

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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READER VIEW | RICHARD YOTT

Plan too good to be true?

I attended the informational meeting given by former Bath attorney Chris Wilkins, CEO of the Loyola Recovery Foundation (LRF), on Jan. 2 at the Episcopal Church in Bath. I was very disappointed that perhaps as few as six members of the community who were not elected or appointed officials showed up.

LRF proposes to tear down three large, fully functional houses and replace them with a 52,000-square-foot complex costing \$17.2 million. This complex, to be built in a flood zone, would consist of four transitional apartments, a cafeteria, and 37 fully-furnished apartments, ranging from efficiencies to three-bedroom units.

The homeless veterans of Bath, suffering from repeated bouts of alcoholism, drug addiction or mental hygiene disorders, would occupy these units.

Conceivably, these 41 units would house about 50 veterans and family members with rent ranging from just under \$500 to nearly \$800 a month. LRF states residents will gain employment in the cafeteria and proposed call center.

It should be pointed out that LRF's parent company, DePaul Addiction Services, currently "rents" the sixth floor of the hospital at the VA and operates a detox program which serves veterans and civilians alike; their meals are provided by the VA.

Here's the deal. A veteran, after completing DePaul's detox program, enters the "cash cow" of the VA, the drug and alcohol program. Only a select few will be awarded a plush apartment.

LRF stated these homeless veterans will be from the Bath area and surrounding areas. Will there be background checks or screening done on these veterans you plan to import? Bath already has more than our fair share of registered sex offenders in the area.

Do you realize your complex will be located 100 yards away from six registered sex offenders, two bars and a "gentlemen's club"?

LRF is promising jobs to

many of them at call centers. Are these call centers in support of LRF or will they compete against local call centers in this area, thereby taking away jobs from the local population?

Why does this complex need a cafeteria if apartments are furnished with kitchens? Are not veterans eligible for meals on station?

Why must the contract for construction go to a firm out of Buffalo? Are there no adequate contractors located here in the Southern Tier?

If the veteran suffers a relapse or a family member is arrested, will they be turned out on the streets to be supported by our county social service? Will they fall under local, state or federal jurisdiction for law enforcement?

For a fraction of the price, why not renovate the three houses or one of the old barracks/domiciliaries? Incidentally, New York State Historic Preservation stated five days after your meeting that they did not give consent to tearing down the houses. Also, they are still waiting for the revised plan to be resubmitted!

Is your "community advisory board" being paid? Is it equal to what the "advisory board" staffed by retired VA personnel is earning?

LRF proposes to bring in "homeless" veterans who cannot say no to their demons, and reward them with plush apartments. How will this affect the delicate fabric of our community if LRF is allowed to proceed?

Because federal funding will be used, who will ultimately foot the bill for LRF's generosity? I have yet to receive a response to my email from LRF.

Personally, I think it is disgraceful that the Bath VA is again willing to prostitute land given to the veterans by the citizens of Bath. But it's not too late to stop this preposterous pipedream. Contact the Bath VA at 664-4722, Loyola Recovery Foundation at (585) 203-1250, or Congressman Tom Reed at (202) 225-3161. Tell them you do not want LRF to capitalize on veterans!

Robert E. Yott is a Mitchellsville resident and veteran.

ANOTHER VIEW

LA CARDINAL MAHONY RELIEVED OF DUTIES...



POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

2-for-2 on time; now early?

For years before 2011, the No. 1 shining symbol of Albany dysfunction was the failure of the governor and the Legislature to enact a state budget before the start of New York's new fiscal year every April 1. Some of you might recall that before 2005, the state went 20 consecutive years – two decades straight – without adopting the budget on time.

For all intents and purposes, if the budget was late by a few days or even a few weeks, the direct impact was minimal if there was any impact at all. State obligations continued to be met and the world kept turning. But it looked bad when the state couldn't get its own act together while at the same time, for example, requiring taxpayers to pay their taxes on time – or face a penalty.

Sometimes, however, the budget wasn't adopted until months after April 1. In 2004, for instance, it wasn't in place until Aug. 11.

Once things get that out of hand, it has a significant and negative impact on school districts, nonprofits, transportation contractors and so many others who depend on the predictable and steady flow of state aid. Late budgets trounced the overall confidence and integrity of New York government.

Since 2011, we've seen the state budget adoption process carried out like it should be: on time, with restraint on state spending and taxing, and largely absent of the rancor that lateness produces.

This year, we're aiming for the earliest budget

adoption since 1983. Legislative leaders have just announced a schedule intended to produce the final 2013-14 state budget by Thursday, March 21 – 10 days before April 1.

