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NEWS RELEASE:

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**County DSS proposes use of the St. Charles Hotel for
emergency housing and satellite office**

HUDSON – Columbia County will investigate a two-prong commitment to solving a growing emergency housing need and concerns about future access to public social service programs in the City of Hudson in a unique arrangement that will additionally provide a significant savings to taxpayers.

Subject to further committee review and ultimately approval by the Board of Supervisors, a lease agreement with owners of the St. Charles Hotel in Hudson, Columbia County would utilize rooms at the 16 Park Place facility for the next seven years, and also acquire use of more than 3,000 square feet of ground-floor office space, which will serve as an expanded satellite office for the Department of Social Services (DSS).

The possible rental agreement between Columbia County and East Coast Realty, LP, announced today, will reduce the county's temporary housing costs by more than \$400,000 a year, according to Social Services Commissioner Paul Mossman.

DSS currently rents more than 60 hotel and motel rooms nightly, at a current annual expense of \$1.5 million, throughout Columbia and Greene counties to provide emergency and immediate temporary housing for some 90 individuals.

The cost of providing mandatory services for temporary housing, food and transportation has more than doubled between 2006 and 2008, with expenditures projected even higher for the current year.

“One of the major advantages of this proposed agreement is that by centralizing program recipients DSS will be able to provide greater monitoring and assistance options, and at a lower cost,” Commissioner Mossman said. “Greater oversight and security will be assured – particularly for younger recipients – with establishment of the satellite office on-site.”

The county's Department of Social Services is slated to relocate to the planned county office complex at the former Ockawamick School in two years, with the Board of Supervisors originally considered proposing a satellite office to be located at the county's 325 Columbia Street building.

The first-floor space at the St. Charles Hotel – used in the past as a restaurant and meeting rooms – would be a better location than the proposed site, observed Board of Supervisors' Chairman Art Baer. It offers ample space for a broad variety of services for City of Hudson residents and would function as an enhanced satellite office.

By being the sole renter of rooms at the St. Charles, the county will be charged a less expensive rate, while also recognizing considerable savings in transporting clients, the commissioner commented

“Housing a family with children at outlying motels on a per-night basis is not the most cost-effective method,” he said. “When families are placed in an emergency and then need follow-up DSS services, they have to pack their belongings, check out of the motel and take a cab or DSS transport to the social service office,” Commissioner Mossman. “That is an additional expense to the county and its taxpayers.”

There also is a safety concern for children, Board Chairman Baer said. “We don’t know who may be staying in the room next to a child or young mother we’ve placed in a motel. It could be a sex offender or pedophile. With the St. Charles serving only clients we place there, we will be offering greater security. DSS staff will be on hand and the hotel staff will be following department-developed protocol for handling safety and security issues.”

Finding rooms to accommodate persons’ housing needs on short notice is a very challenging task. Commissioner Mossman stated that he was “looking forward to implementing this program, which will provide pre-arranged rooms at the St. Charles and offer continuity of service for persons in be need.”

By leasing the space from a private owner, the St. Charles Hotel will remain on the tax roll to the benefit of the city and its taxpayers, Chairman Baer noted.

DSS is scheduled to remain in its current location at 25 Railroad Avenue, Hudson, until 2011. The satellite office would eliminate the need for most Hudson residents to travel to main office when the department is finally transition to Claverack.

The scope of services offered at the St. Charles satellite office should reduce the need and cost of providing transportation for Hudson recipients to the Ockawamick site.

In the three years from 2006 through 2008, the Columbia County Department of Social Services spent more than \$2.6 million to provide emergency housing. An additional \$53,000 was expended for transportation and more than \$37,000 for food.

Columbia County learned of the availability of the first floor space during discussions with George Richardson of East Coast Realty, LP, regarding renting existing hotel rooms. “We believe this opportunity at the St. Charles is a win-win for the County and the City, as well as the local recipients of services provided by our Department of Social Services,” said Chairman Baer.

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