



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer
607-274-5555, Office
607-227-2152, Cell
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THREE PAGES

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Highlights of the April 20, 2010 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Supports Comprehensive Immigration Reform

The Legislature urges federal enactment of comprehensive immigration reform. Citing the County's ongoing strong commitment to protecting human rights and civil rights; its diverse immigrant population; and the Legislature's belief in "the dignity of all county residents regardless of immigration status," the measure maintains that "Tompkins County has a major stake in a just and fair federal immigration system that would help protect the health and richness" of its diverse population and that the nation "urgently needs legislation to correct the failings of our immigration system."

The measure ultimately was approved by a 12-3 vote (Legislators Frank Proto, Brian Robison and David McKenna voting no) after more than an hour of discussion. While stressing that he supports immigration reform, Legislator Mike Lane was one who expressed concern about process, and moved that the member-filed resolution, advanced by Legislators Leslyn McBean-Clairborne and Kathy Luz Herrera, be referred to committee, a motion that failed by a vote of 4-11. The resolution was proposed in advance of a community gathering on immigration reform May 1. There also was considerable discussion of proposed language to endorse the "Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act of 2009," introduced in the House of Representatives late last year, legislation about which several legislators said they did not have specifics; endorsement language ultimately was withdrawn.

The Legislature "calls on the U.S. Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform that will include replacing our ineffective enforcement-only policy; ceasing the practice of warrantless raids; and providing a pathway for undocumented immigrants toward earning legal permanent status and citizenship." The action also expresses the Legislature's appreciation "to all people from around the world who have made Tompkins County their home and in so doing have helped to make Tompkins County one of the most vibrant, safe, and attractive communities in the United States."

Legislator Proto noted his no vote came "with reluctance," that he respects the proposal but saw the need for more discussion. Legislator Robison called immigration reform "a passionate issue for the entire country," but said he could not support it as a national issue over which the Legislature has no jurisdiction.

Contact: Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera, 273-8169; Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, 277-5104.

Legislature Takes Firm Stands on State Legislation

In four separate actions, the Legislature made its position known on issues currently pending in the State, three of them that potentially could affect county spending.

Changes to the Medicaid Cap:

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, registered strong opposition to provisions in the Governor's budget that it maintains would "alter the Medicaid cap agreement in a fundamental way." The provision would empower the State Commissioner of Health to force local social services to fully fund any Federal disallowances under certain circumstances, even when the local district followed State-mandated guidelines. The Medicaid cap legislation enacted five years ago, which caps the local share of Medicaid, committed the State as responsible for Federal disallowances in exchange for receiving all recoveries. The change, the Legislature maintains,

would undermine the State's commitment to fund the cost of Medicaid mandates and would "expose local taxpayers to increased costs and cuts in essential services."

Contact: Legislator Frank Proto, 277-4875.

Autism Services:

The Legislature, without dissent, strongly opposed proposed legislation to amend State and Public Health Laws that, in its language relating to screening, diagnosis, and treatment of children with autism spectrum disorder, indicates such children would not receive insurance coverage for services and precluding counties from billing insurance companies for such services. Children with autism spectrum disorders routinely receive therapeutic services through Early Intervention or school-based services, administered and co-funded by counties. The resolution maintains the proposed change sets a "dangerous public policy precedent" and produces no cost-savings, except for the insurance industry.

Contact: Legislator Frank Proto, 277-4875.

Motor Vehicle Revenues:

Legislators, again by unanimous vote, supported legislation in the Assembly, which would permit County Clerks to retain a share of the motor vehicles fees collected through the State Department of Motor Vehicles web site. Local Clerks presented retain 12.7% of DMV fees for in-person services and, it is noted, often times must issue no-fee renewals when customers renew on-line but fail to receive their stickers. Government Operations Chair Mike Lane called the situation "a trickle effect" on the part of the State, which has taken more and more revenue from local clerk's offices, a situation that has become even worse now that the State allows internet renewals.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 844-8313; County Clerk Aurora Valenti, 274-5431.

Sustainable Energy Financing Programs:

The Legislature by unanimous vote, asked the State to adopt pending legislation to "amend, strengthen, and correct technical deficiencies" within enabling legislation authorizing Sustainable Energy Financing Programs, which would allow the use of bonds and other sources of public and private financing to establish and implement such programs. The Tompkins County legislature last year supported the enabling legislation to establish such "green loan" programs for property owners for energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements, but indicates that broader sources of funding are needed than are permitted in the current legislation.

Contact: Pamela Mackesey, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-6203; Planning and Public Works Commissioner Ed Marx, 274-5560.

Among other business, the Legislature

- Heard from Finance Director David Squires that first-quarter sales tax receipts are up by about 1.5%, about \$100,000 higher than the first quarter of last year and a more optimistic situation than earlier this year. Year-to-date receipts of \$7,165,920 are currently \$100,000 below the 2010 budget, which projects a 3% sales tax revenue increase for 2010.
- Approved funding of the Spring 2010 round of tourism program grants, totally supported through county room occupancy tax revenue—including more than \$29,000 in tourism marketing and advertising grants, \$46,000 in tourism project grants, more than \$19,000 in community celebrations grants, as advised by the county's Strategic Tourism Planning Board. Also approved, \$72,500 in tourism capital grants, administered by Tompkins County Area Development. The Legislature also authorized extending the County's contract with TCAD to administer the Tourism Capital Grants program during 2010, at a cost of up to \$13,326 (10% of total program expenditures).
- Appropriated the 2010-2011 operating budget for the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council, as approved by the Council's policy committee. The budget is fully funded through federal highway and transit administration funds.

- Heard an overview of operations at Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport from Airport Manager Bob Nicholas and the annual report from Public Works Administrator Cheryl Nelson on highlights of the many accomplishments of the County's Sustainability Team over the past year.

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