



Inclusion Through Diversity

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September 7, 2010
THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **September 7, 2010** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Administrator Presents 2011 Tentative Budget

County Administrator Joe Mareane delivered to the County Legislature a 2011 Tentative County Budget that employs a balanced approach to address unprecedented fiscal challenges. The budget holds the line on spending and calls for program reductions to fill a \$4.7 million budget gap, while meeting the Legislature's goal of increasing the tax levy by no more than 5%.

The recommended budget totals \$74.4 million in local dollar spending, an increase of 0.6% over the 2010 budget, in spite of substantial increases in mandated spending. It closes a \$4.7 million budget gap through a balanced mix of revenue increases and spending decreases, producing a \$1.9 million (5%) property tax levy increase coupled with a \$2 million spending reduction. Some spending reductions will affect entire programs. The Budget also applies \$780,000 in one-time federal stimulus money to fill the gap left by the State's delay in approving the county's request to authorize a new local mortgage tax. The County tax rate would increase from \$6.00 to \$6.41 per \$1,000 of assessed value, resulting in a \$66 per year increase for an average \$160,000 home. In a budget message accompanying the budget document, Administrator Mareane notes the budget reflects the County's response to an economy slowly recovering from a deep recession. That has resulted in an increased reliance on mandated services provided by the County and a diminished capacity of taxpayers to pay for them.

"Although balanced, the budget requires significant spending reductions," cautions Administrator Mareane. "That is particularly difficult in a lean government that has already cut spending and is careful to provide only those services that are truly needed by the community. However, the County cannot simply afford to do all that it used to. We require a path of fiscal responsibility committed to living within our means."

Departments were directed to reduce non-mandated local dollar spending by 6.9%; items unable to be supported in the target budget could submitted as an over target request (OTR). The Tentative Budget funds only \$1.5 million of nearly \$3.4 million in OTRs submitted for recurring target funding and recommends most of the \$500,000 requested for one-time expenses. Mareane cautions spending cuts, however, can no longer be achieved simply through across-the-board reductions. In addition to OTRs not funded in the Tentative Budget, County Administration has proposed reductions for the County Health Department's Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA) and two programs managed by the Youth Services Department: eliminating a quarter-million-dollar allocation for the Municipal Youth Development program and reducing funding for the Learning Web's Community and Career Apprenticse Program by 50%. The Administrator recommends the County review whether the County-operated CHHA could operate without a \$400,000 annual property tax subsidy or whether the County should withdraw from providing the service, as many other counties have done, transferring its certificate to a qualified not-for-profit provider. The budget reduces the County workforce by 20 full-time equivalent positions, a decrease of 2.6%, much of the reduction expected to be achieved through natural attrition.

The package will be the focus of legislative review through the Expanded Budget Committee over the next two months, leading to legislative action in November.

Contacts: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; James Dennis, Chair, Budget and Capital Committee, 387-4058; Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.

Local Retirement Incentive Approved

The Legislature approved a special one-time local retirement incentive to eligible employees, seeking to minimize involuntary reductions in force in 2011. The vote was 12-2, with Legislators Brian Robison and David McKenna voting no and Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera excused. The incentive will allow employees who retire and vacate their positions between September 15, 2010 and March 31, 2011 to receive County health benefits for 24 months after retirement at the employee rate of 20% of premium, instead of at the much higher retiree contribution. Legislator Robison said he hasn't been convinced that the incentive would have significant impact and that he sees it as simply another potential cost related to people who would have been retiring anyway. Legislator Mike Lane questioned whether acting now would rule out the possibility of benefiting from funding toward health insurance expense for older workers that's part of the new federal health care program. Administrator Joe Mareane said the action will have no impact, and the County will be applying for those funds. Mareane said it's expected this incentive will have some effect at low cost to the County, compared to the cost of retirement incentives offered by New York State, which he said would be huge.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget and Capital Committee, County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551, Legislator Brian Robison, 351-3601.

