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# The Journal News Sunday

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Valhalla resident wins Eastern States Classic title. **Page 1D**



## THE HIDDEN WORLD OF PET EUTHANASIA

### Fewer than 400 local euthanized animals are accounted for yearly

JORGE FITZ-GIBBON JFITZGIB@LOHUD.COM

More than 1,600 animals are euthanized by Lower Hudson Valley shelters every year.

Fewer than 400 of them are accounted for. An analysis by The Journal News found that there is no public record of most of the animals from local shelters that are euthanized because many farm out the procedure to private veterinarians and others simply fail to file required state reports.

"We did drop the ball," said Mount Vernon Public Safety Commissioner Robert Kelly, whose department oversees the city's animal shelter. "We didn't send these last reports, but everything is filed now. It's just unfortunate that there was some transition down there with the personnel."

The state Department of Health, which is required by law to maintain records of all animals put

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TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Top, staff member Angelica Ventura checks on the food levels for cats in the lobby at Hi Tor Animal Care Center in Pomona. Above, a cat that is available for adoption is shown at the center. Fewer than 400 of the 1,600 animals annually euthanized in Lower Hudson Valley shelters are accounted for.

Many more cats are euthanized than dogs, according to available shelter records

1,600

Local shelter animals are euthanized annually

400

The number of animals accounted for

3 of 7

Animal shelters in the Lower Hudson Valley provided forms to the state



Drew Claxton, left, and Jeannette Phillips

## Grant spurs AHC probe

'Conflict of interest' with non-profit funds to official

LEE HIGGINS  
LHIGGINS2@LOHUD.COM

PEEKSKILL - Deputy Mayor Drew Claxton and a well-known leader of a non-profit are under investigation by a state agency after the non-profit gave Claxton and her son a \$15,000 grant to fix up a home they co-own on Fremont Street.

The Affordable Housing Corporation (AHC) launched the probe after The Journal News questioned why an elected official received the grant, awarded in 2007, despite being disqualified from the program, and why the state was missing required records from the non-profit documenting the completed home improvement work.

Claxton and The Preservation Company, Inc., based in Peekskill, said they will pay back the money and possibly thousands of dollars from other grants designated for that home. AHC, an agency of New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), has requested documentation from the non-profit, spokeswoman Charni Sochet confirmed.

The \$15,000 was part of a \$75,000 grant awarded by AHC to the non-prof-

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WEATHER » 2A

Today: Cloudy  
HIGH: 36 LOW: 21  
Tomorrow: Windy  
HIGH: 28 LOW: 15



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# Grant

Continued from Page 1A

it. The Journal News' investigation prompted AHC to admit it had no required reports documenting the repairs made to Claxton's home and the five others made possible by the \$75,000 grant award.

"It seems that there was a conflict of interest that did occur," said Jeanette Phillips, executive director of The Preservation Company, Inc.

"And it truly was an oversight on our agency's part in terms of what took place," she said.

When asked whether she read the contract she signed in 2006, Phillips said, "I'm not going to say I went over every line."

Claxton, first elected to council in 1999, said she didn't realize she was ineligible until The Journal News asked her about it. She defended her application for the grant by blaming the non-profit for awarding it. Her son, Frederick Claxton, and his family live at the home, but she doesn't, she said.

"I remember Jeanette Phillips saying, 'I understand who you are and we need to make sure that we cross all our T's and dot all our I's,'" said Claxton, a Democrat, who owns the BeanRunner Cafe on South Division Street.

"If I wasn't eligible, they should have told me I wasn't eligible," she said. "I would have moved on."

When asked how Claxton should handle the situation, Phillips said, "The opinion is the money has to be paid back."

Claxton also obtained a federally funded \$25,000 Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) grant the same year through the non-profit, which was also designated to repair the home.

According to Sochet, if the non-profit "cannot provide records indicating that they followed state and federal rules



RICKY FLORES/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Drew Claxton obtained a federally funded \$25,000 Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) grant and a \$15,000 grant through The Preservation Company, Inc., both of which were designated to repair her home on Fremont Street in Peekskill.

**"I think people need to take ownership of what they did. This is misusing your position for your own financial stability."**

**CATHY PISANI,**  
ON HAVING DREW CLAXTON AND  
JEANNETTE PHILLIPS MAKE THEIR  
RECORDS PUBLIC

then they will be required to repay the full amount."

