



ALBANY COUNTY LEGISLATURE NEWSLETTER

MAY/JUNE 2019

Legislature creates commission on redistricting

Local Law O is adopted in 28-9 vote

The Albany County Legislature has created a Commission on Redistricting to facilitate a non-partisan, independent, inclusive and participatory redistricting process.

Legislators voted Monday to adopt Local Law O, amending Section 207 of the Albany County Charter, relating to commissions on redistricting to create a non-partisan process for determining the County's legislative districts following the next federal Census in 2020.

The County's legislative districts must be adjusted in accordance with the relative population growth and shifts as indicated in the Census to ensure that fair representation



Albany County Legislator Joanne Cunningham, sponsor of Local Law O, speaks about the bill during a press conference held prior to the Legislature meeting May 13 at the Albany County Courthouse. She is joined by co-sponsor Wanda Willingham, left, and Legislature Chair Andrew Joyce.

for each resident is maintained.

"Congratulations to the sponsors of Local Law O, specifically Legislators Joanne Cunningham, Wanda Willingham and Peter Crouse, for taking a bipartisan approach in creating the most

independent and inclusive redistricting process Albany County has ever seen," Legislature Chair Andrew Joyce stated. "Thank you to the legislators who fully supported this bill through all of its revisions and the countless meetings held to discuss the

process. While some may not agree, this bill is the best assurance we have not to repeat the mistakes of the past and ensure that all County residents are represented."

According to the Local Law, the Commission, which will consist of nine members who are County residents, will be transparent, accountable and function independently, without the influence of sitting elected officials and their representatives. The Commission's work will be done through a "professional process that includes experts in the areas of redistricting, law, county geography and other important elements that are key to securing a credible, responsive and accountable redistricting process and outcome," according to the bill.

"This charter amendment will change Albany County's redistricting process to make it an accountable, transparent

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Legislators vote down paid sick leave, 21-17

The Albany County Legislature, on Monday, June 10, voted 21-17 against Local Law C, which would have required employers to provide a minimum of paid and unpaid sick days.

The vote followed a press conference and public forum where speakers for and against the bill provided their feedback.

Doug Bullock, sponsor of Local Law C, stated after the vote, "Thousands of people won't get paid sick days right now, but it will happen. This is a progressive item and we will bring this back up next year. Paid sick days is a human right."



Blue Carreker, of Citizen Action of New York, joined by Legislator Doug Bullock, speaks in favor of Local Law C, during a press conference on June 10.

Legislature OKs grant for Shaker El intersection improvements

Albany County is moving forward to address safety and congestion issues at the intersection of Albany Shaker Road and Shaker El related to the traffic at Shaker Elementary School.

The Albany County Legislature voted June 10 to authorize the acceptance of a \$125,000 New York State Department of Transportation Multi-Modal grant to install a traffic signal at the intersection of Albany Shaker Road and Shaker El,

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and public process to redraw district lines. The lawsuits of the past will end with this public and open process that delinks the politics from redistricting,” Legislator Joanne Cunningham, sponsor of Local Law O, said. “We worked for three years to get here and this is a consensus product, with bipartisan co-sponsorship and an inclusive and open drafting process that allowed for maximum public and lawmaker input.”

“Local Law O represents the culmination of numerous issues that were debated during negotiations as all members involved attempted to achieve a consensus to ensure, as much as possible, an independent redistricting commission that will produce an equitable redistricting of the County’s legislative districts.” Legislator and sponsor Peter Crouse stated.

A special Majority Minority District Reapportionment Subcommittee, consisting of seven members, will also be created to assist the Commission to ensure the fair representation of Albany County minority communities in all aspects of the redistricting process. The subcommittee will make recommendations



Legislature Deputy Chair and co-sponsor of Local Law O Wanda Willingham, left, and Patricia Sabilia, President of League of Women Voters, speaks during a press conference prior to the Legislature meeting on May 13.

to the Commission regarding the configuration of the minority districts, with the goal of protecting voting rights of minority residents and ensuring adequate electoral representation of minority residents residing in those districts.

“It is not a secret that Albany County has been involved in multiple lawsuits over the years regarding its redistricting process, the most recent of which was in 2015. That is why this bill is so important. It establishes a completely new process when it comes to redistricting so we can avoid future lawsuits,” Deputy Chair and co-sponsor Wanda Willingham said. “This bill ensures trans-



parency and offers all people an opportunity to be treated fairly, which was our main goal when we started this process. I am proud of the final product that we adopted tonight.”

The Legislature is hoping the new commission will help to avoid a repeat of 2015 when a federal judge ruled that the County redistricting map of 2011 violated the federal Voting Rights Act by diluting minority voting power. Senior U.S. Judge Lawrence Kahn gave the county three weeks to draft an additional district in which minority voters are a majority. The ruling gave the County a fifth majority-

minority district.

“This vote comes after a long, collaborative effort by the sponsors regarding the redistricting process in Albany County,” said Majority Leader Dennis Feeney. “I commend the hard work and perseverance demonstrated by each of them to put forward a bill that we could get behind.”

“Local Law O has a lot of the key tenets of good redistricting practices: it attempts to filter out candidates who may want to unfairly influence the maps; it calls for diversity amongst the Commissioners; it includes transparency in the process and it addresses the basic criteria in drawing equitable district maps. However, it has some draw backs to it. We were asking to have political data completely removed from the process, and the choosing of Commissioners require a unanimous vote by those appointed,” stated Patricia Sabilia, President of League of Women Voters of Albany County. “Regardless, we all should take a moment now to recognize this accomplishment of being able to present legislation that could majorly improve what has been a very broken process in our County.”

