



County Officials Declare Opioids a ‘Public Nuisance’

BY [LARRY GOODWIN](#) | [NEWS](#) | THURSDAY, 18 JANUARY 2018 22:43

BALLSTON SPA – The Saratoga County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously on Tuesday for a local law that declares opioid addiction a “public nuisance,” as the resolution states, and establishes a “cost recovery procedure for the county’s expenditures incurred in providing services related to the opioid epidemic.”

County officials argue in the measure that pharmaceutical companies and physicians, not only drug dealers in the streets, should be held responsible for causing the problem of opioid addiction.

This week’s resolution follows a separate action taken last October, when the supervisors agreed in a special meeting to join a lawsuit filed by the New York City law firm Napoli Shkolnik related to the widespread distribution of opioids in multiple states.

“The opioid epidemic is sweeping the country,” the Jan. 16 resolution states. “Vast amounts of prescription opioids were sold, distributed and prescribed in the county over the past several years, a practice that continues today. The selling, distributing and prescribing of large amounts of opioids in our community has created a public health and safety hazard affecting the residents of the county.

“This crisis has devastated families, wreaked havoc on our economy, and produced a generation of narcotic dependence,” the resolution continues. “As a result of the opioid epidemic, costs related to healthcare, family and social services, criminal justice, addiction and rehabilitation, and many other areas have significantly increased.”

The resolution also sets a public hearing, which will be held at 4:28 p.m. on Tuesday, February 14 in the county complex at 40 McMaster Street in Ballston Spa.

According to Dr. Joshua Zamer, who leads a team of addiction specialists at Saratoga Community Health Center at 24 Hamilton Street in Saratoga Springs, 25 percent of all people hospitalized nationwide return home with opioid prescriptions.

After three months, Zamer said, fully half of those people are still taking opioids.

“The new push is for a three- to seven-day prescription,” he told Saratoga TODAY during a September 2017 interview.

The resolution passed this week stipulates that Saratoga County “may initiate and recover costs through administrative, civil, and/or criminal action against the responsible party,” aside from the collection of “attorney’s fees, interest, and any other payment or type of damages the court deems proper.”

In the “public nuisance” section, the county estimates that “four in five heroin users” become addicted first to prescription opioids.

The resolution further states “that manufacturers of prescription opioids and those in the chain of distribution have wrongfully abused the privilege of selling and/or providing medication to our residents and must be held accountable.”

In recent months, Malta Supervisor Vincent DeLucia has indicated repeatedly that the Saratoga County Sheriff’s Office happens to be so preoccupied by opioid-related crimes, such as larcenies, that it has far less time to enforce local traffic laws.

At a Public Safety Committee meeting in September attended by DeLucia, Saratoga County Sheriff Michael Zurlo confirmed that larcenies are occurring countywide. But he stopped short of tying them directly to opioids.

Many burglaries and break-ins across the county are going unreported, officials added.

After the vote on Tuesday, Clifton Park Supervisor Philip Barrett explained that local lawmakers intend to “make it known that, if you deal drugs in Saratoga County, you will be caught.

“The increase in drug abuse that’s occurring in all forms,” Barrett said, justifies taking such legislative action.

Barrett was the sole vote in opposition to a separate resolution that transferred funds related to the pending construction of a \$32 million public safety complex on County Farm Road in Ballston Spa, near the existing jail complex. That project is expected to start this spring.

Barrett, reiterating concerns he has raised previously in county meetings, said he prefers to see funds appropriated for an expansion of the jail complex itself—at much less cost.

“I’m not against a public safety building, per se,” Barrett offered. “It would behoove the county to fulfill a known need.”

Stillwater Supervisor Edward Kinowski, who is serving in his second year as board chairman, responded that Zurlo and others are reviewing “any improvements to the jail” with close consideration of New York State requirements.

“The jail is being addressed,” Kinowski said. “We are pursuing all avenues.”

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