



**STRATEGIC TAXI REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**VILLAGE OF PORT CHESTER TAXI INDUSTRY REVIEW**  
**FINAL REPORT – MARCH 13, 2009**

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

**JOAN DIBUONO CO-CHAIR**  
**STEPHEN NEILSEN CO-CHAIR**  
**DENNISE CLARK**  
**GENE CECCARELLI**  
**THOMAS FINN**  
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**LUIS MARINO**

The Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee held meetings on the dates noted below. Meeting minutes are on file in the Village of Port Chester's Clerk's Office.

January 07, 2009: Introduction meeting with the Mayor, Village Attorney, Village Manager, and the IZS consultant (Samuel Staley) to discuss our working relationship with Mr. Staley, and expectations of the Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee.

January 14, 2009: Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee met again and reviewed the issues of importance in the taxi industry and brainstormed for ideas. We came up with a list of concerns, but based on a voting process, six (6) top priorities were established.

January 21, 2009: Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee met to review the list of priorities that we established on Jan. 14, and to discuss next steps.

January 28, 2009: Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee met with the Westchester County Taxi & Limousine Commission for an overview of their functions and available services. We also met with Mr. Staley. Mr. Staley discussed the main topics and key issues of his forthcoming report. Stephen provided him with a copy of his own proposal on a senior voucher system.

February 04, 2009: A joint meeting of the Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee and the Taxi Commission was held to share ideas and discuss priorities.

February 11, 2009: Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee met and was given the IZS Consultant's rough draft report. We also spoke with him on speakerphone.

February 18, 2009: Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee met and had a Questioning Session on the IZS consultant's report in preparation of our phone conversation with him during the next scheduled meeting. Each Committee member was canvassed for his/her agreement or disagreement with the IZS consultant's recommendations. Elisa from the Village Manager's office took notes and would forward them to the consultant for response.

February 19, 2009: Spoke to the IZS consultant to review his draft report, to answer our questions, and give him our feedback and ideas.

February 24, 2009: The Committee attended a special meeting called by the Mayor and Board of Trustees. We gave them an update and responded to their questions. The Committee was asked if we could submit a Final Report to them in 2 weeks. We agreed.

March 03, 2009: Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee met and put together our ideas so that a final report could be drawn up and presented to the Mayor and Board of Trustees.

March 11, 2009 Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee met to review and make any changes to the Committee's Final Report.

## **The Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee**

The Mayor and Board of Trustees formed the Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee on July 24, 2008 as a way to review the taxi industry, and changes that need to be made. The Committee was made up of Taxi industry representatives, a Taxi Commission representative, and representatives of the Village of Port Chester (residents). The Committee was challenged to review all aspects of the industry, and be open-minded as to the needs that should be addressed. The Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee met on a weekly basis with full public access. The public was permitted to give their input and suggestions. We, as a Committee, met and focused on a number of issues. Input was based on our collective knowledge of the Village.

During our second meeting we brainstormed and voted on the top issues. These issues were of importance to the public and Taxi industry; resolving them would bring a positive impact on the taxi industry and residents of the Village of Port Chester.

- Westchester County Taxi and Limousine Commission oversight (Pros and Cons with Taxi Operator Licensing).
- Senior Vouchers (Implementing a procedure to have a positive impact on our Senior Citizens and Taxi Drivers.)
- Disciplinary process for drivers, owners, and dispatchers.
- Criminal background checks.
- Rules and Regulations book for drivers, owners and dispatchers.
- Organization of monthly complaints (done in a consistent organized way).

We also looked at the issue of taxi stands and establishing more to improve the traffic flow.

The Committee was not tasked to review and evaluate Chapt. 295. This would be under the purview of the Village Attorney.

## **Senior Vouchers**

Of major concern to the Committee was half-price senior fares, and a way to implement a voucher program. The current system unduly burdens the taxi drivers with absorbing these discounts, which creates a hostile atmosphere in the industry with senior citizens. The Committee reviewed the consultant's proposal of a token program and raised some concerns over this.