Between now and then, roughly six weeks from today, there's a ton of work to get done. The Senate has already established in-house subcommittees to closely examine various portions of the governor's proposal. I'm serving on the subcommittee focused on taxes and economic development and from there will be renewing the push for the Senate to get behind key proposals to strengthen this state's business climate and keep everyone focused on the Upstate economy (emphasizing our manufacturers and small businesses).

In early March, each house of the Legislature adopts its respective budget resolution and then we'll immediately convene a public, joint conference committee process to settle differences and hammer out final agreements.

Last week, the fiscal committees began a series of public budget hearings that will continue throughout the next two weeks. Why pay attention to what's unfolding on a daily basis? Following are some of the early hints coming out of last week's hearings that could have important local impact:

■ Testimony from the head of the state's County Highway Superintendents Association stressed that the largest source of funding for local roads and bridges, the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (commonly known as CHIPS),



TOM O'MARA

remains frozen at 2008 levels. Strikingly, the local highway superintendents contend that while the current state budget includes \$1 billion for the NY Works infrastructure improvement initiative, billed by the Cuomo administration as New York's largest-ever infrastructure enhancement effort, not a penny of the billion went to local roads and bridges.

Senate leaders – and I'm fully on board – responded that it's our intention this year to unfreeze CHIPS or at least secure some additional state aid dedicated to local roads and bridges.

■ On the elementary and secondary education front, you might remember last year that a bipartisan coalition of Upstate legislators called for a more equitable distribution of state education aid to low-wealth, rural, high-need districts. It led to the current budget reallocating \$200 million to achieve this goal so that, overall, high-need districts statewide received 71 percent of last year's increased aid. A similar effort will be made for the upcoming state budget.

■ Under questioning, the state health commissioner made clear the Cuomo administration's willingness to explore the development of a more extensive statewide "telemedicine/telehealth network." One

ongoing focus of the bipartisan Rural Resources Commission on which I serve has been the development of this network.

We see it as a potentially groundbreaking achievement for rural health care. As New York keeps expanding broadband capabilities into underserved regions, an accompanying emphasis should be a more integrated statewide telemedicine system. In fact, the development of modern telemedicine capabilities is highlighted by the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council's blueprint. In its final report, the council noted that telemedicine-based initiatives "will reduce hospitalizations, create Medicare and Medicaid savings, eliminate transportation issues and disintegration of services for elderly and low-income populations" and provide reduced health care costs for rural residents.

So while the state budget adoption process can be a drawn-out, mundane affair, every step of the way produces information that points to where the final state budget is headed.

You can watch each of the fiscal committee hearings and, in March, the joint conference committees – as they're taking place through the Senate's live streaming website at: <http://www.nysenate.gov/calendar/live>.

State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 58th Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and part of Tompkins County.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A gun control suggestion

TO THE EDITOR | I would like to add a suggestion to the mind-numbing discussion going on these days.

If and when it is decided to arm teachers and other non-professionals in public places, my suggestion is to arm them with rimfire .22 multiple-shot weapons loaded with

bird shot.

The advantages of this plan are:

■ Innocent bystanders are quite unlikely to be killed by "friendly fire."

■ A .22 five-shot revolver is quite small and relatively inexpensive. It can be carried in any pocket and not be obtrusive in any way.

■ The arming of anyone in a school situation with a large-caliber,

multi-shot weapon using solid bullets is simply dangerous beyond the assumed benefits to those intended to be protected.

■ Birdshot fired at close range to the face or upper body of a person will have a greater probability of hitting the target than solid bullets, and will completely disable the intended perpetrator.

When I see pictures of people receiving pistol

instruction with large-caliber automatic weapons, I am convinced that when/if the conditions arise for use, innocent bystanders are going to be killed or injured. This seems to be the case when police fire on perpetrators in crowded places.

Need I say more?

Bill Weber
Pulteney

ONLY ONLINE | YOU WEIGH IN

New poll: What was your favorite Super Bowl ad?

- Chrysler's salute to troops
- Budweiser's Clydesdale reunion
- Oreo's library fight
- Audi's prom kiss
- GoDaddy.com's 'sexy,' 'smart'
- Best Buy with Amy Poehler
- Taco Bell's elderly stepping out
- Tide's Joe Montana stain
- Doritos goat

Recent poll: Boy Scouts of America is considering a proposal that would allow its individual organizations to decide whether to allow gays to be scouts and adult leaders. Do you support the proposal?

- Yes 37%
- No 56%
- Undecided 6%

Total votes: 466
Weigh in at www.the-leader.com