LOCAL FISCAL STRESS: State Austerity Policy and Creative Local Response

Tuesday; December 9, 2014, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. - Gideon Putnam, Saratoga Springs

Audience: Municipal and school district officials, union leaders, fiscal administrators, state legislators and staffers and NYS agency representatives are all invited to attend.

9:30-10:00 Registration

10:00-10:15 Welcome, Rod Howe, Community and Regional Development Institute (CaRDI); Fred Floss, Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI); Paul Sausville, Town of Malta; and Joanne Yepsen, Saratoga Springs

10:15-11:05 Decision-making for Quality Services: Information, Indicators and Dialogue, John Sipple, David Kay and Robin Blakely-Armitage, CaRDI

With fiscal stress comes tough decisions. Providing services and education is a main function of local government and local school districts, activities that support community sustainability and well-being. This session will provide a compelling rationale for understanding and tracking the impacts of fiscal and program decisions on individuals, schools, families, and communities, through the use of data and locally-specific social indicators.

Discussants
Mack Cook, City of Cortland
Janet Mayo, NYS Office of the State Comptroller

11:05-11:20 Break

11:20-12:15 Setting the Broader Context, Fred Floss, FPI and Mildred Warner, Cornell University City and Regional Planning and Audience Q&A

The overview will focus on economic conditions and trends (employment, poverty, manufacturing) and how they vary across New York State with implications for state and local policy. The overview will then shift to tax and expenditure trends of local government and the challenges presented by the Governor’s reforms (Tax cap, Tax Freeze and Shared Services, and the need for mandate relief).

12:15-1:15 Lunch

1:15-2:15 Effects of the Tax Cap: Ideas for Reform

This session will examine the disparate effect that the state’s tax cap law has on communities across the state and discuss the implications for local government fiscal stress and service delivery. It will compare New York with other states that have enacted tax caps to identify implications for policy reform.

Student presentation: Hector Chang, Robert Rivera, Hui Wen, & Yuanshuo Xu

Discussants
Marian A. Bott, League of Women Voters of New York State
Deborah H. Cunningham, New York State Association of School Business Officials
Frank Mauro, Fiscal Policy Institute (Executive Director Emeritus)
Peter Applebee, New York State Teachers
Fran Turner, Civil Service Employees’ Association

2:15-2:30 Break
2:30-3:45  Breakout sessions

A.  Economic Development

This session presents recommendations and guidelines that New York state and municipalities can consider when crafting and implementing economic development strategies, with particular attention on how they impact people, place, educational opportunities, and business. We will analyze how anchor institutions, business improvement districts (BIDs), land banks, social entrepreneurship, and tax abatements can contribute to municipal revival.

Student presentation: Elizabeth Agyeman-Budu, Becky Gitonga, Clint McManus, Derek Moretz, Marcelina Valdez, Xue Zhang

Discussants
Michael E. Imber, Alvarez & Marsal | Public Sector Services
Bruce Fisher, Director, Center for Economic and Policy Studies, Buffalo State
Ronald Deutsch, Fiscal Policy Institute

B.  Innovations in Service Delivery

Restructuring Service Delivery: This session will focus on innovative service delivery mechanisms used by local governments and school districts experiencing fiscal stress. These include shared services, co-production of services through technology, and user fees. Case studies will profile successful approaches that promote administrative efficiency and engage citizens.

Student presentation: Brian Byrd, Natalie Hymer, Maya Tellman, & Sofia Yglesias

Discussants
Paula Younger, Tompkins County
Mark Pattison, NYS Department of State

C.  Infrastructure Needs and Finance

Decreased funding, revenue constraints, and increased need have impacted municipalities’ infrastructure. While action is needed at the state and federal level to increase funding (ideas like infrastructure banks), promising innovations at the local level is sharing services across municipalities and across infrastructure projects (for example, combining sewer, stormwater, and roadway improvements into a single effort).

Student presentation: Danielle Burgess, Tyler Keegan, Daniel Kuhlman, Taru, & Max Weisbrod

Discussants
David Kay, Community and Regional Development Institute
Paul Beyer, NYS Department of State
D. Potential for Citizen/Union/Municipal Cooperation

Municipal Union Collaboration: Municipalities, school districts, unions and citizens can find common ground to push back against state policies causing local government fiscal stress. This session will explore innovative examples of collaboration between unions, municipal leaders and civil society groups, and it will be informed by insights from leaders in all three areas.

Student presentation: Sarah Cantatore, Zachary Cunningham, Michelle Muschett

Discussants
Brian McDonnell, AFSCME
Joe Mareane, Tompkins County

E. Designing Social Indicators

Social indicators are becoming important to local governments, especially as fiscal stress forces tough choices. This session will explore how to best design social indicators to identify community needs and therefore aid local government in equitably providing social services and education.

Student presentation: Ana Huckfeldt, Irene Hung, and Roya Sabri

Discussants
Fred Floss, Fiscal Policy Institute
Lauren Tobias, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
Robin Blakely-Armitage, Community and Regional Development Institute

3:45-4:00 Break

4:00-5:00 Moving Forward: Next Steps, moderated panel of union, local official and school representatives and League of Women Voters

Susan Arbetter, Moderator
Steve Allinger, New York State United Teachers
Barbara Bartoletti, League of Women Voters
Bob Lowry, New York State Council of School Superintendents
Ron Deutsch, Fiscal Policy Institute
Joe Mareane, Tompkins County

5:00-5:30 Social Gathering