The Committee felt that if a token program was implemented, seniors would only receive the senior discount if they had a token previously purchased. If a senior would have to use tokens, they would have to buy multiple tokens at a time, possibly putting a financial burden on the Senior Citizen. However, it was taken into consideration that many seniors are not destitute, and were capable of purchasing tokens in advance. Perhaps a token or voucher program should apply only to seniors who have little or no income, live in public or senior housing, or are enrolled in the Enhanced STAR program.

Recommendations of the Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee for implementing a voucher program:

- Implement a voucher program where seniors 60 and over can pick up vouchers at Village Hall or the Senior Center, showing at the place of pick-up identification that they qualify.
- Vouchers would have to be signed in the presence of the driver when used with identification shown. (Senior Center has a program in place for issuing ID cards that could be used.)
- Vouchers could be cashed by drivers on a monthly basis thus eliminating chaos for the Village Hall Staff. (See attached voucher proposal from S. Neilsen,)
- Village should contact Westchester County to secure additional grants, and/or search for Corporate Sponsors (e.g., Rotary, Kiwanis, TWIG, etc.), so as not to put the burden on the taxpayers and taxi drivers.
- Start a voucher program on a three month trial period and evaluate it after 30 days, 60 days, and then 90 days in case any changes need to be made.

The Committee also spoke to several drivers who felt that the consultant's report on the amounts of seniors picked up on a daily basis was inflated, and the costs should be much lower than this. Committee felt it was 4 seniors per day on the busier days of the week, particularly on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

## The Taxi Commission

Another area of review for the Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee was the Taxi Commission and the functions of the Commission. The Taxi Commission currently hears and adjudicates complaints, approves licenses of companies and makes recommendations for suspensions and/or revocations of drivers' taxi licenses.

During our time as a Committee, we evaluated the Taxi Commission and held an open meeting with them. The Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee also looked at complaints that came into the Taxi Commission and the recommendations of IZS Consult. Based on our overall evaluation of the Commission, we recommend the following:

### Committee Recommendations of the Taxi Commission:

- Based on the number of complaints received annually 2006 (19 complaints), 2007 (38 complaints), 2008 (13 complaints), we recommend leaving the current process in place. Putting the process in the Clerk's Office would possibly tie-up resources and expenses of an already busy job of the Clerk. (This may also cause a burden on the residents with higher taxes resulting from an increase in the Clerk's workload, overtime, and possibly hiring additional personnel.)
- We recommend that Violations and Disciplinary actions ("fines") be established based on the severity of the charges, and how often they occur. The violations should be fairly and thoroughly investigated. (This Violation/Disciplinary structure should be put into the Village Ordinance.)
- We recommend a "Point System" be established. A point can be assigned to a driver's record based on the type of complaint/violation. If a driver receives a certain amount of points within a year, suspensions and revocations could occur. A Point system can easily be implemented based on the Committee's research of other taxi industry operations.
- We recommend the Taxi Commission receive training in their areas of responsibility as constant training can only make a person more thorough and professional in their job assignments.
- We recommend placing a member of the Taxi Industry on the Taxi Commission; this would insure experience and knowledge from another perspective of the industry where experience is needed.

## Taxi Driver's Licenses

Another area of review for the Strategic Tax Review Advisory Committee was taxi driver's licenses. We as a Committee also had a meeting with the Westchester County Taxi & Limousine Commission (TLC). The Westchester County TLC currently licenses over 2,000 livery drivers and also licenses the taxi drivers for the Town of Bedford. The TLC has in place background check and drug testing procedures. The Committee voted six members to one on utilization of the TLC with one taxi industry driver opposing the change to TLC.

