



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TCAT Funding Among Items Discussed by Expanded Budget Committee

Legislators acting as an Expanded Budget Committee heard the final scheduled presentations, as they completed their first phase of reviewing County Administrator Joe Mareane's recommended 2016 County budget.

Legislators heard presentations from the Assigned Counsel Office, Cooperative Extension, the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council, Facilities, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT), the Department of Emergency Response, the History Center, and County Administration, and regarding the recommended 2016-2220 Capital Program.

TCAT officials, in their budget presentation, pressed the system's need for a more than \$100,000 over-target request in operating support by the County, a budget request that is also being made to the bus system's two other sponsoring partners, the City of Ithaca and Cornell University, and must be agreed to by all three to take effect. TCAT Board Budget Chair Bill Gray noted that the partners' \$829,000 operating budget contribution has remained flat for the past seven years, with under-funded capital needs for buses and infrastructure, increased expenses from an aging fleet, and uncertain prospects for funding from State and Federal sources, such as the Highway Trust Fund.

Delivery of five buses, currently being built, is scheduled during 2016, with the hope to order 10 more. Whether that will happen, Acting Director Alice Eckleston cautioned, will depend on approval of grant funding, and would not have immediate impact, with many more buses beyond that needing to be replaced. Asked about the impact of the Mortgage Recording Tax, which provides roughly \$700,000 in support and had been secured through the County's initiative, Gray said that funding is appreciated but expected to be used largely for capital, and not the operating budget. TCAT president Frank Proto also noted that an additional \$500,000 in ridership fees being paid by Cornell should not be considered a windfall, since it represents past underpayments. Some Legislators inquired about TCAT's fund balance (of about 20%); a desired level said to be needed to address cash flow in its highly seasonal service. Officials cautioned the system could be forced to consider fare increases or service cuts should the necessary operating support not come through. Mr. Gray said, "We will provide the levels of service the community, the federal government, and the partners are willing to pay for."

Other highlights:

Director of Emergency Response Lee Shurtleff said personnel factors represent a major driver in his budget, with as much as a quarter of the staff expected to retire within the next five years, as well as challenges over the past five years from staff out on disability. The budget recommends over-target spending of more than \$75,000 for one additional full-time emergency services dispatcher to cover disability and reduce backfill overtime.

Recommended as part of the Facilities budget is \$33,000 in one-time funding for replacement of an eight-year-old vehicle used for maintenance and snow removal.

County Administrator Joe Mareane reported the recommended County Administration budget , in part, includes over-target spending related to the transition from paper-based to electronic systems, including service contracts for the new contracts and bids system (shared with Finance) and electronic policy manual system.

The County Administrator also provided an overview of the recommended Capital Program for the next five years, to be adopted along with the 2016 budget. In accordance with policy adopted as part of the updated Capital Improvement Plan three years ago, a 0.5% increase in the tax levy is devoted to support for capital investment. New projects include the access control system and video camera replacement at the Public Safety Building, reconstruction of the South George Road Bridge, the final phase of Ellis Hollow Road reconstruction (contingent upon Cornell University support), and an adjusted schedule for the facilities restoration program, addressing deferred basic repairs and improvements to County buildings and grounds.

The Expanded Budget Committee has recessed until Tuesday, October 13, the first of as many as three voting meetings, to consider recommended amendments to the County Administrator's budget. All Expanded Budget sessions begin at 5:30 p.m., and are held at Legislature Chambers in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street (Second Floor).

On Wednesday, October 7, the Legislature will hold its Community Budget Forum, the annual public information meeting on the 2016 Recommended Budget. The Forum will take place, from 7:00-8:30 p.m., at Legislature Chambers.

The 2016 Recommended Budget, and other information related to the budget process, is posted on the budget page of the County web site at www.tompkinscountyny.gov/ctyadmin/2016budget.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 592-3206; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

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