



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legislators Continue 2017 Budget Review

Legislators acting as an Expanded Budget Committee tonight heard seven more budget presentations in a second night of review of County Administrator Joe Mareane's recommended 2017 budget.

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 Departments of Assessment, Weights and Measures, Information Technology Services, and Finance, the District Attorney and Legislature Offices, and the Solid Waste Management Division.

Highlights from tonight's presentations:

Several of the departments mentioned staff considerations, including the need for succession planning. That is a significant factor behind Weights and Measures Director Don Ellis' request to add a full-time inspector to increase his one-person department. Total cost would be \$89,600, including related support expense, and the Administrator's budget recommends the position at half-time, at a total cost of \$45,356. Ellis said Weights and Measures responsibilities have increased beyond what he is able to complete alone, and he would like to develop a successor to take over when he retires in about four years, as well as cover when he is on leave. Legislature Chair Mike Lane remarked that the Director of Weights and Measures is the County's only consumer protection employee and support is needed; Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne said that, after many years of discussion by the Legislature, "it's time to 'bite the bullet' and do what's needed."

Information Technology Services Director Greg Potter said his department needs to prepare for two expected retirements within the next three years. Finance Director Rick Snyder said his office is in the midst of major reorganization that has seen eight out of his department's 13 positions changing and realigning due to retirements. The Administrator's Budget recommends just over \$12,000 to enable an eight-week overlap between a retiring employee in the Treasury Division and her successor.

Director of Assessment Jay Franklin noted that his department has 11.5 positions now, compared to 19 in the year 2000, with staff now "down to bare minimum," and he cautioned that an aging workforce will require a ramping up of employees in Assessment starting in three or four years, as highly experienced employees in his office retire. Not included in the Recommended Budget is just under \$5,700 to increase an unfilled administrative assistant position in Assessment from 35 to 40 hours per week. Solid Waste Manager Barbara Eckstrom said reorganization following two retirements has enabled her division to reduce its roster by one position.

For Assessment, the Administrator's Budget recommends one-time funding including \$95,000 to support a digital sketch program, a paperless process that will permit geo-referencing and field updating, and will be able to track image changes via aerial imagery. A \$7,000 real property tax database is also recommended, which would help track changes in property exemptions.

Requested as part of the Finance budget, but not included in the Recommended Budget, is over-target funding, estimated at \$5,000, to potentially support the ability of Finance to begin to accept credit card payments, including for property taxes. Director Snyder acknowledged that the Legislature should at a future time discuss the pros and cons of the issue of accepting credit card payments.

Solid Waste Manager Eckstrom noted that her operation is experiencing higher disposal revenues but lower recycling commodity prices, that expenses are stable, and that operations can be sustained, and the food scrap initiative continue to expand, while maintaining the current \$55 annual solid waste fee.

The Expanded Budget Committee will meet again Wednesday, September 14. 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), Ithaca.

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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