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A message from  
Assemblywoman  
**SANDY  
GALEF**

**TOWN MEETINGS**  
Forum on Local Court Consolidations

JANUARY 2010

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**TOWN MEETINGS**  
*with Assemblywoman Sandy Galef*

**Thursday, January 14, 2010**  
7 p.m. – 9 p.m.  
Briarcliff Public Library  
Library Road, Briarcliff Manor

**Thursday, January 21, 2010**  
7 p.m. – 9 p.m.  
The Field Library  
4 Nelson Avenue, Peekskill

**Saturday, January 23, 2010**  
10 a.m. – 12 noon  
Croton Free Library  
171 Cleveland Drive  
Croton-on-Hudson  
1 – 3 p.m.  
Desmond-Fish Library  
1022 Route 9D, Garrison

**Saturday, January 30, 2010**  
10 a.m. – 12 noon  
Putnam Valley Free Library  
30 Oscawana Lake Road  
Putnam Valley  
1 – 3 p.m.  
Kent Public Library  
17 Sybil's Crossing, Kent Lakes

*Assemblywoman Sandy Galef  
Invites All to Attend*

**MAKING  
LOCAL COURTS  
MORE EFFICIENT TO  
SAVE TAX DOLLARS**

**Thursday, February 4, 2010**  
7:30 p.m. – 9 p.m.  
Cortlandt Town Hall  
1 Heady Street, Cortlandt Manor

**Featured Panelists:**

**Administrative Judge Alan D. Scheinkman**  
New York State 9th Judicial District

**Judge Francesca Connolly**  
New York State Supreme Court

**Elliot Moskowitz**  
Chief Counsel  
Special Commission on the Future of New York State Courts

**Denise Kronstadt**  
Deputy Executive Director and Director of Advocacy  
Fund for Modern Courts

Join these esteemed experts to discuss how local court consolidation could improve efficiency in the justice system and save taxpayers money.

Panelists will discuss pathways to change and how local community members can get involved.



*Sandy meets with community members at, from left to right, the Desmond-Fish Library in Garrison, The Field Library in Peekskill, and Hendrick Hudson Library in Montrose during her 2009 Town Meetings.*

Dear Constituents,

*This is an historic time in the State of New York. We are facing the toughest economy most of us have known in our lifetimes. This forces us to make difficult decisions both at home and at the state level. I realize that some of the cuts we made and will continue to make will have a direct impact on all of us.*

*In order to lessen the impact state cuts have locally, I continue to work on ways to streamline government and school structures. We have seen many reports that point to the source of higher taxes and inefficient service delivery: complex levels of government and schools, and redundant responsibilities. Many of the requirements to change government and/or schools have to take place at the local level by a vote of the people. That is why I have spent so much time sharing resources and knowledge with you about how to make these changes at the grassroots level.*

*In this issue of my newsletter I have included specific steps you can take to start working to consolidate your local governments or schools. I will also have information available at my Town Meetings in January. In February, I will host a forum to discuss local courts and how they might be consolidated.*

*I hope that you will join me at these open meetings and forums as well as take the initiative in your own community to make some changes that could have a significant impact on taxes and make government run more smoothly.*

*Touch decisions have to be made. I am confident that as we go down this path together, we will come out leaner and stronger and maintain all the wonderful aspects of this great State.*

Sincerely,



## My Work to Help Lower Taxes

Many people let me know they are pleased about the forums I host on government sharing and consolidation. Sometimes, however, I hear complaints of too much talk and not enough action. Below, I have highlighted a few steps I have taken as a result of my many conversations about improving life in my Assembly District and throughout the state.

*I strongly supported the following legislation which was passed into law:*

### **Tier V (A.40026)**

In early December, we voted to overhaul retirement benefits for newly hired public employees, including teachers. The estimated savings by the year 2040 for municipalities and school districts in the 90th Assembly District totals \$374,309,069, based on the Department of Budget's calculations. Their webpage allows you to see estimated savings over the next 30 years for each entity affected by this newly enacted law. Westchester and Putnam Counties could realize a combined savings of \$332,778,115 just for their county budgets alone. For more information, go to <http://www.budget.state.ny.us/pensionReform.html>.

### **Eliminating State Mandates (A.9052)**

In our November 2009 extraordinary session, we passed local government mandate relief to ease the burden on local property taxpayers. This bill reduces the number of municipalities required to establish a health insurance cooperative, facilitates highway shared services, allows counties to share an administrative position in the area of public health, increases the required threshold for competitive public works bidding from \$20K to \$35K, allows pooled municipal bonds to be issued, and treats municipal employees the same as private sector ones prohibiting them from seeking recovery against a public employer for damages already covered by insurance.

### **Local Government Consolidation (A.8501)**

This bill makes it easier for citizens to petition their local governments to investigate the potential to consolidate positions, departments, and even entire governments so that possible redundancies can begin to be eliminated.

### **Public Authorities Reform (A.40012)**

In November 2009, we passed a bill which steps up accountability and transparency for the state's more than 700 public authorities including the MTA, Thruway and Power Authorities. This bill strengthens rules and closes loopholes regarding property sales below market value, regulates authority debt, requires confirmation of CEOs/Executive Directors for some authorities, and ensures that authorities are subject to legislative and executive approval.

*I introduced the following legislation which has not yet been put to a vote:*

### **Circuit Breaker (A.7094)**

Looks at property taxes versus income and makes provisions so that anyone earning under a certain income could pay less of a percentage of that income towards their property taxes.