Claxton said those grants did not influence any votes she made related to the non-profit or Hudson River Health-Care (HRHCare), where Phillips is one of the founders. HRHCare's flagship facility was named for Phillips over the summer.

Six months after receiving the grants, Claxton introduced a resolution and voted to approve River Pointe at Drum Hill,

a 43-unit senior affordable housing development in Peekskill, where The Preservation Company, Inc. was a development partner. The vote was 5-1.

"That had absolutely nothing to do with me getting grant money from them," said Claxton, adding that if she hadn't introduced the resolution another councilperson would have.

"I guess if someone had mentioned it I could have recused myself," she said. "I didn't really consider it."

**No records to be found**

Neither Claxton nor Phillips would provide the records showing work done with the grants. Phillips declined to meet to discuss the overall \$75,000 grant and how she selected recipients. Claxton declined to allow a reporter inside the home to review the work.

In 2013, Phillips certified with AHC that all work was done in accordance with the grant agree-

ment. The agreement, obtained by The Journal News in July through the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) says, "No individual who is an elected official at the State or local level... or an immediate family member of any such person will be eligible to participate or benefit financially from the Grantee's Project or program." An elected official needs a waiver to qualify for the program, the agreement says.

After AHC stalled in responding to a second FOIL request for waivers and required reports that would show the construction schedule, progress of the work, problems encountered and costs, it admitted in November it had no such records.

AHC, which started in 1985, has not been immune to problems. Between April 2005 and May 2008, it awarded \$132 million in grants across the state for roughly 7,000 housing units, according to the state Comptroller's office, which audited projects accounting for half those funds.

The state comptroller's office found that 21 percent of those grant awards were questionable. Some applicants exceeded income levels or were missing required documentation.

Phillips initially said her agency's records were in storage, then said she needs to check with AHC to see what she is permitted to share.

"The records will show that all the checks that were made out for the repairs were given to the contractors," Phillips said. "The money doesn't go to the individual."

Claxton said a total of roughly \$45,000 in grants was all used to renovate the kitchen, replace the roof and do work on the boiler. She has pledged to pay back all grant funds for the home, if necessary.

"They had no kitchen cabinets or kitchen anything because this was a real handyman special," she said.

Homeowners, she said, are required to make a \$500 contribution to the project, she said, but she did not receive any money

directly. She said she doesn't recall the name of the contractor who did the work.

"I guess I could go home and look through 15 drawers of documents and see if there is something in there that says who it is," she said.

Asked about any plans that were done in advance of the work, she said, "We had plans for the kitchen done through Home Depot or something."

A review of the city's building file for the property in September through a Freedom of Information Law request showed Claxton obtained a building permit in 2008 to repair the home for an estimated \$15,000.

The architectural plans called for adding a laundry room and structural supports to a porch. The work was to be done at the rear of the house. Cortlandt-based architect John Lentini said his records show he received a \$250 check from Claxton for the plans, which was half the retainer.

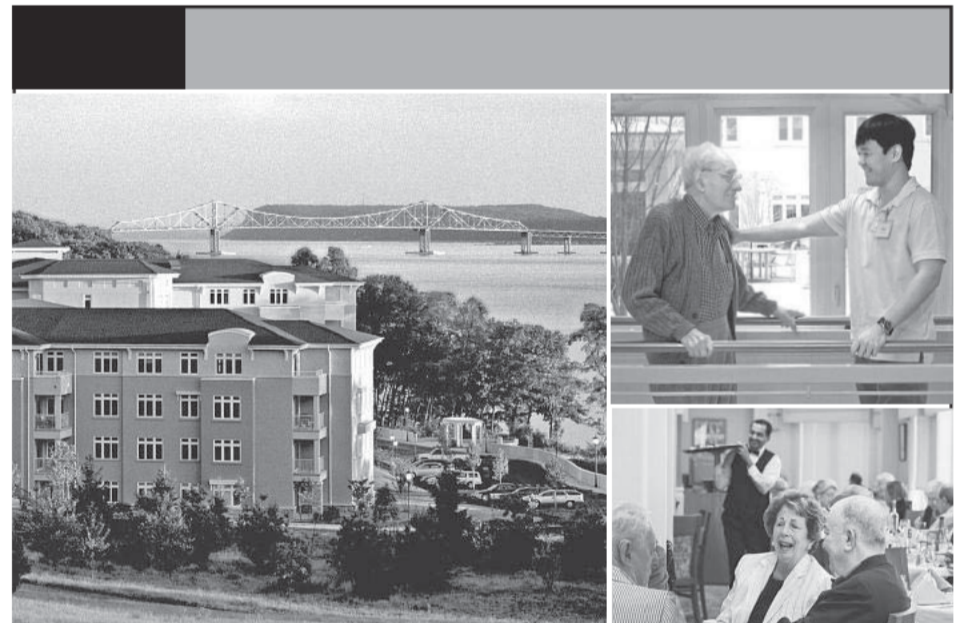
"It was a little rickety porch," he said. "It was falling down. My plan called for extra footing on it... I believe she was trying to get some sort of grant money."

