

Rockland County Legislature plans Summit Park study

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NEW CITY — Nearly one year after it was first proposed to be sold, the Summit Park Hospital and Nursing Care Center will be the focus of a study to help determine its future.

When it convenes Tuesday, the Rockland County Legislature is likely to approve a contract between the county and a joint team of four companies that would conduct the \$186,000 study.

Legislature Chairwoman Harriet Cornell, D-West Nyack, who was critical of the proposed sale because it was pitched without any discussion of other options, said she supported the study.

"It's very important, to protect the public, to do a study to provide answers that we really should have had a year ago," Cornell said. "If the concept had been raised in mid-2010, we would have had answers to questions that were raised by the Legislature, the public and the employees."

County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef proposed selling Summit Park to a public-benefit corporation when he submitted his proposed 2011 county budget in October.

He wanted to raise \$18 million to close a

budget shortfall for 2011, with additional revenues expected once an appraisal was completed.

County legislators greeted the plan with skepticism from the very start.

It hit a significant snag in June after the chairmen and staff of the state Assembly's Corporations, Health, and Ways and Means committees raised concerns that details were lacking about the Rockland plan.

The county needs the state's home-rule approval before it can establish a public-benefit corporation to run the county-owned hospital and [nursinghome](#).

"They're not going to give us a law unless we give them a plan on what we want to do," Legislator Ilan Schoenberger, D-Wesley Hills, said.

He chairs the Legislature's Budget and Finance Committee, which reviewed a recommendation to hire the joint team, which he is backing in the full Legislature.

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The recommendation was made by an evaluation team that included representatives of the county executive's office, the Legislature and several county departments.

The joint team, which had the lowest bid, according to Schoenberger, includes the Buffalo-area accounting firm of Toski, Schaefer and Co.; the nonprofit Center for Government Research and the [lawfirm](#) of Hiscock and Barclay, both based in Rochester; and the Manhattan-based WASA/Studio A architecture and engineering firm.

Cornell said the review would include more than just the option of selling Summit Park.

"I insisted it include more than a discussion of a public benefit corporation and would talk about options for the county in a variety of ways," Cornell said.

The county needs to know if a PBC would serve the needs of residents or if it would be better to sell Summit Park to a private vendor, close it all together, or operate it internally but with recommendations for operational efficiencies, Cornell said.

Vanderhoef said he supported the study because it would provide information that would be useful.

"We'll get these experts in and take a look at this and the various options," Vanderhoef said.

Among other services, Summit Park acts as

a "safety net" facility, providing care to people who exhaust their Medicare and private insurance benefits, and to those without any [financial](#) resources from the start.

Also Tuesday, the Legislature will likely vote to tap the county's contingency fund to pay for the Summit Park study.

It will also vote to add to the fund — moving about 40 vacant posts into a contingency to essentially set aside \$4.26 million.

That would be added to the \$1.9 million the Legislature, with Vanderhoef's support, previously set aside. The money could be used to offset [taxes](#) or reduce the number of programs that could be cut in 2012.

Because the Rockland Legislature, as requested by Vanderhoef, voted to ask for state home-rule approval, the county was able to borrow the \$18 million it needed to close the 2011 budget gap — money that has to be repaid next year.

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Vanderhoef is due to submit his proposed 2012 county budget to the Legislature next month. It is expected to include significant program cuts and layoffs, tax increases, and proposals for new fees as the county grapples with a \$52 million budget deficit and anemic revenues.

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