



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **October 5, 2010** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Urges State to Provide Mandate Relief Before Capping Local Property Taxes

The Tompkins County Legislature has taken a firm stand on the issue of a proposed property tax cap, maintaining that New York State must significantly cut its unfunded mandates that cause local property tax increases before imposing any local property tax cap. Acting on a resolution advanced by the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC), the Legislature “urges the Governor and State Legislature not to impose a local property tax cap unless it is coupled with significant cuts in local costs for State mandated programs that cause local property tax increases.” The measure was supported by a vote of 13-1, with Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera voting no and Will Burbank excused.

The action notes that, while Governor Paterson and many State legislators support a cap on property tax levies of 4% or 120% of inflation, whichever is less, current tax cap proposals do nothing to reduce or eliminate current state mandates on counties or prevent new mandates. With state mandates and other fixed costs making up as much as 80% of a typical county budget and counties’ responsibility for local delivery of state services, the measure predicts that “arbitrarily capping property taxes without addressing root causes would cripple county governments within a few short years because all non-mandated spending would have to be eliminated to meet the cap.” The action notes that simply capping property taxes does nothing to reduce the cost of State services that counties must pay for and that, while the property tax cap proposal allows local boards to override the cap by two-thirds majority vote, such an action not only shifts costs to local governments, but also unfairly shifts blame to local leaders for tax increases actually caused by the State.

An alternate resolution, advanced earlier by Legislator Peter Stein, would have asked the State, should the NYSAC measure not be accepted, to cap all mandates on counties at the 2010 level as part of any local property tax cap, which failed by a 4-9 vote, with Legislators Stein, Pat Pryor, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and Carol Chock voting in favor. Legislator Stein suggested this approach would more likely to be accepted by the State. Many legislators thanked Stein for taking initiative on the issue. His suggested alternate approach will be communicated to NYSAC by letter, along with the Legislature’s resolution.

Contact: Legislator Peter Stein, 266-7579; Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.

Legislature Accepts Federal Grant for Solid Waste Management Division

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Will Burbank was absent), accepted a \$29,500 “Reduce-Reuse-Recycle-Rebuy in Schools Grant” awarded by the federal Environmental Protection Agency to the Solid Waste Management Division. The grant, which involves a \$3,000 local match of cash and in-kind services, will support a pilot program to strengthen “4Rs” practices in Tompkins County schools.

Contact: Barbara Eckstrom, Manager, Solid Waste Management Division, 273-6632; Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 257-7453.

O.U.R.S. Teen & ‘Tween Leadership Council Recognized as Distinguished Youth

Participants in a Dryden youth leadership program serving those living in local mobile home parks are recognized as this month’s Tompkins County Distinguished Youth. The O.U.R.S (Opportunity Understanding Respect Success) Teen and ‘Tween Leadership Council works with Cornell University volunteer mentors (Y.O.U.R.S. – Youth Outreach Undergraduates Reshaping Success) to build life skills, a Dryden Youth Services

program affiliated with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County. The council members are specifically recognized for the Hanshaw Village Community Build Project which, through a grant-funded joint effort involving the park landlord, parents and guardians, and tenants, improved green space behind tenants' mailboxes into a safe and beautiful play and gathering area. Over four weekends, the youth-led project constructed and installed two picnic tables, benches, a shelter, a homemade tire swing, and a geo-dome climber. The letter of nomination from program manager Julie Neumann notes the project "has built relationships across diversity, developed skills, and beautified their home." The Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by A&B Awards and Engraving, Bangs Ambulance Service, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.
Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.

Among other business:

- Five people addressed the Legislature under Privilege of the Floor urging that the County's matching funds to support municipal youth development programs be preserved as part of the 2011 budget, three of them young people who told Legislators how those programs have benefited them.
- Caroline Town Supervisor Don Barber, Chair of the Tompkins County Council of Governments, told Legislators municipal officials have begun discussing how they could respond to elimination of County youth program funding. While he said some larger municipalities believe they could go it alone, Barber cautioned that would not be an option for Caroline and other smaller municipalities. Barber urged that the County and municipalities work together to develop a plan to transition from the current approach to what is found workable to support the programs in the future. And he noted that the destiny of local youth programs is actually a byproduct of the State's funding priorities, which badly need to be changed.

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