

**Lyndon D. Williams**

Vice Chairman

13<sup>th</sup> District – Mount Vernon**Committee Assignments:**

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## Delay in Mt. Vernon Revitalization is Unnecessary

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I joined Mount Vernon Mayor Clinton Young and a number of community and church leaders for a special rally held in Mount Vernon last week in support of the Atlantic Development Group's planned \$120 million downtown revitalization project for the city.

A promised yet undelivered \$4 million-contribution from Westchester County is blocked by County Executive Rob Astorino and holding up the project.

The Atlantic Development project consists of three phases, including 158 affordable "workforce" housing units on Gramatan Avenue with more than 20,000 square feet of upscale retail space at the street level, 59 senior-housing units in a 10-story building on Crary Avenue with rooftop and other upscale amenities and 131 market-rate rental units with possible home ownership on Oakley Avenue. The developer will rehabilitate the municipal garage for residential parking and will contribute toward improvement at Hartley Park.

This development, which will transform Mount Vernon's downtown, is a public-private partnership funded by a private developer, New York State, City of Mount Vernon and Westchester County. Government sponsors have kept their promise of support so far — except for the Astorino administration.

All told, the project will create an estimated 305 construction jobs and 76 full-time positions in Mount Vernon, a city with the highest unemployment rate in Westchester County.

This makes the county executive's foot-dragging tactics even more unacceptable.

Keep in mind, the county encouraged this developer to invest millions of dollars to purchase the real estate and incur the costs of millions of dollars for demolition, clearing and environmental studies with the understanding that the county would support funding the developer's request. In fact, a letter of support to the developer in April 2009 from the county's Planning Department expressed enthusiastic support for the project saying, among other things, "Please consider this letter assurance of the county's strong interest in and support of this project."

Both Democrat and Republican members of the Board of Legislators overwhelmingly approved this project because of the benefits it brings to Westchester County. Astorino vetoed the legislation, and the board overrode his veto. The approval of the bonding for the project is now a county law, and the county executive is refusing to follow the law by stonewalling and making bogus unsubstantiated claims that procedures were not followed. The legislative record and documents demonstrate that these nebulous excuses are false. The county executive's action in delaying the project is an attempt to obtain a second, unchecked veto, which offends the core of our democracy and rule of law.

We cannot allow Westchester's reputation in the business community to be tarnished by this kind of deliberate stalling and renegeing on promises.

The evidence suggests that but for the improper obstruction by the Astorino administration, the Planning Board would have positively recommended approval to the project to the Board of Legislators. Finally, the county's Bond Counsel approved the Board of Legislators' bonding legislation. That would not have occurred if proper procedures weren't followed.

Knowing their argument that "procedures" for the Mount Vernon project have not been followed is inaccurate, and finding little traction, the Astorino Administration is now saying that bonding for housing should be focused instead on new affordable units to satisfy the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs housing settlement. Of course, the Board of Legislators makes these policy determinations, not the county executive and his staff — making this fresh rationale yet another smokescreen meant to obscure the failure of the Astorino administration to follow through with a financial commitment made by Westchester County.

I'm sure many county residents find the county executive's zealous stance against this financial commitment both troubling and unfortunate. In the end, he is simply hurting the entire county by sending a terrible message to those in the business world seeking to invest in Westchester.