



Inclusion Through Diversity

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

County Begins 2017 Budget Review

Legislators acting as an Expanded Budget Committee tonight began review of County Administrator Joe Mareane's recommended 2017 County Budget, hearing their first five department and agency presentations, and beginning a review process that will run through most of October.

The 2017 Recommended Budget supports total expenditures of \$173 million and local dollar spending of \$84.7 million (increases of less than 1%). It meets the Legislature's 2017 budget goal of a 3% increase in the County property tax levy. The property tax *rate* in the budget will go *down* for the third straight year—from \$6.73 per \$1,000 to \$6.63 per \$1,000—a reduction of 1.5%. The County property tax bill for the owner of a median-valued \$175,000 home would increase by \$16.

Tonight Legislators heard presentations from the Highway Division, County Office for the Aging, Department of Social Services, the County Clerk, and the Soil and Water Conservation District.

Highlights from tonight's presentations:

The Highway Division budget includes two over-target requests, both recommended by the County Administrator. One would reallocate for highway materials \$125,000—half of the savings realized in town snow plowing contract expense due to this year's mild winter. The other would allocate more than \$400,000 in one-time money (paid out of the equipment reserve fund) to replace three pieces of heavy equipment, in line with the division's long-range equipment plan, an amount less than the estimated trade-in value for those units.

Highway Director Jeff Smith noted that a major positive influence for his division is increased funding this year, including \$460,000 awarded under the New York State Consolidated Highway Improvement (CHIPS) program, coupled with the positive impact of lower petroleum prices, which affect fuel and asphalt costs. He observed that analysis of the County's pavement quality shows improvement, with more miles of road at better quality than three years ago.

Office for the Aging Director Lisa Holmes said that among the major influences on her department is the demographic trend of rapid growth in the County's older adult population as the Baby Boom generation continues to age. She said expanded State "NY Connects" funding this year greatly increased program revenue for personnel and infrastructure, though the level for next year is still uncertain. A more than \$20,000 over-target request to maintain Foodnet at the living wage standard was not included by the Administrator in the recommended budget; however, Holmes reported that request could now be reduced to just over \$10,000, due to offsetting revenue now expected from New York State.

The Department of Social Services has requested four positions, all within its target budget, which Commissioner Patricia Carey said are driven by an increase in Adult Protective Services caseload and the epidemic of opioid addiction, which has contributed to an extremely high caseload in Family Treatment Court. She said areas of uncertainty for the year ahead include whether public assistance caseloads will remain at their recent lower levels, the impact of new federal day care requirements, and whether the State's Medicaid cap on the County share of the cost of benefits will continue past 2017. An \$8,375 over-target request to permit the department to replace five of its vehicles with all-electric vehicles, instead of hybrids, was not included in the administrator's budget, Administrator Mareane saying that was one of the items he opted to defer to the Legislature.

Reporting on a successful year, County Clerk Maureen Reynolds told Legislators that a \$50,000 over-target request for one-time funding in her budget, recommended by the County Administrator, would continue to support the continued record-scanning initiative through the County's digitization project. She noted the Tompkins County was named one of the nation's top digital counties for the third straight year.

The Soil and Water Conservation District asked, in part, for \$200,000 in one-time over target funding, to support up-front funding for reimbursement grant projects, which could then be returned to the County at the end of 2017, similar to an arrangement that has been used in the past related to Hydrilla grant funding. The request is not included in the Recommended Budget, Administrator Mareane saying a better approach may be to seek approval by resolution from the Legislature each year, outside of the budget process.

Legislators will hear seven more presentations when the committee reconvenes Monday, September 12. 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).

The 2017 Recommended Budget, with schedules and other budget-related information, is posted on the budget page of the County web site at www.TompkinsCountyNY.gov/ctyadmin/2017budget.

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

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