## Village of Port Chester Issuing Taxi Driver Licenses

The Strategic Tax Review Advisory Committee looked at the current process of how licenses are issued. If the process stays within the Village of Port Chester, background checks and drug testing should be implemented. (We noted that drug testing was not shown in the IZS Consult report in section 3.2.1). The Committee also looked at the enforcement on the roads, and gathered feedback from drivers. We recommend that taxi ordinance violations be enforced. For example, missing signs on cars, damaged cars, and/or missing numbers, etc. This could be done by having a police officer during the day monitoring and enforcing these and other taxi ordinances. Behavior would change if enforcement were regular.

## **Taxi Stands**

The Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee looked at the current taxi stands in place and how we could implement stands as a way to increase the flow of traffic. Currently, there is one stand on the north side of the train station by the corner of King Street and Adee Street. This stand has 9 spaces. The drivers report having difficulties with picking up fares in the peak evening hours when private vehicles park in the spaces to pick up commuters. The Committee recommends implementing the following:

**Table of Proposed Taxi Stands**

<b><i>Taxi Stand</i></b>	<b><i>Location</i></b>	<b><i>Notes</i></b>
Train Station North	North Exit – King St./Adee St.	9 Spaces current location of stand in use at this time. (Keep As Is)
Train Station South	Westchester Ave.	3 Spaces with sufficient distance from the corner of Main St. to allow emergency vehicles to turn from Main St. onto Westchester Ave.
Kohl's Department Store	Boston Post Road	Contact Landlord, as this is private property.
Midland Ave	Midland Ave. Place to be researched for location.	Establish 2-3 car stand at place of discretion on Midland Ave.

In summary, the Committee recommends keeping the current taxi stand on the north end (King St./Adee St.) in effect with the nine spaces, and strictly enforcing it as a taxi stand so that private vehicles are not allowed to park there. We disagreed with IZS Consult on proposing two spaces at this location. We also recommend establishing new stands at the other three locations.

Due to already limited parking in the Village, the Committee recommends not leasing spaces to the companies as recommended by IZS Consult.

## **Licensing Dispatch Companies**

The Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee reviewed the recommendations of IZS Consult on changing the current number of four dispatch companies. The Committee felt that the current cap should not be lifted. This cap was put in place several years ago to help ease the traffic burden, and should remain in effect. The Committee voted six members to one to keep the current cap.

The Committee also reviewed IZS Consult's evaluation of Village Taxi and PC Taxi companies, and does not agree with consultant's evaluation that it is really only one company. If 2 dispatch licenses were issued by the Village of Port Chester, it should be documented as 2 different dispatch companies.

## **Taxi Vehicle Licenses**

The Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee looked at the current cap of 75 licenses to vehicles and thoroughly reviewed this procedure. The Committee voted six members to one to keep the current cap. Thus, with the exception of one member, the Committee was not in favor of the IZS Consult recommendation. The Committee felt the cap should not be lifted for the following reasons:

- Population of the Village of Port Chester and the current 75 licenses is sufficient due to the loss of business in the current day. (Drivers reporting 30-35% drop in business over the last couple of years making it financially hard to make a living and support their families).
- The "Gray Market" currently spoken about by IZS Consult would be very difficult to establish with the current financial crisis the economy is in. (Research when the last time a driver sold a license at the market value stated by IZS Consult.)
- 75 Vehicle Licenses for 2.4 square miles of the Village of Port Chester is sufficient for the supply and demand of the business.
- Adding more vehicles could potentially be an environmental concern with extra vehicles idling.

In summary, based on a 6 to 1 vote, the Committee recommends keeping the current policy and cap in effect with 4 dispatch companies and 75 Taxi vehicle licenses.

