



## GOVERNMENT

## Information for the Season

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as the need arises. The changes may seem small or trivial but when taken together they produce a better set of standards by which to govern our Village. As an example, this summer we saw a proliferation of unicyclists on our sidewalks interfering with the safe passage of our pedestrian diners and shoppers. Our police officers came to the Trustees to get a provision in our Code that would make this activity a formal safety violation. As a coincidence, it was recently in the news that New York City is dealing with the same issue and changing their law as well.

- This past week I spoke at a forum in Scarsdale on the subject of property revaluation. Scarsdale has not revalued in over forty years, much like us, and is experiencing the problems associated with an outdated assessment roll. The Town of Mamaroneck has officially decided to conduct a revaluation and many other communities are considering it primarily due to the amount of money expended on certiorari and small claims settlements. As an example, many Westchester villages and towns saw their certiorari and residential tax challenges skyrocket by six and ten-fold in the past year. In that same period, the Village's actually decreased by 30%.
- Village Hall is participating in a Holiday Coat Drive sponsored by the Junior League to benefit Community Service Associates of Mount Vernon. We are collecting gently used coats for men, women and children in all sizes in the lobby of Village Hall. Please think about giving warmth to someone this holiday season.
- In the most recent elections, New York State had the dubious distinction of having the lowest voter turnout, less than 32% of eligible voters, of all of the fifty states. As a result, candidates were elected in some cases by only 16% of the voters they represent.
- In response to residents' requests, the tree on the Village Hall lawn will be lit on Wednesday in time to be enjoyed by friends and family over the holiday weekend.

*Mary C. Marvin is the Mayor of the Village of Bronxville.*

# Open Door Center Braces for Drastic County Cuts

By Abby Luby



If Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino gets his proposed 2011 budget passed in a few weeks, \$1.9 million will be slashed from neighborhood health centers - clinics that serve over 100,000 Westchester residents including immigrants, minorities and low income wage earners. Centers such as Open Door Family Medical Center, Hudson River Health Care and Mt. Vernon Neighborhood Health Center are poised to cut essential staff such as doctors and nurses.

Open Door serves about 40,000 people alone in their clinics based in Ossining, Port Chester, Sleepy Hollow and Mount Kisco. The clientele counts on such services as well-baby clinics, family planning, tuberculosis and HIV screening. The reduced county budget would skim off over \$550,000 of funding from Open Door whose yearly budget is \$28 million.

"\$550,000 is a lot of money - its three doctor's salaries," said Lindsay Farrell, President and CEO of Open Door. Farrell, who has been at the helm of Open Door for 12 years, said the county has supplemented their budget for 20 years with funds that generally paid for screening and treatment of communicable diseases.

"It would be the first time that money was eliminated completely," Farrell said. "By eliminating these long-standing county contracts and Title 6 public health services, Astorino jeopardizes the health of the public in addition to restricting access to care for low-income people."

Open Door and other public medical centers predict that without county funds they will be forced to turn their patients away who will in turn, seek help at hospital emergency rooms. "We do about 800 visits a day and if we cannot longer do that kind of volume it will spill over to emergency rooms that are really for people with real emergencies," Farrell explained.

Last winter Farrell said the number of patients at Open Door increased by

20 percent, but with federal funds they were able to hire one nurse practitioner and one doctor.

Westchester has the second highest number of residents with tuberculosis outside New York City. The county also has the most people living with HIV and AIDS statewide apart from New York City. But Astorino has justified his budget cuts to medical centers saying they will be covered by new federal dollars and health care reform.

"This is highly misleading," said Farrell. "Health care reform, in terms of coverage, won't kick in until 2014. The other issue is we don't anticipate our demographic to be any different. Currently 55 percent of our clients don't have health coverage and that's not going to change that much." Farrell added that many low income uninsured people in Westchester would most likely not qualify for health care after the reform is enacted.

For many years, before neighborhood medical clinics were established, Westchester County ran numerous public health clinics in several municipalities including Yonkers, White Plains, Mt. Kisco, Port Chester, Ossining and operated with staff salaried county physicians and nurses. When many federally qualified neighborhood health centers started to crop up throughout Westchester, they were able to offer comprehensive care around the clock including evening hours, Saturdays and 24 hour call coverage.

