



NEWS...

From

Legislator Tom Cilmi

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“WORKING SMARTER IN SUFFOLK COUNTY”

Legislator Tom Cilmi delivered a report today to County Executive Steve Bellone entitled, “Working Smarter in Suffolk County...a Compilation of Employee Suggestions.”

The report lists more than 140 suggestions put forth by Suffolk’s employees, many of whom found themselves on a list of more than 200 employees who were laid off at the end of June as a result of Suffolk’s fiscal problems.

On May 15, 2012 Legislator Cilmi held a public hearing to allow employees to share their ideas and suggestions on how to help Suffolk tackle a budget deficit reported to be between \$300 million and \$560 million. Approximately fifty employees spoke that evening and Cilmi said he received hundreds of emails thanking him for the opportunity to participate.

“One of the most remarkable things that came out of this,” Cilmi said, “is that our employees were thrilled to be asked for their opinions. Many of them said they previously felt like their ideas were unwelcomed. Some even said they were discouraged from offering suggestions. Given the number and variety of suggestions we received, I think there’s a great lesson to be learned by leaders throughout government: there’s a bottomless well of ideas in the workforce if we just take the time to ask and to listen.”

In a cover letter attached to the report, Cilmi acknowledged that the suggestions listed in the seven page report are rudimentary, but said there may be “some diamonds in the rough.” He said, “Some of the ideas may require State or union approvals, some might not be possible at all, but there were certainly some very interesting suggestions, well worth further review.”

Cilmi said he hopes the Bellone Administration will carefully consider each of the ideas brought forth. “I’m sure the County Executive appreciates the thoughtfulness and, to some degree, bravery that went into this. This is not an easy situation for anyone and we can use all the help we can get.”

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Working Smarter in Suffolk County

A Compilation of Employee Suggestions

Compiled by Legislator Tom Cilmi

7/10/2012

Working Smarter in Suffolk County

A Compilation of Employee Suggestions

The following suggestions were submitted by County employees in response to a call for employees to actively participate in the process of eradicating inefficiencies, eliminating waste and increasing revenue generation in Suffolk County government.

Submissions were made via email as well as at a public hearing organized by Legislator Tom Cilmi for this express purpose. The public hearing took place on May 15, 2012 from 5pm to 8pm in the Rose Caracappa Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, Smithtown, New York.

While many employees who spoke were facing an impending layoff and took the opportunity to make a case for their job preservation, many of those same employees and others offered substantive, thoughtful suggestions on how to improve County government.

Some employees expressed disappointment that they had never before been asked for their opinions. Still others expressed frustration that suggestions they had previously offered fell on deaf ears. The multitude of suggestions indicated a real willingness on the part of employees to be a part of the solution.

The suggestions listed in the following pages are admittedly rudimentary. Some may require union involvement. Others may require legislative action. Others may require State authorization. Some may not at all be possible. Many may seem trivial. To the extent however that the front line workers...those closest to the delivery of services...have taken the time to participate, to be a part of the solution; and to the extent that those workers with their hands in the engine are probably those best suited to see where change needs to occur, none of these suggestions is insignificant. There may well be a few diamonds in the rough. Management in the County would do well to encourage continued employee participation as we strive to work smarter.

This report is submitted with the hope and request that the County Executive and the Presiding Officer forward this document to the Executive Budget Office and to the Legislature's Office of Budget Review for a complete review and analysis. Hopefully such an analysis will reveal some unexplored territory in our cooperative effort to improve service delivery, increase revenue and reduce costs.

At the very least, the following list should provide a sense of the attitudes and desires of our workforce, as well as our employees' potential contributions and commitment to a cooperative, healthy, efficient, fiscally sound Suffolk County.

