



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **November 3, 2010** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Adopts 2011 Budget Amendments

The Tompkins County Legislature, by a vote of 14-1, formally adopted amendments to the 2011 tentative budget, as recommended by its Expanded Budget Committee. Legislator David McKenna voted no, but several other legislators made it clear they were voting in favor of the package at this point so that it could be sent on for review by the public and comment at the Legislature's public hearing on the budget next Monday, November 8.

The recommended budget would raise the tax levy (the total amount of property tax revenue needed to balance the budget) by 5.98%. The countywide average tax rate in the recommended amended budget would increase by 7.9%, to \$6.47 per thousand dollars assessed property value, an increase of \$75.30 for the average \$160,000 home.

Before adopting the recommended amended budget, Legislators made four changes to the package forwarded by the Expanded Budget Committee, including reductions which decreased the proposed tax levy increase to under 6%:

- Legislators, by a vote of 13-2, removed \$43,335, which had been restored two days earlier, for a supervising psychologist position in the Mental Health Department at half-time. It was suggested the department might redirect funding for a long-vacant deputy commissioner position to support that staff need.
- By a 13-1 vote, Legislators moved to reduce rollover for the Department of Social Services by \$100,000, applying the money to the budget to provide property tax relief. (A proposal to adjust sales tax projections, as an alternative, by the same amount, failed by a vote of 1-14.)
- Legislators restored \$24,360 in one time funding, supported through rollover, to support a half-time administrative assistant position at the Health Department, approved by a vote of 12-3.
- \$35,000 in one time funding was restored for the Learning Web, approved by a 10-5 vote.
- Legislators voted 9-6 to refer to the budget committee for further discussion a proposal from Legislator Peter Stein which would have directed the County Administrator to not allow either one or two non-essential positions to be filled next year, with the goal of reducing the tax levy increase by .25% .

Legislature Chair Martha Robertson thanked budget chair Jim Dennis, County Administration and all department heads for their work on the budget in a very difficult year, and budget chair Dennis also expressed his appreciation to his fellow legislators for their tremendous effort.

The amended package, now known as the Legislative Tentative Budget, replaces Administrator Joe Mareane's tentative budget as the basis of budget deliberations. The Legislature will hold the public budget hearing on Monday, November 8, beginning at 7 p.m. at Legislature Chambers. The final budget adoption vote is scheduled at the Legislature's next meeting on Tuesday, November 16. The amended budget will be available

for review online at the County website at www.tompkins-co.org (click on “County Budget”) with paper copies available at the County Legislature office at the County Courthouse and at County Administration, 125 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

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

Broadband Committee Created

The Legislature approved creation of a Broadband Committee and the appointment of 20 people to serve on it. The advisory committee is charged with assessing broadband infrastructure investment, deployment, and adoption opportunities countywide and making recommendations for improved broadband access and affordability. The committee, chaired by Legislator Pat Pryor, will focus areas including economic development, government performance, public safety/emergency medical services, telehealth, equity in education, energy and the environment, rural broadband access, and civic engagement.

The committee was approved by a 13-1 vote, with Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera voting no and Legislator Dooley Kiefer excused; the appointments were approved by a vote of 11-2, with Legislators Herrera and Frank Proto opposed, and Legislators Kiefer and Jim Dennis excused. Legislator Luz Herrera expressed concern about whether sufficient attention had been paid to ensure a diverse make-up of the committee; Legislator Proto inquired whether any conditions had been set to avoid potential conflict of interest for members who might potentially benefit from the committee’s recommendations. Committee chair Pryor assured that racial, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity were important considerations in forming the committee, and that members will be bound by the County Code of Ethics in fulfilling their advisory responsibilities.

After six months, the committee will deliver an interim report to the Government Operations Committee summarizing its activities and key issues identified that affect broadband accessibility and affordability. It will also make specific findings and recommendations for the Legislature to consider.

Contact: Legislator Patricia Pryor, Chair of the Broadband Committee, 319-0507; Michael Lane, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440; Deputy County Administrator Paula Younger, 274-5551.

Legislature Declines to Comment on Pending Federal Water Quality Mandate

Legislators discussed, but declined to take a stand on new clean water regulations for the Chesapeake Bay watershed and a dispute between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the State Department of Environmental Conservation. Amidst uncertainty concerning two alternate proposed resolutions, one of which was believed not to be final, legislators declined by a 5-8 vote to register official comment by the November 8 deadline. Legislators Frank Proto, