



Assemblyman Steve Otis



Legislative Update

December 2024

Dear Friends,

This newsletter includes updates on some of the Science and Technology issues on which I have been active, an update on NYS property tax relief initiatives, and news on services provided by several important Westchester not-for-profit organizations.

I am looking forward to 2025 and working on pressing issues affecting the communities on the Sound Shore. I expect the new year will again bring a focus on the importance of state aid to school districts and local governments, clean water infrastructure, flood mitigation, coastal resilience, and other environmental issues. State support for all these issues is vitally important to reduce costs borne by property taxpayers. We will see continued attention to evolving issues related to cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and data privacy.

This newsletter includes information on several important Westchester not-for-profits that I have worked with for many years. During the year, I regularly highlight the activities of many groups providing services and programs to our communities. The holiday season is a wonderful time to consider volunteering or assisting any of the groups I have spotlighted or ones you see active here in Westchester.

Ideas for new legislation often come from the experiences we all have as consumers, residents, or in business. My office is available to help with individual issues you may have with state agencies or other entities. Those problems may also trigger ideas for changes in the law.

Please call my District Office at 914-939-7028, if I may be of assistance. It is an honor to serve you and to work on the issues of concern to Westchester residents and businesses.

In this holiday season, I wish you and your family happiness and health in the New Year.

Warm regards,

Steven Otis
State Assemblyman

Westchester County Association Digital Innovation Conference

In October I was a panelist at the Westchester County Association's Hudson Valley Digital Innovation Conference. The STEM Alliance and Westchester County were also sponsors of the gathering titled the "Converge" conference with a focus on the intersection of innovation in digital infrastructure, economic growth, and the goal of ensuring that all residents can fully participate in the digital economy.

The conference brought nationally recognized speakers on priority topics for the State Assembly Committee on Science and Technology, which I chair, such as expansion of digital literacy and accessibility, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity.

Cybersecurity leaders discussed the evolving cybersecurity landscape, the growing threat of ransomware, and the need for strong cybersecurity defenses. They emphasized the importance of education, collaboration, and proactive measures to combat cyber threats.

I participated in a panel discussing "Bolstering Cybersecurity, Awareness and Prevention". There was a strong consensus that rapidly evolving cybersecurity-risks, surveillance technology and weakening of privacy protections heightens the need for increased vigilance by businesses,

governmental entities, and individuals. My comments focused on the weakness of law enforcement capabilities to fight cybercrime and increased risks posed by the confluence of AI access to personal data and related increased cybersecurity exposure.

Fellow panelists were Stephanie Pell, Brookings Institution; Meghan Cook, NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services; Professor and Dean Li-Chiou Chen and Professor Joe Acampora, both of the Pace Cyber Center at Pace University's Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information Systems. The conference was held at Pace University's Pleasantville campus.



Assemblyman Otis speaking as part of the cybersecurity panel at the WCA Digital Innovation Conference with fellow panelist Pace University Cyber Center Professor, Li-Chiou Chen.

New State Funding for Mamaroneck Flood Projects

The Village of Mamaroneck has been awarded \$6.6 million from New York State for the Village's Floodplain Restoration Effort to mitigate flood risks in a designated high-risk area by creating two floodplain benches. The project will increase flood storage capacity and improve water quality with natural sediment filtering. The \$6.6 million grant is part of a larger \$60 million in Green Resiliency Grant (GRG) funding that will support 13 transformative green infrastructure projects across New York State.

Congratulations to the Village of Mamaroneck, Mayor Sharon Torres, the entire Board of Trustees, and Village staff on the award of this competitive NYS Green Resiliency Grant. This state funding comes in addition to New York State's already allocated share of \$23.35 million towards the Federal Army Corps of Engineers Mamaroneck Sheldrake program. Senator Mayer and I have been working with state agencies to bring additional programs like the NYS GRG funding to supplement the Army Corps projects. This is an important assist to the Village.

This project will both complement the Army Corps Plan and help reduce its cost. We appreciate that our state and federal partners recognize the effects of flooding on our municipalities and are collaboratively helping communities like ours through funding opportunities. Flood mitigation remains the highest priority for the Village of Mamaroneck and this grant allows the Village to move forward on flood mitigation efforts that will allow more capacity to carry water to Long Island Sound, and away from flood prone areas.

Artificial Intelligence Hearing Examines Regulatory Options to Protect Consumers and the Public

In September I co-chaired a joint hearing on how to best protect consumers, businesses, and the public from risks associated with rapidly expanding use of artificial intelligence and automated decision-making systems. The hearing was held jointly by the Assembly Science and Technology Committee and the Assembly Consumer Protection Committee.

New York State is playing a leading role in the evolution of AI through Governor Hochul's Empire AI Consortium, a public private partnership that includes SUNY. A constant theme in academic and technology scholarship on AI is the need to provide quality control to protect consumers, businesses, and entities using AI systems.

We received testimony from technology companies, such as IBM, privacy advocates, the State Attorney General's Office, AARP, publishers, broadcasters, and the Screen Actors Guild.

Discussions on how to best protect the public and support the evolution of these technologies are being discussed in state legislatures, as well as in Washington, and Europe. Our hearing followed some of those discussions with views on what areas should be subject to regulation and oversight and what areas should be left outside regulation.

One common question has been whether to regulate risks or abuses alone or audit systems as well. The hearing provided a good opening dialogue on many aspects of an issue that should be addressed thoughtfully and should not be ignored. These issues will continue to be reviewed in 2025.

STAR Property Tax Relief

In September I attended a press conference with fellow State Legislators and Governor Kathy Hochul to promote participation in the STAR property tax relief program which will provide \$2.3 billion in tax relief in the current year. The Hudson Valley is the second biggest recipient of STAR tax relief benefits after Long Island.



More broadly, I have been an advocate for using state programs to reduce costs at the local level.

Affordability was a major focus of our 2024-25 state budget where we included numerous increases in programs that reduce property tax burdens, including record aid to school districts, increased funding to local governments for general state aid, roads and bridges, clean water, and environmental grants.

A major priority of mine is assisting local governments and school districts with funding for competitive grants and other funding opportunities to reduce costs at the local level. One of my biggest legislative causes has been the state's clean water grant funding programs that have delivered \$2.8 billion in funding to support over 1000 programs statewide, costs that would otherwise have been borne by property taxpayers.

Feeding Westchester, Volunteer New York, and Monroe College Combine for a Day of Service

The City of New Rochelle, Volunteer New York, Monroe College, and Feeding Westchester organized a community service project on September 6th to help residents with food insecurity challenges as part of the federal September 11 National Day of Service and Remembrance. This is the second year holding this event, which once again was selected to receive outside funding to help meet its goal of packing and distributing 50,000 meals across Feeding Westchester's extensive network of partners. I recently toured Feeding Westchester's warehouse and distribution facility in Elmsford. They have dramatically increased their food distribution efforts working with local food programs. In the last year, Feeding Westchester distributed 23.8 million pounds of food to Westchester families.

I joined other volunteers in measuring and packing food for delivery to families in need. The event was held at the Monroe Athletic Complex in New Rochelle. Also packing the food containers were Deborah Maher, Vice President of the Inter-Religious Coalition of New Rochelle, and former County Legislator Damon Maher, both longtime community volunteers. You can get involved with Volunteer New York or Feeding Westchester by visiting their websites.



Pet Adoption Event Hosted in Port Chester



The Village of Port Chester and the Westchester SPCA sponsored a very successful Family Fun & Pet Extravaganza at the Abendroth Dog Park in Port Chester. The focus of the event was to promote dog and cat adoptions. There were also games, craft sales, and many happy dogs and owners. You can reach SPCA Westchester at SPCAWestchester.org.

I also attended the benefit of the Humane Society of Westchester, based in New Rochelle, which also is a great source for adopting a pet. <https://humanesocietyofwestchester.org>

I am pictured here at the event with a constituent from Larchmont, Zeus, a two year-old Komondor who is sharing views on treats and best places to walk.



I joined Tracy Stora, chair of the Rye Conservation Commission/Advisory Council, at the City of Rye Recreation Department Food Truck Festival. The event included local civic groups, including the tent pictured here sponsored by the Rye Sustainability Committee to share news of their work with the community.

Fields For Kids Hommocks School Dedication

I recently attended the Fields for Kids kick-off of their latest fundraising campaign with the dedication of a new plaque at Hommocks Middle School to thank donors who made significant contributions to the Hommocks Outdoor Play Space (HOPS), completed during the last school year.

1,300 middle school students now have a play space during recess, and physical education teachers have outdoor fitness equipment available, due to the support of the community, local businesses, and the Mamaroneck School District.

Fields for Kids is half-way to their fundraising goal to build a new multi-sport field at Town Center field which is owned by the school district. State Senator Shelley Mayer and I have arranged state grants towards the project.

Fields for Kids is a volunteer run non-profit, launched in 2006 to advocate for quality recreational and sports space across Larchmont and Mamaroneck. The organization raises private funds and partners with local governments and the Mamaroneck School District to improve

athletic facilities. I worked with Fields for Kids to support improvements to Lorenzen Park years ago and have supported athletic field, parks, youth, and recreation programs in every community I represent.



Port Chester Rye NAACP Freedom Fund Luncheon



At the NAACP Port Chester Rye Branch Robert S. Brown and M. Paul Redd Freedom Fund Luncheon on October 19th, I joined public officials of every level of government to celebrate exceptional honorees. Here we surround long-time community volunteer and voting rights activist Martha Bell. Martha and Marcela Kissner were both recognized as Voter Rights Advocate Honorees at the event.



STEM Alliance Open House

The STEM Alliance showcased their offices in Mamaroneck with a recent open house to share the story of their work on STEM education and digital inclusion programs. Their goals include:

- Enhance and expand STEM awareness, educational offerings, and extra-curricular opportunities.
- Obtain grants to support STEM education, enrichment, and professional development.
- Promote connections between STEM education and career opportunities.
- Create a strong network of STEM educators, professionals, and other nonprofit partners to increase our impact.

Margaret Käufer and her team provide programs in Westchester and beyond. I work closely with Meg on digital equity and inclusion programs and with NYSDEN (NYS Digital Equity Network) practitioners in these programs across the state. You can learn more about the STEM Alliance at www.thestemalliance.org.

Furniture Sharehouse - A Model for Serving Westchester Families

I recently attended Furniture Sharehouse's Milestone Celebration marking their 18 years providing one of New York State's most innovative and successful furniture reuse and donation programs.

Furniture Sharehouse is Westchester's Furniture Bank, providing free furniture to Westchester families in need since 2007. Its clients include people moving out of homeless shelters, escaping domestic violence, struggling with mental or physical disabilities, recovering from personal or natural disaster, as well as veterans and refugees.

This year, it celebrated three major Milestones. Furniture Sharehouse served its 18,000th client, distributed 100,000 items of FREE furniture, all worth \$6 million at thrift shop value.

At the Milestone Celebration held at their location in a hangar at Westchester County Airport, I joined Founder and Executive Director Kate Bialo, other elected officials, and representatives of 50 partner not-for-profits and agencies, community partners, and major supporters.

In addition to providing free furniture to those living in empty apartments who cannot afford even the most basic items, Furniture Sharehouse has saved thousands of tons of used furniture from the waste stream. Last year I visited another innovative not-for-profit upstate, Finger Lakes ReUse, which uses a different model to divert used furniture from the waste stream and makes it available to families in need. These are great programs.

To support the mission of Furniture Sharehouse, consider donating your gently-used furniture, volunteering, or finding other ways to help furnish the empty apartment of families in need and help them rebuild their lives in comfort and dignity. You can learn more at furnituresharehouse.org.

Meals on Main Street Addresses Food Insecurity

I attended Meals on Main Street's Annual Run in Port Chester to raise funds for their innovative programs to provide quality food to families in need in Westchester. Their programs using Mobile Pantry Trucks and Strategic Food Hubs allows Meals on Main Street to supplement the work of Westchester County pantries and soup kitchens to deliver recovered food and farm-fresh produce to families in need where they live. Meals on Main Street offers a variety of ways you can volunteer and support their efforts. Learn more at www.mealsonmainst.org. I joined board member Pat Hart and Executive Director Jon Haseltine at the event.



NYS DOT Route 1 Boston Post Road Public Participation Process Takes Form

I have worked on traffic and pedestrian safety issues over the years in several Sound Shore communities and have been working with local officials, two school districts, public safety advocates, and the NYS Department of Transportation on an upcoming planning process to include traffic safety improvements to the scheduled major repaving project of Route 1, the Boston Post Road, within the Village of Larchmont, Village of Mamaroneck, and Town of Mamaroneck.

State Senator Shelley Mayer and I have been working with NYS DOT and local participants to make sure that local requests for improved pedestrian safety and implantation of traffic calming measures are included as part of the process.

The key to success in this effort will be making sure that all the local participants are working together in developing community supported sets of requests to DOT that can work along the different sections of the tri-municipal corridor. We have already had a series of informal discussions with parent and traffic safety representatives and local officials.

The DOT held an initial Stakeholder Meeting on November 22nd where they heard from the three municipalities and major stakeholders to help determine what pedestrian safety, traffic calming, and safe route to school modifications could be implemented on the Boston Post Road corridor. The NYS DOT understands the importance of safety improvements to this major project, and there will be several public sessions, such as Open Houses, scheduled in early 2025 where parents and community advocates can voice their concerns about pedestrian safety and offer solutions that can be incorporated into their proposed Route 1 project.

Our shared goal is to come up with the ideal traffic safety improvement plan and see it implemented. Success requires strong public participation, engineering analysis, and the involvement of the local entities that know the issues and challenges in the corridor.

Route 1 is a State Road under the jurisdiction of NYS DOT. We all understand the importance of traffic and pedestrian safety issues. In June, Mamaroneck experienced the tragedy of the death of a mother and son in a pedestrian accident on Mamaroneck Avenue.

Westchester County, which has jurisdiction over that road, moved quickly to install traffic and pedestrian safety improvements in advance of the beginning of the school year in September.

In 2017 we worked with local officials and DOT on the implementation of safety improvements near Mamaroneck High School. We want to make sure that properly designed safety and community supported safety modifications are included in this new major Route 1 project.

Sharing Shelf's Innovative Program to Provide Clothing for Children in Need

Sharing Shelf is another local not-for-profit that has developed a new model for serving families in need. Their program has developed an innovative program to address clothing insecurity and other basic needs of low-income children and teens in Westchester County.

Their program serves children from birth through age 19 by providing each child they serve with a Wardrobe Pack – a week's worth of seasonally appropriate clothing – together with essentials including diapers for infants and toddlers, toiletry kits, period products, new socks, and new underwear.

I recently attended a Sharing Shelf event, which included a panel discussion describing how they receive donated clothing from individuals, excess clothing donated by manufacturers, and other sources. Sharing Shelf then packages clothing and other materials targeting the needs of Westchester children.

I have supported state grant funding to assist Sharing Shelf. There are a variety of ways you can help through volunteering, donating gently used clothing, and contributing in other ways to their good work. You can learn more about their work by contacting The Sharing Shelf directly.

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



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**Steve
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HOPE Community Services

HOPE (Help Our People Eat) Community Services in New Rochelle is a not-for-profit, non-sectarian organization that for the last 40 years has provided emergency food services, children's supportive programming and assistance with applying for full array of social services, including emergency housing in New Rochelle and surrounding communities. HOPE's Food Pantry is one of the largest in Westchester County and their Community Kitchen serves about 100 meals each weeknight.

With the gift of a new building from Calabria Mutual Aid Society, HOPE has been provided an amazing opportunity to create a new home in its existing community, envisioning a bright, welcoming Community Kitchen, supermarket-style Food Pantry, and multi-faceted Community Center. Learn more on their website: www.hopecommunityservices.org

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