The county decided to close its public facilities, favoring instead to partner with local clinics, subsidizing them to offset the cost of non-reimbursed public health services, such as treatment and follow-up care for tuberculosis and STDs. The county funding level remained the same for many years, but started to reduce its funding despite two to three hundred

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percent increases in the number of peopleserved in Westchester's many new health centers.

Farrell said Open Door has more than quadrupled its footprint and the number of patients served over the last two decades. Proportionately, however, the cost of delivering care declined significantly which provided what Farrell calls "real value for the county's dollar."

Astorino's \$1.9 million cut from health centers averages out to be \$20 per patient. The county currently spends about \$117 million a year on health care for its 5000 employees, or about \$20,000 each. That number will apply only if 705 county positions are eliminated. The proposed county employee lay-offs would offset the escalating health care costs which have more than doubled over the last decade. In 2007 county employees' health care cost \$82 million and jumped to \$111 in 2010.

The proposed budget is also calling for the closure of mental-health clinics in Peekskill, Mount Kisco, Mount Vernon and Yonkers, and homeless shelters in Greenburgh and New Rochelle.

For the first time the public can follow the plethora of ongoing decision making meetings by county legislators and community organizations via live streaming at [www.westchesterlegislators.com](http://www.westchesterlegislators.com). The web site also includes the meeting schedule. County lawmakers are expected to vote on the budget by mid-to-late December. Until then, Farrell said she is keeping her fingers crossed.

"I have confidence in the Board of Legislators. They get it."

*Abby Luby is a Westchester based freelance journalist who writes about current, local news, environmental issues, art, entertainment and food. he teaches writing and literature at Marist College.*

## Village of Rye Brook Meets to Attend to Local Issues

By Bary Alyssa Johnson



Mayor Joan Feinstein brought to order the most recent Meeting of the Board of Trustees

of the Village of Rye Brook with a warm welcome to those in attendance.

After pledging our allegiance to honor the American Flag, the mayor and Board of Trustees got down to the business at hand.

First on the docket was a draft report on Affordable Housing in the community. In 2009, Westchester County reached a settlement regarding an affordable housing lawsuit. As a result, \$50 million is to be allocated to make available 750 units of fair and affordable housing.

"It was found that many communities don't have affordable housing," Feinstein told The Westchester Guardian in an interview. "I think affordable housing is great because it allows people like Police Officers and families just starting out, a home that they may not have been able to afford otherwise."

The Village Board commissioned a study 8-9 months ago to find potential sites for said affordable housing units. At the meeting, Marilyn Timpone-Mohamed of Frederick P. Clark Associates, an outside land consultant planner, presented preliminary findings on optimal locations for building. Approximately seventeen sites were suggested to the Board.

A bit of education on affordable housing was served up during the Village Hall Meeting. Primarily, to clear the air, the presentation was not about Section 8 housing, it was simply about "affordable" housing. Price-wise, if the buyers are

seeking home ownership, a family of 4 are eligible for housing with an \$80,000 yearly income. Eligible renters for a family of 4 would require a \$60,000 yearly income to take advantage of these suggested housing units.

The presentation was an introductory one and the board will pick up further discussion at its January 11, 2011 meeting.

Moving on to the Resolutions section of the meeting, the topic of broader influence for the community was the consideration of an agreement between the Village of Rye Brook Recreation Department and D'Agostino's super-market for the use

of D'Agostino's kitchen to offer residents both kids and adult cooking classes. For this type of collaboration, insurance is required for obvious reasons.

"We voted on the contract to make sure there's insurance, which we do have," Feinstein said.

The insurance companies are busy making sure that formal agreements are properly in place. The Village of Rye Brook has already obtained their certificate of insurance and want an official agreement to back it up.

On to the Administrator's Report portion of the meeting. The Administrator tells us that the Village's Leaf Program is heavily underway, with Public Works hard at work. This program is an established project that the Village uses to get rid of leaves each year.

The Village's Highway & Parks Department has asked for residents' cooperation in proper placement of leaf piles to ensure the roadway is safe for bikers

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# Ciao!

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