

My view: A way out of divisive partisanship

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We select our representatives through a democratic election process. Once elected, they have the responsibility to work together for the common good. This is the framework of our republic. Far too often, despite the positive intentions of those elected, we see the fostering of divisive and partisan agendas, resulting in gridlock which is always contrary to the common good. Must it be that way? No. It is possible to work together through trying to understand each other's needs and interests. It's not easy. But, there is a solution – The Collaborative Governing Program.

The Collaborative Governing Program is a renewal of public-centered, interest-based discourse. It is a paradigm shift that empowers governing officials to choose to work out agreements on critical public policy and fiscal issues without “giving in” or “giving up” their ideologies. It is a process for building skills that allow for the hard work of finding pathways to beneficial agreements across party lines.

In 2014 Orange County Legislators agreed to join The New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC), The New York State Dispute Resolution Association (NYSdra) and the Dispute Resolution Center serving Orange, Ulster, Putnam and Sullivan Counties in an initiative to enlist the Collaborative Governing Program to bring these skills to Orange County. It meant becoming the pilot project, which if successful, would be expanded throughout New York state. During these first three years they have taken on the struggle of learning and employing Collaborative Governing principles and processes in the way they do business, meet challenges and resolve critical issues.

What should we expect from this innovative commitment? When they use these skills and are supported by the Collaborative Governing coaching team?

We should expect less conflict rather than escalated conflict, resulting in;

1. Well thought-out, timely and cost-efficient policy
2. Accountability to the public trust and
3. Public agenda productivity.

These are just a few indicators of a shift toward the Collaborative Governing mindset. While in politics a “win-win” may not always be the intent, leaders benefit from having tools to assist them to “get to yes” when possible. When such is possible Orange County leaders need to possess the skills to negotiate pathways to agreements that benefit their combined best

interests, those of their constituents and those of the residents of Orange County as a whole.

Dr. Bernadette Tracy is co-coordinator of Collaborative Governing Program.

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