



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **January 19, 2010** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Recognizing Challenges, Chair Expresses Optimism in Annual State of County Message**

In the Annual State of the County message, Legislature Chair Martha Robertson notes that, while there is no doubt that Tompkins County face challenges in the year ahead, the Legislature and stakeholders throughout the county can and will meet those challenges through ingenuity, initiative, and collaboration. Reflecting on a recent conversation with past Legislature Chair Stuart Stein, Robertson observes that past “problems” tackled by the Legislature became solutions now taken for granted, prompting the realization that “as slowly as government sometimes seems to move, we *can* make things happen when we have a goal and work toward it together.”

Cautioning that how the County addresses its “number one” challenge, the budget, could shape county government and Tompkins County itself for years to come, the Chair states that the County “must find new ways to think about our programs and services and organize our work.” Supporting the program just beginning to anticipate challenges over the next three years and how to meet them, Robertson challenges the County to do more than that. “I submit that three years is not long enough” Robertson states. “This economy *will* improve. We will see employment rise and sales tax receipts with it. And most importantly, if we make the right investments – even now, when it’s hardest to do – we will position our community to rebound ahead of the curve and be ready for even better things in the future.” The County, she adds, has solved very difficult problems before, and is recognized as a “leadership county” by others, including New York State.

Among challenges the Chair identifies that will demand leadership:

- The issue of gas drilling which, she cautions, could “transform our region” ;
- Global warming as a local problem, with continued local initiatives to address it;
- The need to improve diversity of the County’s workforce, especially in light of limited hiring;
- Continuing to strengthen the county’s tourism program;
- Continuing to build the effort to secure outside grants and resources to support needed programs;
- Becoming an even stronger voice among New York’s counties and within New York State, making the County’s voice heard on issues of importance.

The Chair expresses confidence that the County will weather its immediate budget woes, considering “the fairness, the immediate impact, and the future ramifications” of each choice that is made. “*We can do this,*” Robertson concludes. “The ingenuity, the generosity, the passion for what we do are not just hallmarks of Tompkins County government. They are essential qualities of Tompkins County’s people... We must nurture these qualities. This economic slump won’t last forever. It is our job to steer a course through it, and position our community for even better things in the days and years to come.”

The Chair’s full message is posted on the County website at

<http://www.tompkins-co.org/legislature/welcome.html>

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 607-274-5434 or 607-272-0584.

## **2010 Committees Assignments**

In her committee appointments, Chair Robertson notes that the 2010 committee structure closely follows that of past years. Standing committees remain at six. The Chair's appointments move Human Resources oversight to the Legislature's Budget Committee; otherwise, the standing committee structure remains largely unchanged. There also will be two special committees during 2010: a Capital Plan Review Committee and the continued Census Committee, which will function through June 2010.

The Budget and Capital Committee will continue to be chaired by James Dennis; Frank Proto will continue to chair Health and Human Services, and Pam Mackesey will continue to lead the Planning committee. Dooley Kiefer will chair the Facilities and Infrastructure Committee; Nathan Shinagawa becomes chair of Public Safety; and Legislator Michael Lane, who is returning to the Legislature after a four-year absence, will chair the Government Operations Committee. Regarding special committees, Chair Robertson will lead the Capital Plan Review Committee (which will review the County's 20-year Capital Plan, adopted in 2006, considering possible changes in priorities and potential additions), and Pam Mackesey will continue as chair of the Census Committee.

Committee assignments are as follows:

*Budget and Capital:* James Dennis, Chair; Kathy Luz Herrera, Vice Chair; Pamela Mackesey; Brian Robison; Peter Stein

*Government Operations:* Michael Lane, Chair; Dooley Kiefer Vice Chair; Carol Chock David McKenna; Pat Pryor

*Health and Human Services:* Frank Proto, Chair; Will Burbank, Vice Chair; James Dennis; Kathy Luz Herrera; Nathan Shinagawa

*Planning, Development and Environmental Quality:* Pamela Mackesey, Chair; Carol Chock, Vice Chair; Will Burbank; Frank Proto; Pat Pryor

*Facilities and Infrastructure:* Dooley Kiefer, Chair; Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Vice Chair; Pam Mackesey; David McKenna; Michael Lane

*Public Safety:* Nathan Shinagawa, Chair, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Vice Chair; James Dennis; Brian Robison; Peter Stein

*Capital Plan Review Committee* (special committee): Martha Robertson, Chair; Dooley Kiefer, Vice Chair; James Dennis; Kathy Luz Herrera; Michael Lane; Frank Proto

*Census Committee* (special committee): Pamela Mackesey, Chair; Carol Chock; Frank Proto; Kathy Luz Herrera; Michael Lane

*Contact:* Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 607-274-5434 or 607-272-0584.

## **Legislators Briefed on AES Cayuga Payment in Lieu of Taxes Agreement**

The Legislature heard a more than hour-long detailed briefing on the 20-year payment-in-lieu-of-taxes agreement approved in early 2009 between the county Industrial Development Agency (IDA) and Lansing's AES Cayuga power generating facility and why modification is necessary, as allowed by the agreement and agreed to by the IDA/County negotiating team. At its next meeting, the Legislature will be asked to support renegotiation of the agreement, which governs a system of valuation and tax for the facility, and is not a tax abatement. AES Cayuga plant manager Jerry Goodenough told legislators that market factors over the past year (including the economic meltdown, falling energy demand, and low natural gas pricing that sets market clearing prices) have caused a rapid decline in the plant's financial condition, thus, requiring lower market values from what was initially negotiated and creating an extraordinary situation, as defined in the agreement. Terms of a value and phasing plan agreed to by IDA and utility negotiating teams, over five years would decrease the

plant's valuation from the current \$160 million for 2009 to \$100 million in 2013, instead of an increase in value during that period to \$255 million. The agreement will be revisited later this year to review validity of the \$100 million figure in light of economic conditions and plant finances.

Former County Administrator and County Assessor Steve Whicher, who played a key role in negotiating the agreement, provided a detailed explanation of the provisions and valuation in a highly volatile and difficult-to-forecast market, especially in today's regulatory environment. Administrator Joe Mareane said bailing out of the agreement would open municipalities and taxpayers to abrupt value changes and the full effect of the volatility. Both Whicher and Mareane had high praise for AES as an extraordinary and responsible corporate citizen. Lansing legislator Pat Pryor said the AES valuation decline is of concern to her constituents and will be especially difficult for the school district. Pryor added, however, that constituents also are worried that the facility might close, and she maintained that the County should work with the utility as it struggles through a very difficult period.

A proposal to vote on the support resolution tonight, instead of later, failed by a vote of 5-10, with Legislators Pryor, Frank Proto, Jim Dennis, Mike Lane, and Chair Robertson voting in favor. Several other legislators said the delay would permit citizens to learn more about the issue before a vote is taken.

*Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 607-274-5551.*

### **Wesley McDermott Confirmed as Interim Assigned Council Director**

By unanimous vote, the Legislature confirmed Administrator Joe Mareane's appointment of Ithaca attorney Wesley McDermott as Interim Supervising Attorney of the County Assigned Program. Mr. McDermott will serve on a contract basis for a period not to exceed 120 days while the County engages in the search for a permanent replacement for the late Robert Stolp, who died last week. At the beginning of the meeting, the Legislature also observed a moment of silence in honor of Mr. Stolp and his many, many contributions to the County over more than 30 years.

*Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 607-274-5551.*

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Heard from County Administrator Joe Mareane on Governor Paterson's 2010-11 Budget Message, delivered today. County Administration and departments will be reviewing the Executive Budget to determine potential effects on county departments. The administrator noted that the effect on county budgets is more difficult to determine than other municipalities, since revenue is determined by formula and program. He said early indications are that the Governor may have refrained from burden-shifting to counties, as has happened in the past. Areas of potential funding concern at this early stage include health, social services, probation, as well as community college funding and mass transit. Mr. Mareane reminded legislators that this is only "day one of a very long budget process" and that the situation may look significantly different at the end.
- Recognized Ithaca High School student John Nord as the County's Distinguished Youth for January. Nominated by Mary Arlin, John was recognized for taking the initiative to design and build a natural trail to create a natural outdoor study area behind Ithaca's DeWitt Middle School as an Eagle Scout project, including building picnic tables and benches for visitors to use. The Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by A&B Awards and Engraving, Bangs Ambulance, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.
- Authorized a conservation easement on a 3.8 acre woodland parcel located on Brooktondale Road and bordering Six Mile Creek in the Town of Caroline.
- Accepted a more than \$168,000 one-year state grant to the Tompkins County Health Department (with the possibility of two one-year extensions) to support a year-long Healthy Neighborhoods Program in targeted areas of the County, and accepted more than \$36,000 in emergency preparedness funding for the department from the New York State Department of Health and Office of Homeland Security.