

**Merrilyn Pulver
Supervisor
Town of Fort Edward**

I do understand that I stand between you and your lunch. And then I will say that as Supervisor of the Town of Fort Edward I am kind of used to this David and Goliath thing. That happens on a pretty regular basis with EPA and GE and I have been known to hold my own.

So, with that, I am just going to tell you I am going to talk as quickly as possible and cover everything that I can and answer as many questions as I can as well.

I just went back and said to Lori, I said, Lori, why am I here? What role do I serve here? She said, just tell your story. So we are going to tell the story and we will be as quick as possible.

The reality is--and I would really like to begin with thanking the Commission for the opportunity to present ideas for greater efficiency and tax relief for residents not only in the Town of Fort Edward, but also in towns and villages located on the Route 4 corridor.

For those of you that are not aware, of course we are in Washington County. The village and town of Fort Edward and the village of Hudson Falls and the town of Kingsbury are very closely located together. In addition, our county seat is located in the Town of Fort Edward.

I have unusual circumstances because of having the largest EPA environmental dredging project in the history of mankind taking place in my community, so we have some different things that we have reached out to achieve, and they are perhaps a little unique, but my position has allowed me the opportunity to advocate for not just the town but also the county and regionally.

I have been an advocate for making Fort Edward a model for future federal Superfund sites. And to that end we have an interagency work group of elected leaders of state and federal agencies and think tank people--and think tank people are wonderful--that help in creating that vision for tomorrow.

And as we look at those things, it's very obvious that we have some real opportunities. We have reached out for a community of 6,000 people, which include the village and the town, and in the last eight years have brought over \$10 million to the community in the form of grants and earmarks and those things.

Now, that's nothing to do with efficiency in government. Where the efficiency takes place is the ability of these communities, and particularly the town and village of Fort Edward, to work together.

Presently we do have two shared services grants. One is a feasibility study and the second grant providing construction dollars for adding the village highway department to the town facility.

We in Fort Edward have identified many ways and have consolidated and done shared services on many levels for a long period of time. We share a municipal office building, a fire department, fire district, historian, judicial clerk, local development corporation, assessor, animal control. We collaborate very closely with the village on special days and Chambers of Commerce and recreational programs.

And I have to say that I thought, you know, we can get this done with the highways. I am not sure if it is because both highways are all men, but I think we need a woman facilitator, I really do, at this point.

In other words, it hasn't been as easy a transition as we have all hoped for, and it's very obvious that we are going to need some additional facilitation to bring it together.

And we have already had the incentive. The state has given us the incentive via grant dollars. So it takes more--this is my message--it takes more than the giving of dollars to communities in shared services projects. It takes a sincere desire of those people to move it forward.

And sometimes money isn't the answer. Sometimes the answer has to be with better facilitation, better understanding.

I recently went to Hillsborough, Oregon with the Chamber of Commerce as part of--I represented on the county level. And the one thing that was very obvious there that they have been very successful with is their ability to have visionary collaborative efforts between all entities and whether it's towns, villages, counties, schools, businesses, that's what it takes. It takes that sincere desire to collaborate to make things happen.

I would like to move along to some comments regarding things that we have done that have been very effective. As far as strategies for advancing merger and consolidation of outdated local boundaries and structures, we have worked very closely with these four communities, as I mentioned before, on a Route 4 corridor management program.

We are now having a complete new look placed upon these four communities, making it a continuous corridor, rather than each of these individual towns and villages saying, I want mine to look like this. We are going to have that look.

The town and village of Fort Edward have worked on a local economic revitalization plan. The town is collaborating with the Town of Kingsbury to create a community health center.

So, there has been a lot of good things moving in that direction, bringing these four communities together.

In addition, we have a county sewer district. One of the things that at a county level we are working to accomplish is to get a county water authority, because at this point that's very fragmented between these four communities.

We have all had to deal with MS4 issues, which I wish never heard the word, but we all have to deal with it, and we are trying to do that in a collective manner.

We have a local waterfront revitalization plan, and that involves eight communities and three counties, and everybody is on board. That's a really good thing.

And then most recently we have the historic Saratoga-Washington Counties partnership on the Hudson, which jumps the river. On both sides of the river we have a partnership collaboration.

So, we have done a lot along those lines to be progressive and to try to find ways to reduce the cost to the residents.

I do have one area in particular on a county level, and it relates back down to us as a grass roots with the towns and villages. We continue to have a concern with health insurance cost.

If the smaller counties throughout New York State, and in particular I am referencing the counties north of Saratoga County, could have the ability to create community cooperatives, it would be very beneficial.

The State Insurance Law says that you have to have a minimum of 2000 employees and it specifically says that excludes dependents. But either changing that law, take the exclusion that dependents cannot be part of that 2000 employees, and allowing them to be.

Or by reducing that 2000 minimum number to 1500 employees, then towns and villages in upstate New York would have the ability to work with their counties and have an experience rated health insurance package that would lower considerably the cost to taxpayers for the continually two digit yearly increases.

In our case in Washington County, the county itself has had the ability to keep increases to a minimum of five percent each year. Whereas, the towns and village experience a 15 to 18 percent increase annually.

Our request on a county level is and has been for two years for this change, but the State Insurance Department has done nothing to rectify the situation, and we are still waiting for one of these two basic changes to take place.

Now, that may seem like a small thing to everything else you have heard today, but from the grass roots level, as we talk about towns and villages and the costs that go back to their taxpayers, it should be such an easy fix and yet we can't get it done.

So, I would say that would be one of the major thoughts that I would like you to bring back, for the real need for those communities in upstate New York. And when many people talk about upstate New York you are talking north of Westchester County, which could very well be true, but the reality is those communities that don't have those number of employees, on a countywide basis it puts us at a much increase in our cost.

So, I am done.