Asked about those plans, Claxton said that work was not done. It was for a separate project and had nothing to do with the grants from the non-profit, she said.

"That hasn't been done because my son doesn't have the money," Claxton said.

Cathy Pisani, a Republican, a former councilwoman for 16 years, is calling on Claxton and Phillips to make their records public. Pisani voted against the River Pointe at Drum Hill development because she believed all the details weren't fully worked out, she said. Claxton should consider resigning, Pisani said.

"I think people need to take ownership of what they did," she said. "This is misusing your position for your own financial stability."



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## Getting ripped, or ripped off?

Gymgoers used to contract risks

ALEX TAYLOR  
ARTAYLOR@LOHUD.COM

Getting ripped, or ripped off?

Less than 48 hours after New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman announced a settlement with nearly 100 health and fitness clubs for allegedly violating state law, gym rats across the Lower Hudson Valley said they weren't working up a sweat over the revelations.

From deceptive marketing to high pressure sales tactics, gymgoers already know how to avoid the perils of the gym and keep their wallet in shape.

"The small print is always a problem," said Eddie Serrano, 28, of Valhalla, as he bounded up the steps to Balance Health and Sports in Elmsford with a bottle of blue Powerade in his hand.

The attorney gener-

al's investigation found gyms — including chains like Planet Fitness, Gold's Gym, Curves and L.A. Fitness — failed to disclose end-of-contract provisions and basic consumer rights, such as limiting health club contracts to no more than \$3,600 a year or a term of no longer than 36 months.

Serrano, a former bodybuilder who can bench press 375 pounds, said he's had no problems at Balance Health and Sports, one of the half-dozen or so fitness clubs in the Lower Hudson Valley to settle with the attorney general.

Still, he knows that canceling a membership at many a New York gym can be as strenuous as the most explosive strength training routine.

"They're always changing their deals and trying to lock you in," he said.

Outside the Vision Sports Club on Jefferson Avenue in Pearl River, a few fitness buffs wearing sweatshirts, hoodies and headphones, gave a reporter from The Journal News a wide berth.

One of the few to stop was Nick Favia, 25, of Suffern who said he'd been coming to Vision for years for weight-training. Favia gave the gym a kettle-bell ringing endorsement, but said some other gyms he visited were flabby when it came to facts about new membership.

"I think the worst thing a gym can do is hound you for sales," Favia added. "You go once for a trial and they flood your inbox. It's a pain."

Twitter: @alextailored

**ENGELBERT HUMPERDINGK**



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## SUNY tuition hike faces opposition

JOSEPH SPECTOR  
ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY — SUNY is vowing to press forward with potentially another five years of tuition increases, and it picked up a key endorsement: Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

Cuomo in his state budget proposal Wednesday endorsed the SUNY 2020 plan, which would allow SUNY to charge up to \$300 a year in higher tuition over next five years. The program was first installed in 2011, and SUNY tuition has increased 30 percent over that span.

Cuomo said in addition to investing \$6.9 billion in SUNY and the city university system, "I also propose extending our highly successful SUNY and CUNY 2020 rational tuition and challenge grant program."

State lawmakers are vowing to fight another series of \$300-a-year tuition increases for the 64-campus, saying they are concerned about student debt.

Tuition was \$6,470 a year for incoming freshmen this past fall.

SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher and college presidents are lobbying for the extension of the SUNY 2020 plan, which expires this year.

"As a result of the original NYSUNY 2020 funding, we have hired faculty, expanded academic programs and increased our enrollment," Binghamton University President Harvey Stenger said.

Twitter: @GannettAlbany