

## WCA says no-go to citizen commission

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Calling it “a waste of time” and “delaying tactic,” the head of the Westchester County Association said the prominent business group will not be represented on a proposed citizen commission to review and recommend changes to the county charter.

That proposal for now is dead with the county Board of Legislators. Legislators, though, are expected to again consider creating a charter revision commission in early 2010 after County Executive-elect Rob Astorino takes office.

Board of Legislators Chairman William Ryan, D-White Plains, this month proposed creating a 31-member citizen-run commission representing all sectors of the Westchester community. Operating independently of county government, but supported in part by county funds, the commission would have one year to review and recommend revisions to the county’s nearly 73-year-old charter. Legislators would have three months to act on the commission’s report. Some charter changes would require a voter referendum in November 2011, Ryan said.

Ryan announced his initiative, called Westchester Renewed, on the same day the board’s Democratic caucus voted to replace him as chairman in 2010 with Legislator Kenneth Jenkins, D-Yonkers. The caucus also chose Legislator Lyndon Williams, D-Mount Vernon, to replace Legislator Michael B. Kaplowitz, D-Somers, as vice chairman.

Ryan said the Westchester County Association and The Business Council of Westchester would represent the business community on the charter commission.

The WCA in a press release, though, strongly criticized Ryan’s proposal, calling it “grossly impractical” and “a partisan political maneuver” to delay and encumber Astorino’s expected efforts to cut county spending and reduce the size of county government.

Legislators called a special meeting Dec. 18 to vote on an act creating the citizen commission. Before that meeting, though, some legislators, while praising Ryan's proposal as exciting and needed, balked at creating the commission without input from the new Republican county executive.

The board instead was to consider adopting a resolution of support for the commission proposal, while leaving procedural details and the commission's size to be worked out later with Astorino and his staff. For the resolution to be introduced at a special meeting, the board's unanimous consent was needed.

The resolution died without a vote when Kaplowitz objected to introducing it. Tara Martin, the board's press secretary, said the charter commission proposal almost certainly will be taken up again early next year by legislators.

"I think it's dead," said Westchester County Association President William M. Mooney Jr. "I think it's a bad idea. I think anytime you have a 31-man commission, I'm not sure that's good."

Mooney said Ryan's proposed commission seemed a strategy to stave off immediate cost cuts and tax-saving reforms by Astorino. By the timetable proposed by Ryan for the commission's work, "The earliest possible tax action would be in 2012," Mooney noted.

"Taxpayers are looking for relief now," he said. "We need relief now as business people. I think this is a delaying tactic and also I think it will undermine Astorino's efforts. He's got a mandate to change things."

Asked whether the WCA will be represented on the charter commission if created next year, Mooney said, "At this point in time I would say no. I don't want to be part of something that's going to take two years to do. I think it's a waste of time."

Ryan said the citizen commission's purpose in examining county government would be "not to make anything smaller or bigger, but to make it better."

Regarding the WCA's criticism of his proposal, Ryan said, "I see it as a more emotional response rather than a response that focuses on the substance of the proposal."