



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer
607-274-5555, Office
607-227-2152, Cell
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **June 1, 2010** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Establishes County Clerk, Sheriff Salaries

The Legislature took a long and careful look at what the salaries should be for the elected positions of County Clerk and Sheriff for the upcoming four-year term. After nearly an hour-and-a-half of discussion and considering several alternative approaches, Legislators ultimately decided to keep the positions' salaries at their current levels for 2011, then to adjust the salary percentages during the remaining three years of the term in line with any increases received by County management personnel. For County Clerk, the salary will remain at \$69,691 for 2011; for Sheriff, the salary will remain at \$85,823.

The Clerk's salary was approved by a vote of 12-2 (Legislators Jim Dennis and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no); the Sheriff's salary passed by an 11-3 vote (Legislators Dennis, McBean-Clairborne, and Kathy Luz Herrera opposed. Legislator Nathan Shinagawa was excused for both votes.) McBean-Clairborne and Luz Herrera indicated they see tying salaries for elected positions to management salaries as inappropriate.

Legislators declined to increase the base salaries for the positions—either in 2011, as had been advanced by the budget committee, or in 2012, as had been suggested as an alternative by Chair Martha Robertson. The increase in base salary had been proposed earlier, seeking to achieve salary parity between the County Clerk and the Clerk of the Legislature, and to boost Sheriff's pay to \$1,000 per year more than the Undersheriff, the second highest ranked employee in the Sheriff's Office. Legislator Peter Stein proposed the substitute resolution that was ultimately approved, first advanced as a combined resolution then split into two separate actions.

Legislator Pam Mackesey was one who said that, while she would very much like to be able to provide salary increases for both positions, under the current economic circumstances, there is no way she could vote for an increase for next year. To see salaries for the positions being increased when other jobs could be eliminated, she said, would be "demoralizing" to employees.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget and Capital Committee, 387-4058; Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-058; Legislator Dooley Kiefer, 257-7453.

2011 Budget Guidelines Call for 6.9% Reduction

The Legislature, following little discussion and without dissent, followed the recommendation of County Administrator Joe Mareane and its budget committee and established 2011 budget guidelines which call for departments and agencies to cut spending by 6.9%, as a starting point in the 2011 County budget process. The administrator has indicated that the 6.9% reduction is needed to achieve the projected \$2 million reduction in discretionary spending needed to balance the budget and meet the Legislature's 5% tax levy increase goal. The fiscal target is the maximum amount of general revenue spending authority that a department may request without initiating an over-target request as part of the budget process.

The guidelines call for fiscal targets to be reduced by 6.9% from the level approved as part of the 2010 adopted budget. The fiscal targets apply to County departments, not-for-profit agencies, and county municipalities and agencies reimbursed under the Sales Tax Agreement with the City of Ithaca. The targets do not include one-time funding, re-appropriations or adjustments from previous years. The action also grants the County

Administrator full authority of the Legislature to adjust department targets, as needed, to achieve the Legislature's 5% tax levy increase goal and states that the Administrator will consult with department heads and division managers before any needed target reduction.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget and Capital Committee, 387-4058; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Asks State to Authorize Increase in Local Mortgage Tax

The Legislature is asking the State to approve home rule legislation in the Senate and Assembly authorizing the County to adopt a local law enacting a .25% increase in the county mortgage recording tax. The vote was 12-3, with Legislators Mike Lane, David McKenna and Frank Proto voting no.) Mortgage tax revenue of \$1 million is projected for the 2011 budget, and Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera, who had previously opposed the increase, said she would support it "reluctantly" this time, since the revenue is badly needed. Legislator Mike Lane said he is opposed since the County imposed the real estate transfer tax a few years ago, as a supposed alternative to a mortgage tax increase. While the tax would sunset in three years and be subject to renewal, Legislator Frank Proto suggested that, based on the County's past experience with sales tax, it's doubtful the increased mortgage tax would be temporary. The Legislature asked the State to introduce such legislation late last year, and would still have to pass a local law on the increase, once permitted by the State.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget and Capital Committee, 387-4058; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Opposes Proposed Change in Public Records Law

The Legislature, by a 8-7 vote, opposed pending State legislation which would set requirements for advance posting of records of any records to be discussed at a public meeting. (Voting in favor were Legislators Frank Proto, Will Burbank, Jim Dennis, Mike Lane, Pat Pryor, Dooley Kiefer, David McKenna, and Chair Martha Robertson.) The legislation would require the agency to post such records on its website not less than 24 hours before the meeting at which they would be discussed, with a reasonable number of copies available at or before the meeting. Legislators who supported the resolution, however, made it clear that they in no way oppose transparency in government, but that the measure, in fact, amounts to an unfunded mandate for localities, has positive intent, but is ambiguous and fails to adequately consider implementation,. The requirement, they say, would pose a significant staff and cost burden for local government, including county advisory boards and some municipalities which lack internet capability. Legislators Kathy Luz Herrera and Carol Chock were among those who noted that opposition to the proposed changes to the Public Records Law would conflict with the County's commitment to transparency in government.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 844-831.

Among other business, the Legislature:

- Approved a settlement agreement accepted by the judge in the Lakeside Nursing Home, Inc. bankruptcy proceeding, which provides for the County to receive more than \$710,000, coming from a pass-through of federal funds granted by New York State and proceeds from sale of the Lakeside property. The settlement agreement satisfies nearly \$770,000 in property taxes owed the County by Lakeside between 2000 through 2003, plus interest and fees.
- Approved release of \$22,000 from contingency to support the first phase of a "Smart Work" training program for county government, which will work toward streamlining processes for four county programs. \$50,000 to support the efficiency training was approved as part of the 2010 budget.
- Approved the addition of nearly 11 acres at 1588 Taughannock Boulevard in the Town of Ulysses to County Agricultural District No. 2 on the West side of Cayuga Lake.
- Heard a presentation from Information Technology Services Director Greg Potter and Deputy County Clerk Maureen Reynolds on the County's records management program.

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