



NEWS FROM THE ULSTER COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE HEIN REPORTS PROGRESS AFTER MEETING WITH GOVERNOR PATERSON OVER STATE PROPOSAL TO FREEZE PROPERTY TAX PAYMENTS ON STATE OWNED LAND

Kingston, NY – February 25, 2009 - Ulster County Executive Mike Hein met with Governor David Paterson yesterday to outline concerns of a proposal to freeze state property taxes paid to local governments and school districts for state owned lands. Included in the meeting were New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) Executive Director Stephen Acquario, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis and other interested county and state representatives.

Hein said that, “We outlined the full impact of the cost shift to local communities and school districts inherent in the Governor’s proposal, along with its potential to discourage local support for State land conservation efforts in the future. I respect the Governor’s efforts to address the State’s serious budget problems, but this particular proposal places a disproportionate, unfair and unsustainable burden on local taxpayers. The Governor said to us that our position is compelling and that he would consult with his staff. I remain hopeful that, as the Governor and legislators continue to deliberate the state budget, this proposal will be removed in the final budget.”

Previously, Hein had written a letter to Governor Paterson, and Ulster County's state representatives, strongly opposing the proposal and had promised to meet with the Governor to drive home the message personally. Through the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC), Hein also Co-Chairs the *County Coalition for Property Tax Payment Equity*, a group that been working for quite some time on this and other issues related to property tax equity.

This month, the County Executive asked the County Legislature to pass a resolution requesting that the Governor withdraw his proposal or for the State Legislature to reject it. The resolution was passed with a unanimous bipartisan vote.

The State owns approximately 359,000 acres in the four counties in the Catskill Region: Ulster, Greene, Delaware, and Sullivan. Among these counties, Ulster has the largest number of acres of State owned lands – approximately 185,000. The State currently pays over \$13 million in property and school taxes for its lands in the Catskill Region - \$7.8 million in Ulster County alone. The results of a freeze on the amount of tax paid by the State would be most dramatic in Towns like Shandaken, Denning and Hardenburgh, where the State owns close to 124,000 acres that cannot be developed and that will, under the current proposal, no longer pay a fair share of property taxes, moving that burden to local taxpayers. If the State's proposal is adopted, the resulting loss in County tax revenues would be absorbed by taxpayers throughout the County.

“The state-owned lands at issue here are a constitutional, principal and moral obligation of the state. They are a natural treasure, and a matter of state concern. The state must continue to pay its fair share of property taxes or payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs),” said NYSAC Executive Director Stephen J. Acquario. “The homeowners and businesses in these communities should not be punished because of a proposal to break this commitment to offset a small fraction of the state's \$14 billion budget shortfall.”

The environmental community has expressed concern because conservation of open space, through the State land acquisition program, would be threatened by an increase in local opposition resulting from the loss in tax revenues.

