

Minutes
Planning & Economic Development Committee
September 17, 2025, 6:00 pm, Legislative Chambers
Livestreamed on YouTube
Gerace Office Building, Mayville, NY

Members Present: Harmon, Gustafson, Penhollow, Dickey, Larson, Johnson

Others: Chagnon, Lee, Swan, Zafuto, Harp, Wurster, Geise

Complete video of meeting can be viewed on YouTube

Chairman Harmon called the meeting to order at (6:00 p.m.)

Approval of Minutes (07/16/25)

MOVED by Legislator Gustafson, SECONDED by Legislator Penhollow.

Unanimously Carried

Privilege of the Floor

Legislator Larson: Rather than try to speak on these issues when we look at the timetable for Ripley and Mason Park being shovel-ready – this has been a bad couple months for those of us who care about real economic development and jobs. Twice the majority in this legislature refused to declare that jobs growth was the number one economic development priority even though employment is down in this county by 14,000 from 68,000 fifteen years ago to 54,000 now. Another piece of bad news since we last met – Serta Mattress announced it's leaving the county and approximately 100 jobs are lost. I'm not saying, because we don't know if there is anything the county or its IDA could have done to have Serta and their bankruptcy reorganization where they have already closed or announced closures of 6 facilities across America – including in places in Iowa and Kansas. Nobody knows if we had known anything about their plans. But we don't know what we don't know. We don't know if they were having quality problems with their workforce, we don't know if they were having job training problems and in our 2025 county budget – I don't believe there is a dollar of county money for job training. The third thing that's sad in the last couple months – last year this legislature said “no” to a four big murals proposal – remember that? We tabled the resolution and the next meeting, not a single legislator moved to take the four murals resolution off the table. We said “no” – figured it would be dead. Today's Post Journal region page headline: *Painting the Town. County celebrates new murals in Westfield, Falconer and Sherman. The partnership for economic growth in the Chautauqua County Department of Planning and Development are the agencies behind the inaugural paint CHQ festival.* So, this body in a very rare moment in the almost two years I've been back here, this body said “no” to something. And our own department wouldn't take no for an answer. They are going to say – well we didn't spend any County dollars on it. We didn't get the \$100,000 from you. So, you shouldn't be complaining because we didn't use County dollars. Well, I read an earlier article about the process of getting these four murals.

There was a search for a national consultant and then there was organizing committees and sending out proposals to mural artists around the country. And this article today references the progress actually began in February this year. Next month this committee should receive a report on how much county employee time has been spent arranging for something the county legislature refused to support. And on the jobs front – the consultant on this project is not from Chautauqua County, none of the four muralists are from Chautauqua County, apparently our county is devoid of talent to do murals, although there are a lot of them in Jamestown done by a local artist – Lucille Ball themed. I believe there is an independent one that was in the news within the last month or so done by a county resident. So, I guess we don't know what our priority is in Economic Development. The majority said they weren't going to commit it was jobs or job creation and we said "no" to this mural project and here it is – a big deal. I just hope now that our department is helping communities like Sherman to decide whether they will pursue a Hyatt Hotel or a Hilton Hotel for the thousands and thousands of people that will travel across America to see this mural in Sherman. I'd certainly like to see it in the afternoon and see it again in the morning under those lighting conditions. Our county department that we have as our territory in this legislature pursued this project when we said "no". Thank you.

Chairman Harmon: I'm going to rebuttal with that Fred. I guess you have a problem with liking this County and wanting these towns to look great. I think these murals are going to bring people to our County. I think these murals are done extremely tasteful and are beautiful – they are great pieces of art. And I don't know why you don't like those. I know we voted "no" – but things went the way they did and now they are here and didn't cost the county any money. But yet you are still anti ...

Legislator Larson: Well, it did. County staff time – we have no idea. And if I may respond. I don't want the county to look pretty? If the New York State Council on the Arts or the Chautauqua County Arts Council – if they want to make a project like this – it's wonderful. I love the murals in Jamestown. They do make sense because they are about Lucille Ball and we have the Lucy/Desi Center. You want to make the county look pretty – hey – make an amendment to the budget we get next week – let's put a million dollars into it and we'll pay for paint for homeowners to paint their houses across Chautauqua County. We'd make the place look beautiful.

Chairman Harmon: That's a little different.

Legislator Larson: No, it isn't any different.

Chairman Harmon: It's a lot different Fred.

Legislator Johnson: Well, let me ask a question if I may. Procedurally. Because I did recollect that we said "no" to that money. Now, I then presume that the county did not spend any funds on those murals. Is that correct?

Legislator Larson: The County's staff time. We know that. That's money.

Legislator Johnson: I know that. But I'm just wanting to make sure. So, the Legislature as a whole said "no thank you". We don't wish to fund this. Is that correct?

Chairman Harmon: Sure.

Legislator Larson: And we didn't see it as a priority.

Legislator Johnson: Okay. So, then the next question is legally, does that constrain the Executive from spending executive department budget resources on a project that the Legislature chooses not to fund. Now that's a legal question.

Legislator Larson: I'll answer that. Legally, he can have his people work on any projects he wants.

Legislator Johnson: Okay.

Chairman Harmon: There's the answer.

Legislator Larson: But that doesn't answer the issue of priorities. You see those staff people could have been looking for additional business industrial park land in Westfield off the thruway.

Legislator Johnson: I get you. It's called opportunity.

Legislator Larson: It is. If they are doing one thing, they are not doing another. And you live with that your whole career.

Legislator Johnson: So, let me ask another question. This is now a hypothetical. If the legislature had wished to constrain the Executive on spending time on those murals, how would we have gone about it?

Legislator Larson: Threaten to amend the budget to reduce personnel expense.

Chairman Chagnon: Yes, it would have been through the budget. We could have reduced the appropriation budget for the department that was wishing to do that.

Legislator Johnson: Okay. So, we could have been able to say – Executive, department "no" on this one.

Chairman Chagnon: We could have said: if you want to pursue this, there is going to be a cost to your department to do that.

Legislator Johnson: And we could have made that cost anything we decided to make.

Chairman Chagnon: Absolutely. We control the budget.

Legislator Johnson: Now, all of that is just for my clarity. So, education to me, that is if we wish to constrain the Executive on something, not spending money on it may or may not work. If we want to go further, we need to do so.

Chairman Chagnon: Yes.

Legislator Johnson: Okay.

Proposed Resolution – Amend 2025 Budget – Occupancy Tax Funded Projects – *Presented by Sam Zafuto, Deputy Director of Finance*

Unanimously Carried

Proposed Resolution – Authorizing Execution of County Infrastructure Grant Program Agreement for the Homesteads at Dunkirk Landing and Welch’s Building – *Presented by Mark Geise, Deputy County Executive for Economic Development, Rebecca Wurster, Planning Coordinator for the Department of Planning and Development*

Unanimously Carried

Other –

Discussion: Updates from the Planning & Development Department

MOVED by Legislator Larson, SECONDED by Legislator Gustafson to adjourn.

Unanimously Carried (6:58 p.m.)

Respectfully submitted and transcribed,
Olivia L. Lee, Clerk of the Legislature/ Nancy Quattrone, Senior Stenographer