



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **June 15, 2010** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Calls for Payment of Overdue Transit Aid

The Tompkins County Legislature is calling upon New York State to immediately come through with State Transit Operating Assistance, where quarterly payments have been delayed in absence of a state budget. Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT) was forced to undertake unbudgeted short-term borrowing to make payroll during the quarter, assuming that borrowing will be sufficient only if a state budget is approved by the end of that period. The measure notes that STOA funds included in a recent emergency spending bill is not sufficient to cover expenses, and that unless funding comes soon, the system could be forced to consider service reductions. Legislator Frank Proto, who also chairs the TCAT board, noted STOA accounts for 36% of TCAT's budget and lack of STOA funding affects all upstate transit systems.

The Legislature's action "strongly urges the State Legislature act now to adopt a state budget and to appropriate the transit aid to avoid further harm to TCAT operations and the local economy" and, if a state budget is not passed soon, to find another mechanism to appropriate and release sufficient STOA money.

Contact: Legislator Frank Proto, 277-4875.

Legislature Authorizes Airport Parking Expansion

The Legislature approved a contract to expand the long term parking lot at Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport—one year earlier than called for in the airport's master plan—and an interfund loan to help with cash flow to expedite the work. The master plan calls for parking lot expansion in 2011, but recent increases in passengers using the airport terminal have been so great that the terminal lot is repeatedly filled to capacity, and it's feared parking needs will exceed capacity during the busy Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday periods. The Legislature, by a 14-1 vote (Legislator Will Burbank voting no), first approved a \$140,000 interfund loan from the County's general fund to the airport capital project fund, with the Airport to repay the loan over three years through parking revenue, through annual principal and interest payments of \$49,229 per year. By unanimous vote, Legislators then authorized a consultant agreement with C&S Companies of Syracuse to design the project, which will add about 65 more spaces at an estimated cost of \$140,000. Some legislators expressed concern about removal of trees necessary to accommodate the extra spaces, noting that in keeping with the Airport's environmental goals, it would be desirable to replant an equal number of trees to those removed during the expansion. The Facilities and Infrastructure Committee will review final design before bids are requested.

Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 257-7453; Airport Manager Bob Nicholas, 257-0456.

Legislature Requests Determination on Soil and Water Conservation Districts' Potential Role in Providing Technical Assistance Related to Gas Drilling

The Legislature is asking a regional coalition to clarify how local Soil and Water Conservation Districts can provide technical assistance regarding questions related to gas drilling in the Marcellus shale. By unanimous vote, the Legislature asked the Upper Susquehanna Coalition and its member soil and water conservation districts "to explore how member districts might be engaged to assist landowners (especially farmers), the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and others concerned with the public interest" to provide "sound technical assistance...and "ensure the best use and protection of natural resources" as

landowners and others answer questions and provide technical information to gas drilling companies. With considerable staff time that may be required by Soil and Water Conservation Districts to provide such assistance, the measure also asks that a mechanism be developed to allow compensation for the districts to provide the technical assistance to industries, not by direct payments, but in a way that maintains their autonomy. The resolution notes that drilling and related activities “will involve critical questions regarding soil and water resources.” The vote followed considerable discussion on appropriate wording to convey the Legislature’s position in the proper manner.

Contact: Pamela Mackesey, Chair, Planning , Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-6203; Legislator Carol Chock, 273-9007.

Legislature Repeats Action on Mortgage Tax

To correct a technical error in bill language earlier provided by state staff, the Legislature repeated its request to the State to approve home rule legislation pending in the Senate and Assembly which would authorize the County to adopt a local law enacting a .25% increase in the county mortgage recording tax. By a vote of 13-2 (Legislators Frank Proto and Mike Lane voting no), the Legislature rescinded the resolution approved at its last meeting (which did not reference a required “sunset” clause) and replaced it with a request that notes that the proposed legislation would only be in effect through December 2013. Mortgage tax revenue of \$1 million is projected for the 2011 budget. The Legislature asked the State to introduce the mortgage tax legislation late last year and would still have to pass a local law to enact the increase, once permitted by the State.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget and Capital Committee, 387-4058.

Federal Transit Grant Funds Awarded to Eight Local Agencies

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, allocated more than \$160,000 in Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds, split among eight local agencies, to support projects to assist low income residents in meeting transportation needs related to employment. The awards supplement grant-funded programs operated through the County Department of Social Services and Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT) under the County’s Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program. The funds will support Catholic Charities (car repair program); Challenge, Inc. (individual travel training program); GADABOUT (operating assistance to Challenge); FISH (volunteer driver medical transportation); Cooperative Extension and Ithaca Carshare (elements of the Way2Go transportation program); L. Lightborne Enterprises (driver safety training); and the Women’s Opportunities Center (taxi vouchers). The action authorizes the County to allocate JARC funds to eligible projects to be funded through the end of next year, as part of a local consolidated public transit – human service transportation plan process, administered by the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council.

The Legislature, also without dissent, also accepted a more than \$25,000 Community Solutions for Transportation renewal grant to the County Department of Social Services through contract with the New York State Department of Transportation. The grant will continue a working families bus pass program and a working families gas cards program.

Contact: Frank Proto, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 277-4875; Fernando de Aragon, Executive Director, Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council, 274-5570; Patricia Carey, Commissioner of Social Services, 274-5251.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Approved by unanimous vote a resolution of appreciation for Public Health Director Alice Cole, who will retire later this month after more than 20 years of County service, 17 of them as Public Health Director.
- Scheduled a public hearing on the Tompkins Cortland Community College 2010-2011 operating budget. The hearing will be held July 6, 2010, beginning at 5:30 p.m. at Legislature Chambers of the County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca.

- Continued for another three years the grant agreement between the County and Tompkins County Area Development to operate the Tompkins County Area Development Countywide Loan Fund, which supports economic development loans to assist local businesses.
- Heard a presentation on the Downtown Ithaca Alliance draft 2020 strategic plan by executive director Gary Ferguson. One element of the plan suggests a new shared County-City administrative office building in the City's central core.

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