



Inclusion Through Diversity

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October 15, 2015
THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Funding Increase for TCAT Among Latest Recommended County Budget Amendments

Legislators acting as an Expanded Budget Committee supported ten more changes, as they completed their second night of acting on potential amendments to County Administrator Joe Mareane's Recommended 2016 County Budget

Legislators recommended the following changes to the budget. Tonight's decisions may be reconsidered at later expanded committee meetings and will require approval by the full Legislature to become final.

TOMPKINS CONSOLIDATED AREA TRANSIT:

Legislators recommended \$50,000 in additional operating support for TCAT, contingent upon matching support by the transit system's two other funding partners, the City of Ithaca and Cornell University. The amended amount, recommended by a 9-2 vote, is about half the amount TCAT has requested (\$103,568), which it maintains is badly needed to balance its budget in challenging times. Urging approval of the initial request, Legislator Peter Stein, one of the County's representatives on the TCAT Board, made an impassioned statement to his colleagues about why the request is important to the system and the community. Countering arguments he said he has heard, Mr. Stein maintained that TCAT, with the appropriate level of support, is truly a sustainable organization; that it has coped with the same level of funding for the past seven years; that the size of its fund balance is essential to being able to pay its debts; and that Cornell's recent ridership funding increase compensates for past underpayments and is not a windfall to solve TCAT's problems. He said, "TCAT is really a unique service in this small county that we live in...If we are to make this a sustainable bus service, we must get a payment of this amount from the partners." He maintained that the support decision is more than just a number—that support at the full level represents a declaration regarding TCAT's importance to the county.

Discussion favored an increase in support, but some questioned the level that would be achievable to gain support from the other partners. Legislature Chair Mike Lane first moved to increase the contribution by \$25,000, a proposal that failed by a 3-8 margin. Advancing the successful motion to increase the amount to \$50,000, Legislator Martha Robertson stressed that this amount increases by \$50,000 the County's considerable contribution of nearly \$940,000 to TCAT, already included in the budget.

CITY OF ITHACA WATERFRONT PARKS:

After considerable discussion, potential County funding support for City Waterfront Parks was approved, though not in the form that had been requested. The City had asked for \$30,000 in general, ongoing support for Stewart and Cass Parks (which, it maintains, receive heavy use by those who live outside of the City) as a new beginning to a cost sharing solution for the City's local waterfront parks and recreation facilities—a request not included in the Administrator's budget. What began as a recommendation to consider one-time funding—half for operation and maintenance and half to support

a master planning study concerning City parks—became an amended proposal, approved by a vote of 6-5, to set aside \$30,000 in the Contingent Fund to study or support a study limited to Stewart and Cass Parks, contingent upon County participation in development of the Request for Proposals for such a study.

Many Legislators appeared unwilling to support operations funding at this point and indicated that more questions need to be answered before County funds ultimately would be committed. Legislator Martha Robertson, who advanced the amendment, noted that a parks study in 2002 had recommended against County support, and, while there may be a need to take a fresh look, a study is needed to do that in a careful, reasoned manner—looking beyond simply facility changes people would like to see, to including many other factors, including governance issues were the County to be involved.

HIGHWAY DIVISION:

In a new addition to the budget, Legislators, by a 9-1 vote, added \$150,000 to the budget for Road and Bridge Maintenance. Budget Chair Jim Dennis had initially proposed \$250,000, and Legislator Glenn Morey successfully advanced the amendment to \$150,000, calling road and bridge maintenance “a very important portion of the budget.” Legislature Chair Mike Lane noted that the County always must be vigilant about roads and bridges, especially after this year’s storms and two tough winters, and uncertain prospects for ongoing State funding support.

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT DIVISION:

By an 8-3 vote, the Committee approved an amendment to reducing the 2016 increase in the County Solid Waste Fee by \$1, to \$3 per unit, setting the fee at \$55. Legislature Chair Mike Lane, who praised the Division for its excellent work, noted that last year it had been promised that the fee would be decreased when bonds were paid off, and he didn’t want last year’s \$4.00 reduction to be completely reversed in one year, responding to decreased commodities revenue. Administrator Mareane reported that the Division expects that, with some belt-tightening, it will be able to absorb the smaller increase, without impact on program.

OFFICE FOR THE AGING:

By an 11-0 vote, \$22,080 was added to the Office for the Aging budget to allow FoodNet to maintain the Living Wage standard for employees. Funding for this purpose had been approved in 2014, but additional funds were needed to enable the agency to keep pace with the increase in the local Living Wage standard in 2015.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING:

Legislators approved \$17,753 in target matching funds for Gadabout’s “New Freedom” program and to restore other funds. The vote was 11-0.

HUMAN SERVICES COALITION – AGENCIES:

By a vote of 11-0, the Committee restored \$4,000 in one-time funds for a pilot locally grown foods program for the Food Distribution Network.

Also approved, by a vote of 11-0, was a new item approving \$25,000 in contingent funding to the Coalition, to cover unexpected needs of Coalition agencies. \$15,000 had been proposed, but was amended to boost the amount to the \$25,000 level.

YOUTH SERVICES, RECREATION PARTNERSHIP:

Without dissent, in an 11-1 vote, \$821 in target funding was approved to support a 3.3% increase for the intermunicipal Recreation Partnership.

COUNTY ATTORNEY:

In a new addition to the budget, \$500 in one-time funding was approved, by an 11-0 vote, to support the update in County Charter documents. The County is scheduled to complete its once-a-decade update of the Charter by early 2016, following nearly two years of committee review.

Other actions:

- Proposed restoration of an additional 1% increase in staff salaries for the Human Services Coalition (beyond the 2% already included in the Administrator's Budget) failed by a tie vote of 5-5, with Legislator Will Burbank abstaining, since his wife works part-time for the Coalition.
- A proposal to provide \$25,000 in target funding, instead of one-time, to support a part-time bookkeeper/office position at The History Center failed by a 3-8 margin.
- Legislators, by a vote of 2-9, failed to approve proposed elimination of \$2,900 in over-target funding for travel and training for Office of Human Rights to enable staff attendance at state and national civil rights conferences. (\$8,700 in one-time funding had been requested.) Legislator Dooley Kiefer had proposed zeroing-out the over-target funding, since \$8,700 in unspent current-year funds for this purpose typically would be available to apply to 2016. Departments, however, were not able to seek approval for that this year, since timing of rollover-fund processing was later than normal.

Potential Tax Impact of Recommendations to Date

In actions to date, the committee decreased target spending in the County Administrator's recommended budget by \$33,358 and increased the use of reserves by \$43,650. If the committee recommendations were approved, the county's total 2016 tax levy would increase by 1.23% (down 0.07% from the 1.3% increase in the Administrator's budget), and the average county tax rate would stand at \$6.74 per thousand dollars assessed property value, an increase of \$14.82 for the owner of the median-priced \$170,000 home.

The Expanded Budget Committee will meet Monday, October 19, for what is expected to be its final session to consider recommended amendments to the Administrator's budget. 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).

The 2016 Recommended Budget, along with other budget-related information, 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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