

County allots \$48K for strategic-plan consultant

By Joe Mahoney Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, June 4, 2015 8:56 pm

Otsego County lawmakers are moving forward with an effort to frame a "strategic prioritization plan" that could chart the region's development future and, if successful, help to reel in millions of dollars in state grants.

The Board of Representatives has approved spending \$48,500 to hire a consulting firm, the Laberge Group, that would complete the plan in just five weeks.

The vote this week came after the county's administration committee heard a presentation by Benjamin Syden, a Laberge vice president and co-director for legislative affairs for the upstate chapter of the American Planning Association.

Syden, according to the Laberge web site, has overseen the development of more than 100 community planning and infrastructure projects and secured more than \$135 million in funding for clients.

Rep. Craig Gelbsman, R-Oneonta, said having a strategic plan in place will make the county more competitive as it seeks to attract state economic development grants channeled through the Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council.

"It will give Otsego County a vision for the future, one that we can mold as time goes on," Gelbsman told The Daily Star.

Only three representatives voted against the Laberge contract — James Powers, R-Butternuts, Keith McCarty, R-Springfield, and Betty Anne Schwerd, C-Burlington. Schwerd said she saw the contract as wasteful spending, contending similar studies have been done repeatedly over the years and are now stacked on back office shelves.

Gelbsman said the strategic plan will help to serve as a guidepost to county department heads and "make us more proactive, rather than reactive."

He said the consultant group is planning to conduct four meetings throughout the county to get input



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from local officials and residents, after which that input will be distilled into a report.