I. Recurring pre-hearing suggestions

- Reevaluate county car policy
- Turn off lights and computers when not in use
- Raise property and/or sales taxes
- Reduce number of upper management positions
- Offer early retirement incentives
- Consolidate/lease out unused office spaces
- Four day work week/furlough/lag payroll including police and sheriff's
- Reduce wasteful printing such as pistol licensing rules and regulations and all-employee memos
- Augment staff in departments that generate revenue

II. Unique pre-hearing suggestions

- Institute parking fee at correctional facilities
- Eliminate longevity pay
- Eliminate shoe and uniform allowances
- Use inmates for certain jobs
- As an alternative to early retirement, allow employees to purchase remaining years to reach retirement
- Create a collections department for uncollected fines and fees
- Limit the number of temporary DSS benefit cards
- Allow (food) concessions in County buildings
- Stop sending mail to ourselves for homeless DSS clients
- All employees take a temporary 1% salary cut
- All employees take a temporary 10% salary cut
- Moratorium on land preservation
- Create Suffolk County lottery

III. PUBLIC SPEAKERS' SUGGESTIONS

Salary/Employment

- Any and all layoffs should be based purely on seniority
- Freeze Wages for upper management
- Eliminate some patronage positions
- Eliminate part time deputy jobs with full time benefits
- Eliminate double dipping: no retiree's with part time employment
- Eliminate overtime and/or abuse of overtime
- Two year across-the-board wage freeze
- No new hires, only replace the positions after retirement
- Eliminate unnecessary departments/consolidate where possible
- Eliminate provisional positions
- All employees should pay 3% towards retirement costs including pensions and health insurance
- Re-allocate existing positions to mission critical or revenue generating departments
- One year 10% furlough for all employees
- Make more positions part time or shared
- Create a four day work week to cut operation costs
- Eliminate some executive positions, as well as staff members
- Cut back on the holidays (i.e. Lincoln's Birthday)
- Furlough the day after Thanksgiving, and the day after Christmas
- Cut the work week from 35 hours to 32.5 hours (9-4:30) or (4 day 8 hour per day)
- Reverse all promotions in the past two years
- Revamp the raise/promotion system to function based on experience, performance and formal education instead of seniority
- Re-evaluate promotion politics
- Create flexible job titles to move employees in order to meet needs
- Keep grant funded positions in the budget
- All employees in the general fund for ten years or more should be able to purchase their additional years of service to vest.

Health Insurance

- Explore alternatives to self-insurance
- Charge new employees for insurance
- Stop paying insurance benefits for no-show jobs
- Re-create the health care buyback program
- Raise the deductible to lower the premium of health insurance
- Review and revise approved vs. unapproved procedures to allow for cost-effective alternatives
- As same sex marriage is now legal in New York, stop giving health insurance to dependents in domestic partnerships, or persons who reside together for over a year
- Allow vacation/personal day accruals to pay for health insurance
- Raise emergency room copay
- Monitor disability benefits more closely to reduce fraud and abuse

Social Services

- Update the index used to determine food stamp benefits (they currently use an antiquated housing ratio)
- Tax or otherwise charge absentee landlords (many landlords live out of state and rent the properties here to DSS)
- Review emergency housing placement facilities more thoroughly to eliminate abuse and reduce cost. Prohibit long-term use.
- Medicaid fraud control (some clients are enrolled in Managed Care HMO's in two counties at one time. They do not notify the county that they have moved)
- Control salaries of not for profit agencies receiving funding.
- Fine/penalize people who are found fraudulent during/after collecting social security
- Review/police welfare system to ensure strict compliance
- Review/police Medicare system to ensure strict compliance
- Eliminate consultants not paid by grants
- Remove night differential payouts and longevity payouts.
- Limit replacement benefit cards or charge a fee for lost cards (each time a request is made, a copy is provided in the office, as well as one is made in Albany and mailed to the persons address)
- Restrict use of public assistance funds to necessities

- Reduce \$12 meal vouchers to \$10
- Hire drivers and use county vans to replace cabs (cab fare for homeless is close to \$1 million annually)
- Create stricter policies for public assistance benefits (for example, require long term residency prior to benefit collection, including a NYS license)

Police

- Increase the cost for traffic violations (such as texting while driving), and/or increase enforcement
- Eliminate mileage reimbursement for SCPD from their place of residence to the workplace on days they are not scheduled
- Increase red light camera fees, (\$75.00) and have the county process the tickets instead of sending them out to the state
- Occasionally relocate red light cameras to increase revenue.

