



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Legislators Recommend 2016 Amended Budget**

Legislators acting as an Expanded Budget Committee tonight recommended that the Legislature amend County Administrator Joe Mareane's 2016 Tentative Budget and the Capital Program for the next five years. The vote was 10-2, with Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no.

The amended budget, to be presented to the Legislature tomorrow, would increase the County tax levy by 1.12%. The recommended tax rate of \$6.73 per thousand is down by 1.77% from 2015 and is about a penny less than the Administrator's budget, representing an increase of \$13.82 in the tax bill for the median-valued \$170,000 home.

In actions during the three voting sessions, the committee decreased the County Administrator's budget by \$82,458 in target spending and increased the use of reserves by \$43,650. The recommended levy increase of 1.12% compares to a 1.3% increase contained in the County Administrator's budget.

Before reaching their recommendation, Legislators considered several actions, many reconsiderations from previous meetings, but ending up approving only two more changes to the budget—recommendations that may be reconsidered as the process continues and will need approval of the Legislature, as part of the budget, to become final.

#### **HIGHWAY:**

The committee, by a 7-5 margin reduced by \$50,000 the additional funding recommended last meeting for Road and Bridge Maintenance, reducing that increase to \$100,000 (down from \$150,000). Budget Chair Jim Dennis, who had first proposed \$250,000 for that purpose, said he stands by the importance of supporting funding to preserve and improve the condition of roads and bridges, but made it clear he now proposed reducing the amount of increase with an eye toward the levy increase included in the budget. He indicated he wants to keep the increase below the level of the Administrator's budget, especially in light of the more than half-million-dollar savings recognized from the decline in the pension rate.

Legislator Martha Robertson agreed that limiting the increase to \$100,000 is appropriate, saying that spending up to the level of the Administrator's budget is essentially spending as much or more than the mandate relief the County got. Legislator Dan Klein, however, countered that coming in at that level amounts to sticking to the goal the Legislature had set.

#### **COUNTY ADMINISTRATION:**

Legislators, by a 10-1 vote, approved \$900 in over-target funds to fund the County's community outreach initiative. Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne said the County's program over the past year in promoting county government "goes a long way in helping (the County's) recruitment efforts."

Other actions:

- By a 4-8 vote, Legislators failed to approve adding \$60,000 in Contingent funding, on either a target or one-time basis, to provide support for agencies to meet the Living Wage standard for employees. Legislator McBean-Clairborne said her intent in advancing the amendment was to return the fund to close to the \$100,000 approved two years ago. (About \$38,000 currently remains.)
- Legislators stuck by their earlier support for adding \$50,000 in operating support for Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, contingent upon the match by the other partners, the City of Ithaca and Cornell. A proposal to increase that amount by \$25,000, to \$75,000, failed by a 5-7 margin.
- A proposal to remove \$94,469 to fund a Community Health Nurse in the Health Department's Early Intervention program failed by a 4-7 vote, with Legislator Klein recusing himself due to a family connection to the program.
- Proposed restoration of funding (\$88,005) for an additional librarian at the Tompkins County Public Library was defeated by a 5-7 vote.
- In the final action before the full budget was considered, Legislator Martha Robertson proposed taking \$60,000 from reserves to apply to reducing the tax levy, a proposal that failed by a tie vote of 6-6. That action would have reduced the levy increase to just under 1%. Robertson noted that, under fiscal policy, the County's target excess fund balance is 10%, and currently stands at 14.6%. Administrator Mareane cautioned that throughout the budget preparation process the County has sought to tie use of reserves to non-recurring expenses, and that taking such action now could have consequences next year.

At its October 20 meeting, the Legislature will consider the recommended amended budget. Once the Legislature formally adopts recommended amendments to the County Administrator's budget, that package becomes the basis of deliberations, including the Legislature's public hearing on the budget. The public hearing will take place November 10, beginning at 7:00 p.m. at Legislature Chambers, located on the second floor of the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

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](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/ctyadmin/2016budget).

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