## **Additional Committee Recommendations**

1. A Book of Rules and Regulations should be put into effect, and signed for by drivers at time of renewal.
  - Book should include three sections: Driver/Owner/Dispatcher.
  - Drivers would be required to keep the Book in their vehicles, and dispatchers would be required to keep it in the dispatch offices.
2. Certificate issued by the Village of Port Chester prior to dispatcher dispatching so that the Village can be sure the dispatcher is trained on the Rules and Regulations, and that they will also follow the rules of the FCC.
3. Taxi Drivers and/or Taxi owners should be rewarded for compliments of good service, and issued a certificate of recognition from the Village. This would keep the driver and/or owner striving to do better. Consider implementing a “mystery rider” program to monitor performance.
4. Drivers should not be allowed to change from one company to another without first filling out a change form from the Clerk’s office, and having that form approved by the Taxi Commission. A fee could be applied. This procedure will help to keep track of the drivers and companies, and help to maintain an organized industry. Driver hardship could be taken into account, and a speedy change process put into place. Also, a confidential process should be in place where drivers can go to the Taxi Commission to file a complaint against a company or dispatcher without fear of reprisal.
5. The Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee recommends the driver point system be put into place so that violations are done in a fair and established way.
6. Vehicle replacement should be extended from the current 10 years of expiration to 12 years, with the discretion of the mechanic at time of inspection. Vehicles are currently made with high standards and vehicles last longer than in the past. Vehicles are also made to have a better appearance, as was not the case in the past. Taxi vehicle owners also put a lot more money into their vehicles making them last longer in the safety aspect. Putting a 10-year limit on vehicles also creates a financial burden for drivers.
7. Out of town rate sheets should be established by the Taxi Driver Association, and filed with the Village of Port Chester. Fares should not be negotiated by the drivers.
8. Taxi Driver dress code that currently appears in Chapt. 295 should be kept as is and enforced.

9. Committee recommends that “Green Vehicles” be looked into for their positive environmental impact.
10. Revise the Taxi Complaint form to allow the Taxi Commission to review and sign-off on it.

## **Conclusion**

The Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee worked long and hard, and generated feedback based on their strong knowledge of the day-to-day operations in the Village of Port Chester. The Committee also listened to the ideas of each member, and considered each member’s viewpoint until a conclusion was made. This Committee received input from members of the taxi industry, and by being on the Committee, all members received a greater understanding of how important the taxi industry is to the residents of the Village of Port Chester. This was based on the Committee talking to residents, elected officials, and other Taxi drivers of this Village.

The Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee would be willing to stay on as a Committee to help implement its recommended changes, help write the Rules and Regulations book, and help establish a Point System.

We, the Committee, wish to thank the Mayor and Board of Trustees for creating the Strategic Taxi Review Advisory Committee, and for appointing us as members. We sincerely hope that our recommendations and suggestions will be beneficial to the public and taxi industry combined.

January 26, 2009

## Proposal For Senior Citizen Voucher Program Organization.

Senior Citizen voucher program proposal of easy organized way to cash vouchers in without causing disruption or added time for village hall to reimburse drivers for the vouchers.

The senior voucher program was researched and was put into the final stages several years ago after the Port Chester Taxi Drivers Association held an open meeting with Martin Rogowsky. Mr. Rogowsky was surprised that our hard working drivers were absorbing the costs of the senior discounts (which is half of the fare at \$2.00 per senior). Mr. Rogowski secured funds to establish the voucher program and set it in a stage to get it established.

The Strategic Taxi committee felt this is an important issue to focus on as it will hopefully maintain improved service between the driver and the senior, which has received some negative feedback among several seniors who don't feel comfortable making a formal complaint.

The Taxi Drivers Association has brought to the committee the possibilities of organizing the cash in process of the vouchers for the 70 members it currently has (Port Chester has approximately 125 drivers). Discussions need to be made as to ways to get the vouchers cashed in for the other drivers. Who will handle?

The Taxi Driver association is made up of an Executive board of 4 members and the board proposes to take one company each and organize the vouchers for presentation to the Village on a monthly basis and will than get the money back to the drivers once available. The association would maintain a log of the driver and the amount of vouchers turned in as to be done in a legal manner and this would be verified and signed by the driver.

The Taxi Driver Association feels by doing this on a monthly basis it would be as orderly as possible for the Drivers and the Village of Port Chester.