Correctional Facilities

- Charge to deposit money in an inmate's account during a same day visit
- Use jail offenders to clean the highways
- Charge fees/fines for probation violations including dirty urine
- Don't waive out of state case fees
- Eliminate the rewards program for juveniles who attend school (the reward is gift cards)
- Provide an alternative to incarceration for victimless non-violent crime offenders (for example, fine them or make them perform public services)
- Expedite cases for persons who have severe medical problems to reduce medical bills

County Vehicles

- Perform a cost analysis of county vehicle use, purchasing, mileage, repair, maintenance
- Eliminate the use of county vehicles altogether
- Require caseworkers to use their own vehicles
- Never allow cars to go home
- Reduce mileage reimbursement
- Eliminate the use of county vehicles other than for field workers

Taxes & Fees

- Increase sales and/or property tax
- Apply a temporary surcharge to property tax (\$25-\$75) for the year
- Enforce collection on owed delinquent property taxes
- Raise the clothing tax above 4%
- Charge for document rejections
- Charge for permits: (Tobacco Vendor Education classes and Food Managers Courses are currently free...\$100 for a three year permit is reasonable)
- Increase the fee for paperwork copies to the public from 25 cents per page currently to 50 cents or \$1.00
- Re-use paper for non-essential printing
- Calibrate the printing machines so they do not waste paper
- Change certified mail return receipts to online receipts. (@2.35 for a mail receipt, but only \$1.15 for email receipt)
- Increase the fingerprinting fee (currently it is only \$10 per card)

Efficiency

- Hire an employee specifically for applying for grant funds. (many smaller departments are eligible for funding but employees do not have the knowledge pertaining to the grant application process)
- Eliminate printed memo's
- Switch to electronic payroll systems
- Institute electronic rule and procedures systems
- Install automatic sink valve/lighting shut offs
- More efficient temperature control air systems (avoid open windows, or people using heaters at their desks)
- Convert to LED lighting (initial large cost but effective in saving over time)
- Mandatory computer and light shut off when not in the offices.
- Put parking lot lights on timers
- Consolidate office space
- Move all legislators out of district offices and put them in county owned buildings in the area
- Do energy audits for the County buildings
- Avoid expensive renovations by consolidating/moving as necessary
- Combine the Oser and Edgewood offices, or move everyone into the Dennison building

- Move the S.C. Department of Health Services into the Dennison Building (since most work is done with Audit & Control on the 8th floor)
- Use portable technology for field workers to increase efficiency
- Rent empty cubicles to title search companies
- Sell tax liens after one year
- Reduce non-mandated contract agencies funding
- Eliminate color printers
- Eliminate the use of the U.S. Postal Service for inter-office mail
- Eliminate the Suffolk County health services \$100.00 incentive rebate program for the closure of residential underground fuel tanks
- Use the Federal Court Building next to the Cohalan Courthouse for county offices (it is currently half empty)
- Reduce the number of legislative districts and enlarge them
- Increase auditing to reduce waste in maintenance (Companies are charging excessive amounts for things such as tree removal)

Miscellaneous

- Eliminate \$25,000 NYSAC Membership
- Compressed natural gas project is federally funded, explore this further
- Do not refill hand sanitizers
- Reduce unnecessary office supplies such as desk calendars and planners
- Eliminate vanity signs that need to be changed when there is a change in administration
- Allow the health centers to take other managed care insurance to reduce costs. (Right now it only takes Suffolk Health Plan/Neighborhood)
- Eliminate the Smoking Cessation Program
- Charge a fee for language interpreting services. (Several departments pay to have the interpreting services available, some also charge fees for probation services)
- Eliminate free prenatal care
- Rescind the prevailing wage requirement on companies that do business with the county (sometimes the county pays two to three times the amount to get work done by outside vendors)
- Bring all training (such as ITAP and food stamp training and Medicaid) here from Albany so we do not have to use county vehicles, or food vouchers
- Fine absentee landlords and slumlords