Syracuse, who are currently represented by Mr. Stanczyk and Mr. Buckel. It is very possible, and even likely, that the person who is chosen to represent me and my family may

live miles away from my neighborhood and be totally unaware of my concerns and those of my neighbors. Under your plan, Plan A, the southern part of DeWitt would be spliced into the district which includes the Towns of LaFayette, Pompey, Fabius and Tully. Several noncontiguous Dewitt neighborhoods would be part of a district, which include parts of the 17th and 16th wards. My neighborhood in central DeWitt will be part of that ultra district, which I've already describe and the northern part of the Town of DeWitt would be included in a district with portions of the Towns of Salina and Cicero and the Village of East Syracuse. Quite simply, this makes no sense. By carving up our town into four pieces in order to protect incumbent legislators or empowering new districts for potential new candidates, DeWitt risks losing its voice in county government and will no longer have representation by primarily one legislator. Furthermore, as a resident of the county I'm concerned that your proposed plan will dilute minority voting power by cramming minority voters into relatively fewer districts. Diminished representation of city residents by reducing the number of pure city districts, and slicing up small portions of the city into a large number of mostly suburban districts, violates principals of one person one vote by cramming greater numbers of voters into some districts, while leaving other districts with fewer voters and great proportional weight. I respectfully urge you to reconsider your plan and not to go forward with Plan A and to give serious consideration to Plan B.

HAROLD MATTSON, Syracuse resident; Ward 16, retired professor from Syracuse University - here today to speak for myself. This proposed redistricting gives politics and you a bad name. You refuse to provide the people a fair contest, you want it kept set up that there's no real contests and I think that's wrong. I think you should be willing to run in a fighting distance. When I say a fighting distance, I mean one that's rather easily bound between the two parties, which would force each party to put up a strong candidate, a good candidate, and would prevent any group (from either group) from running or from succeeding – is unaware of any data that shows the distance given us as a fighting distance. This is a cheap exercise; he rejects it and wants legislators to reject it also.

VITA DEMARCHIE, Chairman of the Onondaga County Democratic Committee. Thanked everyone for their service; it is a very difficult job. First and foremost thank you for what you do. I was thinking about the comments that I've been hearing from people and I thought you know, why do we have County legislators, and why are they there and who do they represent. I believe, or at least I thought I believed that each elected official, each one of you legislators try to do a public service; to serve the people in your district, the district that they represent, the people that you work for. The people in turn, who voted you in as their representatives expect that you know and understand their community, your community that you live in and your issues and needs collectively. You are expected to be the voice and the vote of your district in very hard decisions, decisions that are becoming harder and harder day by day, given the economy and given the budget that we're under. Onondaga County is comprised of a very diverse constituency. There's not just diversity between the towns and the city, there's diversity between neighborhoods. In the towns, diversity also exists and representation must be aware of, agricultural communities, commercial development smart growth communities and sprawl communities. The county is comprised of areas where the "haves" live and the "have-nots" live. Given all of this, how a legislative district is configured is essential to insure that people in that district are represented by a legislator that knows them. It is and will be difficult, even more so with the proposed plan for a legislator to represent a district that includes a rural or agricultural town with a piece of the city's population. It will be difficult, if not impossible for one legislator to represent the needs of a wealthy town suburb in conjunction with the challenged city district and vice versa. By design of what would be a majority voice in an appropriate district, divided into smaller portions then are merged into other districts with different demographics where they are now minority. (inaudible) This morning I heard ESPN commentary about performance enhancing drugs; and I thought interestingly enough, that this might be the same analogy of what's happening here in redistricting. Given the ability for personal gain over others, some would do it. In major league sports they now have drug testing to identify this type of activity; but what do we have we have a vote, and we can vote. We can identify unfair representation; we can vote.

LORAL FREGA, Town of Geddes resident -- more than a little frustrated, if you can't tell. I definitely understand why everyone keeps saying that voters are disenfranchised, because I feel that the public has been taken out of public service, and that's not okay. It's my understanding that a motion was brought the County Legislator asking for a fair and unbiased approach the redistricting process and it did not happen. It didn't come to fruition, and it should have because the public doesn't care about your party, it cares about our towns. It cares about my town, Geddes and the fact that I will be maybe 15% of what's on the mind of whoever my legislator might be, it's the truth, I mean I understand that we are connected all the way around the lake to Liverpool, and even beyond and that is simply unconscionable to keep the districts the way they are. There's

no way you can represent all those constitutes in all those different places. How you can balance the needs of all those constitutes when you know what, we liked it when Geddes had a voice -- one the legislator -- and we want it to stay that way.

DIANE DWYER - Town of Camillus, former Town Councilor of Camillus, Former Chair Onondaga County Democratic Committee. Ten years ago I came to this Legislative body to state my opposition to the then proposed redistricting plan that would divide Camillus into four Legislative districts rather than keep its two current districts, my plea fell on deaf ears. This time I attempted to be more involved by attending several of the reapportionment committee meeting. However, before I continue I want to express my concern about the public notice of these meetings they left something to be desired. One really had to search to find out the time and place of these meetings unless you were a part of the group that was there looking for it. The commission may have met the letter of the law but certainly they didn't meet the spirit of the Open Meetings Law by letting the community know about these meetings. I had great expectations for these two meetings. One that Camillus and other towns would remain whole and that the city wards would not be cut up into little pieces. To my dismay I'd heard very little discussion on how to keep communities, neighborhoods, or towns whole. Based on the plan put forth today, Plan A, it is obvious that there was little to no consideration given to this concept. Why would a new district have one election district from a single town or ward splintering the towns and wards in a manner is unconscionable. An example of this is election district 5 where one single election district from the Town of DeWitt is thrown into this district plus four ED's from the Syracuse city ward, Ward 1, which has few issues in common with Cicero and Salina the other towns in this district. Another example is District 12, where 1 ED from Manlius and 1 ED from Syracuse ward were thrown into the same pot as LaFayette, Pompey, Fabius and Tully in addition to this entire the southern portion of DeWitt, having been formerly represented by Legislator Ervin were included in this. Now regarding my home town of Camillus, it is now divided into three legislative districts less than before, but still too many. If you feel looking at the map that some of the natural boundaries and the political subdivisions seem to have been ignored. Also as previously stated, DeWitt has gone from three legislative districts into four, and we've heard from them and Geddes who when from one to 3 districts, you've heard from them. Some people feel that splintering gives the towns and city better representation, however I believe it divides and conquers the respective municipalities and subdivisions. The ability of these communities to have one voice with a single County Legislator does not exist. Constituents are forced to go in three or four directions. This also diminishes their attempt to effect change and voting rights and isn't this what it is all about – to insure the majority party remain in office. Twice a resolution to form an independent nonpartisan commission was introduced and twice defeated. Respectfully requested that you reconsider Plan A.

Chairman Rhinehart asked if anyone else wished to be heard. Hearing none, he closed the hearing at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



DEBORAH L. MATURO, Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature