



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **March 16, 2010** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Conducts Hearing on Hanshaw Road Reconstruction**

At a public hearing that lasted more than one-and-a-quarter hours, conducted under provisions of the State's Eminent Domain Procedure Law, residents expressed concern about the Hanshaw Road reconstruction project. The hearing was held to inform the public and review public use to be served by the \$3.7 million project, to reconstruct one-and-a-half miles of road between Pleasant Grove Road and Sapsucker Woods Road through the Towns of Ithaca and Dryden and Village of Cayuga Heights. The project has been in development for several years, with construction scheduled to begin next spring. With negotiations for many permanent and temporary easements not yet completed, the hearing was held in case any land might need to be acquired via eminent domain procedures as a last resort. Civil Engineer Jon Lampman outlined the project, which he said will widen the road, but employ a 15 foot right-of-way, the narrowest the State will allow, and add improvements such as a sidewalk and walkways, to increase safety. But 17 residents who addressed the hearing, most of them Hanshaw Road residents, maintained the improvements will actually make the road more dangerous, will affect drainage, decrease property values, and destroy vegetation and neighborhood character. Hanshaw Road, several said, should be built to a lower, rather than a higher speed. And several claimed that the County has failed to provide clear documentation or justification for the County's current right-of-way and clear communication concerning how their properties would be affected. Written comments will continue to be accepted until the hearing closes April 6.

*Contact: John Lampman, Civil Engineer, Tompkins County Highway Division, 274-0307*

#### **Legislature Endorses County Response to Google, Inc. Broadband Proposal**

The Legislature authorized the County to respond to Google, Inc.'s "Fiber to Communities" Request for Information, expressing the County's interest in serving as a pilot community for a demonstration project of Google's ultra-high speed fiber optic network trial. The measure was approved by unanimous vote, with Legislator Dooley Kiefer excused. The measure notes that the Google project would provide both "a unique public/private partnership" and "an extraordinary collaboration opportunity" involving the County, other local municipalities, economic development entities, health care facilities and institutions of higher learning.

Government Operations Committee chair Mike Lane stated that it's important that people of Tompkins County get every shot they can to get broadband access and to get it in ways that are affordable to the county. While voting in support of the resolution, Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera cautioned that, while she supports the effort to serve underserved population, she is concerned about seeking this proposal in haste, as well as potential long-term financial responsibilities.

Legislature Chair Martha Robertson announced that County and municipal officials have declined to pursue participation in the Southern Tier East Regional Planning and Development Board initiative to develop an 11-county open access fiber network through an application for federal stimulus funding, an proposal that, if approved, was estimated to cost the County more than \$860,000 up-front, with additional ongoing maintenance expense. Robertson said officials instead wish to base broadband development on the County's own plan. The Legislature's Government Operations Committee will examine what has been done and proposed in the past

and, as a first step, will work toward establishing a special, broad-based committee to guide the plan development process.

*Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 844-8313; Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.*

### **Legislature Opposes State Budget Reductions**

The Legislature, in three separate resolutions approved without dissent (with Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Nathan Shinagawa excused), went on record opposing proposed funding reductions for local health departments, community colleges, and for farmland and environmental protection. The Legislature asked Governor Paterson and the State Legislature to eliminate proposed reductions in health department services labeled as “optional,” including Home Health Care funding, and expressed official concern about a proposed funding shift in Medical Examiner funding from the State Department of Health to a block grant program in the Department of Criminal Justice Services. Legislators also opposed proposed cuts to the state’s community colleges and the Tuition Assistance Program. And they urged State lawmakers to “support New York’s farmers, the State’s agricultural economy and protection of valuable farmland by supporting funding for the Farmland Protection Program and Environmental Protection Fund,” opposing what they describe as “drastic cuts” to those programs in the Governor’s executive budget.

*Contact: Frank Proto, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 277-4875; James Dennis, Chair, Budget and Capital Committee, 387-4058; Pamela Mackesey, Chair, Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-6203*

### **Director Franklin Presents Annual Assessment Report**

The Legislature heard a report from Interim Director of Assessment Jay Franklin on the department’s 2010 Continual Equity Maintenance Program, an annual report regarding the current real estate market. Mr. Franklin noted that the Tompkins County real estate market is not yet experiencing the significant downturn prevalent in other parts of the nation, although sales data show the market appears to be slowing very slightly compared to a year ago (in the \$500,000 and above valuation range). He said it appears that the 2010 assessment roll will not require major changes to maintain a 100% level of assessment, although individual property assessments can still change in value. Franklin reported 2,787 total assessment changes from 2009 to 2010 Preliminary Assessment Roll (719 decreases and 2,068 increases). Preliminary assessment change notices for properties whose assessment has changed began to go out as of March 12.

*Contact: Jay Franklin, Interim Director of Assessment, 274-5517.*

### **2010 Census Report**

The Legislature received an update from special Census Committee chair Pam Mackesey on the County’s Complete Count Census campaign, including

- 1,500 Census flyers distributed so far to students on the Cornell campus, with more outreach in progress at Ithaca College and TC3.
- 180 businesses, agencies, organizations, associations, town and village clerks, city and county departments, community centers, schools and school districts, museums, libraries, university departments and programs received an informational Census e-mail.
- 41 restaurants, laundromats, and grocery stores received Census flyers and informational pieces.
- 16 identified locations where residents of Tompkins County live and/or socialize who may need language assistance in filling out their Census form. Efforts are underway to reach out to these groups.

*Contact: Pamela Mackesey, Chair, 2010 Census Complete Count Committee, 273-6203*

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Accepted a \$54,000 grant from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to establish a three-year automated countywide rideshare pilot program through the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council. Cornell University, Ithaca College, Tompkins Cortland Community College, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, and the Tompkins County Department of Social Services collaborated with the ITCTC to develop the rideshare proposal.

- Authorized the County to apply for \$750,000 from the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal Community Development Block Grant Program to continue the County's Homeownership Program. Once funded, the program will be modified to include partnerships with organizations such as Tompkins Community Action and Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services to support increased energy efficiency in homes and long-term housing affordability.
  
- Approved constitution and bylaws for the Tompkins County Development Corporation, which operates in conjunction with the County's Industrial Development Agency. The corporation, whose board members are board members of the IDA, is empowered to issue bonds and other obligations on behalf of the County to promote community and economic development and the creation of jobs, filling the gap left when New York State civic facility legislation which permitted the IDA to issue such bonds, expired at the end of 2008. The vote was 13-1, with Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera voting no and Legislator Dooley Kiefer excused. Herrera expressed concern about non profits employing non-union or non-local labor for such projects.

**- END -**