Road Patrol Salary Arbitration Results Announced

County Administrator Joe Mareane reported the arbitrator has issued his decision in binding interest arbitration for the March 2006-February 2008 contract for uniformed members of the Employees Union Tompkins County Sheriff's Department (road patrol). The 2006-2007 contract was referred to arbitration in 2008. The decision directs a 3.5% increase in base wages, effective 3/1/06 and on 3/1/07, and adjustments for other contract elements including investigator mandatory on-call service, call-in service, shift premiums, health insurance, longevity payments, and clothing allowance. Contract provisions are retroactive for all employed during the period. The union remains without a contract for the period following February 2008.

Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Reaffirms Authorization to Participate in Municipal Health Insurance Consortium

With words of praise for everyone who has worked to make a long-planned initiative a reality, the Legislature by unanimous vote reaffirmed its authorization to enter into an agreement with the Greater Tompkins County Municipal Health Insurance Consortium. The action once again authorizes the County to enter into a municipal cooperative agreement with most of the County's other municipalities to pool their buying power for health insurance coverage, at a considerable savings. The agreement authorizes approval of a modified agreement that incorporates union representation on the Consortium Board and in a joint committee on plan structure and design.

Chair Martha Robertson said participation of labor representatives on the board and through the joint committee is a clear strength, and predicted the Consortium will serve as a model for other communities in New York State. She especially thanked Administrator Joe Mareane and Caroline Supervisor Don Barber, who as Consortium Board chair worked tirelessly and persevered to make the health consortium a reality.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Authorized a Senior Planner position within the County Planning Department to support the Strategic Tourism Planning Board over a two-year pilot period in overseeing the County's \$1.7 million annual tourism budget. The new position will be fully funded through county room occupancy tax revenue.
- Endorsed the Tompkins County 2020 Energy Strategy, which specifies interim actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% of 2008 levels over the next ten years. The County's Comprehensive Plan established the policy to reduce community emissions to reach at least an 80% reduction by 2050. The vote was 13-1, with Legislator Frank Proto voting no (Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera was excused). Proto voiced concern that the strategy could have long range implications for expense and staffing and could prove to be an extremely expensive but worthwhile effort.

- Authorized salary for the position of Executive Assistant to the County Administrator. The salary level was reset at \$53,541, based on salary review conducted by the Commissioner of Personnel, as directed by a prior resolution establishing the salary for the prior incumbent at a level above the standard salary scale. Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne expressed concern about what she sees as a lack of openness in the selection process and was the sole dissenter in the 13-1 approval vote (Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera was excused.)
- Heard a presentation from Sheriff Peter Meskill on the Sheriff's Office 2009 Annual Report. The Sheriff cited many accomplishments during the year, including the first-ever accreditation of the jail and award of jail variances by the State Commission on Corrections. The full report is posted online at www.tompkins-co.org/sheriff.
- Added additional funding authorization for the right-of-way funding agreement with the State Department of Transportation for the Hanshaw Road reconstruction project. The action authorizes more than \$200,000 more to support additional non-federal design and right of way expense; the County will file for reimbursement from the State for eligible expenses.
- Heard from nearly a dozen residents of Ithaca's Pine Tree Road neighborhood and received a petition containing 50 neighborhood signatures expressing concern about the Pine Tree Road pedestrian/bicycle traffic improvement project, specifically how raising the old railroad bridge at the intersection with Route 366 will increase heavy truck traffic and threaten the safety of their neighborhood.
- Discussed, then voted to send to a new ad hoc committee a proposal to take a stand on a proposed New York State property tax cap. Noting that such a cap, which appears to have widespread support—including by gubernatorial candidates Cuomo and Lazio—Legislator Peter Stein filed a resolution that would have urged rejection of such a cap that did not include certain provisions. Several legislators commended the effort, but supported referral to committee to work through the proposal further.

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