### **BOCES and School Districts (A.9208)**

Requires BOCES to form committees with Component School Districts to consider options for sharing and consolidations between and among school districts and report their findings to the government and the public.

### **No Member Items for 2010 Budget (A.9427)**

Legislators would forego member items for the next year through this rocky economy saving \$148-200 million in the general state budget.

## Update from the Shared Services Task Force of the 90th A.D.

In October I held two forums with my Shared Services Task Force on finding ways to make real property taxation more equitable, as well as ways to cut taxes through sharing and consolidation. From the Office of Real Property Services, Executive Director Lee Kyriacou discussed the need for regular reassessment. We also learned that one of our local municipalities is double-assessed. To learn more about this forum and see Lee's presentation you can visit this link on my website: [www.assembly.state.ny.us/mem/?ad=090](http://www.assembly.state.ny.us/mem/?ad=090). Dr. James Malatras from the Attorney General's office discussed the new law that enables community members to initiate local government consolidation. Details on this law can be found throughout this newsletter. School consolidation was discussed with Dr. Deborah Cunningham from the State Education Department. To see her presentation, visit [www.assembly.state.ny.us/mem/?ad=090](http://www.assembly.state.ny.us/mem/?ad=090).

# Steps You Can Take to Initiate Government or School Consolidations

Many of you have asked me why my colleagues and I cannot put together a piece of legislation forcing schools and municipalities to consolidate. Every community is different and a one-size-fits-all bill from Albany will not address the differing needs and limitations across the state. **Consolidation must be a grassroots effort.** However, I can provide you with the tools to initiate these changes in your own school districts and municipalities. Every individual can make a difference.

## Local Government Consolidation or Dissolution

Here are the steps to “elector initiated” consolidation or dissolution:

1. “Elector Initiated” consolidation must first be approved by referendum. To get on the ballot, a petition is required that contains 10% or 5,000 registered voters within the affected municipality, whichever is less. For municipalities with a population below 500, the law requires signatures of at least 20% of registered voters. Next, the petitions must be presented to the Town or Village Clerk to be properly filed and approved.
2. Once the petition is approved, a notice will be issued announcing the referendum.
3. Public referendum on the consolidation/dissolution issue must be held between 60-90 days after the clerk approved the petition. Please note that the referendum is only approving the idea of dissolution or consolidation.
4. If the public approves your idea for reform, an actual plan for consolidation or dissolution must be formulated by the local government(s) in question, with input from the public.
5. If the referendum is voted down, there will be a four-year moratorium on the issue before you can try again.



## School District Consolidation

Legislation to consolidate or annex school districts has been in existence since the late nineteenth century, but has not been used consistently in over three decades. This legislation provides options for all types of school districts in the state and how they can be combined. While there are several different end results when reorganizing school districts, initiating school district consolidation always begins the same way:

1. For a formal study of school district reorganization to begin, the affected board of education must meet to determine if there are sufficient benefits to consolidation.\*
2. During these joint meetings, the districts’ Superintendents act as informed, neutral parties that provide information, support and assistance.
3. If there is a potential benefit to combining school districts, the school boards undertake a comprehensive feasibility study, with guidance from the State Education Department, to determine how the reorganized school districts would operate.
4. After the feasibility study, there must be a referendum in the communities affected by reorganization. The public should be kept abreast of news of the reorganization plan so that they can make an informed decision at the time of the vote.
5. If the referendum passes in all affected school districts, then the plan to consolidate must be taken to the Commissioner of Education for final approval.
6. If the Commissioner approves the plan, then consolidation or annexation of school districts can begin.

\*If your school board is not talking about consolidating, but you think they should, I urge you to go to their next meeting and encourage them to talk about making these important reforms.

If you have any further questions about consolidation and reorganization of school districts and local governments, or would like advice on how to initiate these processes please call my District Office.



*Audience members were engaged (above) when Sandy led this forum on Local Government and School District Consolidations with, from left, Dr. Deborah Cunningham from State Ed, Dr. James Malataras from the Attorney General’s Office, and John Clarkson from the Local Government Efficiency & Competitiveness Commission.*

# Constituent Questionnaire

(Room for two respondents)

1. Should there be a cap on state spending based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI)?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
2. Would you support a freeze in state spending for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 budget years?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
3. Would you support my bill calling for removing member items (i.e. legislator's discretionary spending, also known as earmarks or "pork") from the 2010-11 budget?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
4. Would you restore the STAR rebate check if it meant raising state taxes?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
5. Do you favor the continuation of the new income tax rates on people making \$200,000 and above?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
6. Do you believe there is inequity in property assessments in your community?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
7. Are you in favor of county wide reassessment of property to curtail the cost of court challenges and offer more equity in taxation?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
8. Should we amend the law to allow more than the 200 charter schools already permitted in New York State?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
9. Would you support a stricter law on driving while text messaging that would make it a first offense rather than a second offense?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
10. Would you support the merging of local courts and/or developing a larger regional court system?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
11. Are you in favor of a unicameral (one house) legislature?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
12. Should we call for a New York State Constitutional Convention before the next one is scheduled (2017)?  
 Yes  No  Yes  No
13. Given the economy, which areas of the budget do you believe should be reduced?  
Please list in priority order (feel free to include a separate page if your list is long.)

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**For updates on issues in Albany, please include an e-mail address.**

**E-mail 1:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

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|||||.....  
Assemblywoman Sandy Galef  
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Ossining, NY 10562-4802