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which is expected to improve traffic exiting the elementary school, a concern that has been raised by residents in the area. In addition to the traffic signal, other improvements include striped crosswalks, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) ramps, pedestrian signal heads and push buttons on all legs of the intersection.

“Traffic and pedestrian safety is always a priority for us in Albany County and this particular intersection was a cause for concern for years due to the amount

of traffic at the elementary school. With this grant, we will not only be able control that traffic but also provide pedestrians a safer route around that intersection. I want to thank our state officials who helped to assist in this important project,” Legislature Chair Andrew Joyce said.

According to District 25 Legislator Joseph O’Brien, this project is the result of a study that was undertaken starting in 2015 to assess traffic and safety along the Albany Shaker Road corridor. Residents raised their concerns

about the Shaker El intersection and signed a petition for the County to address the issue during a meeting with the state Department of Transportation.

“Since 2013, there has been one fatality and 15 significant injuries on Shaker Road. The Albany Shaker Road Traffic Study in 2015 recommended a number of safety upgrades which would be phased in over time. This project was among those upgrades and I am glad to see that it’s going to come to fruition just in time for the school year

this fall.” O’Brien said. “The County has really stepped up to the plate in providing safety for our children.”

District 23 Legislator Paul Burgdorf, chair of the Public Works Committee, stated, “The traffic signal and pedestrian crossings at Shaker Road and Shaker El will provide long awaited safety and traffic mitigation to thousands of residents of the highly traveled Shaker corridor. We are planning for September operation of the light and pedestrian crossings in time for the school year.”

Chair Andrew Joyce optimistic about Albany Capital Center's future

The Albany Convention Center Authority, the state authority that oversees the Albany Capital Center facility, revealed on May 6 that the number of events, visitors and total visitor spending is on the rise. The Albany Capital Center reportedly held 62 events during this year's first quarter compared to 50 in the first quarter of 2018.

"The early years of any new enterprise always brings uncertainty but the Capital Center is proving to be a success. Not only did the convention center bring thousands of visitors to the area but those visitors ended up booking hotel rooms, patronizing our restaurants and ultimately generating millions of dollars," Albany County Legislature Chair Andrew Joyce said. "The Capital Center is only in the first quarter of 2019 but it is already surpassing last year and gaining speed. The Albany County Legislature continues to offer its support to ensure that the momentum continues."

In addition, the Authority named Michele Vennard as interim board chair, who will take over for Megan Daly in June. Daly has served as chair for the past two years.

"Congratulations to Michele Vennard for her new role as board chair for the Albany Convention Center Authority. I look forward to working with her in the future," Joyce said. "I want to thank Megan for her tireless dedication in leading the Albany Capital Center through its infancy. While her role on the board shifts, I know she will continue to strive for its continued success."



Attending a picnic

Members of the Albany County Legislature attended the Albany County Nursing Home's 45th Annual Picnic on June 3 where they talked with staff and residents, enjoyed some food and musical entertainment. In attendance, from left, Legislators Sean Ward, Frank Commisso, Paul Miller, Chairman Andrew Joyce, Nursing Home Executive Director Larry Slatky and Legislature Majority Leader Dennis Feeney. Also in attendance were Mark Grimm and Peter Tunny.



'Honor a Living Veteran'

Veterans Terence L. Kindlon, Eugene "Gene" Loparco and Nils Mockler shared personal stories and were recognized for their years of service in the military as well as the community on June 11. The ceremony corresponded with the second annual Capital Region Military Awareness Day, which included a Military Expo and Job Fair at Crossgates Mall.

Your County Legislators

District 1 – Lucille M. McKnight	District 21 – Brian Hogan
District 2 – Merton D. Simpson	District 22 – Peter B. Tunny
District 3 – Wanda F. Willingham	District 23 – Paul J. Burgdorf
District 4 – Norma J. Chapman	District 24 – Peter R. Crouse
District 5 – Christopher T. Higgins	District 25 – Joseph E. O'Brien
District 6 – Samuel L. Fein	District 26 – Patrice Lockart
District 7 – Douglas A. Bullock	District 27 – Frank A. Mauriello
District 8 – Lynne Lekakis	District 28 – Dennis A. Feeney
District 9 – Andrew Joyce	District 29 – Mark E. Grimm
District 10 – Gary W. Domalewicz	District 30 – Charles E. Cahill
District 11 – Frank J. Commisso	District 31 – Travis Stevens
District 12 – William M. Clay	District 32 – Paul Miller
District 13 – Raymond F. Joyce	District 33 – William Reinhardt
District 14 – Alison McLean Lane	District 34 – Joanne Cunningham
District 15 – Robert J. Beston	District 35 – Charles S. Dawson, Jr.
District 16 – Sean E. Ward	District 36 – Richard M. Mendick
District 17 – John E. Frainier	District 37 – Richard N. Touchette
District 18 – Gilbert F. Ethier	District 38 – Victoria Plotsky
District 19 – Todd A. Drake	District 39 – Christopher H. Smith
District 20 – David B. Mayo	

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Legislature Newsletter
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the County website at:**

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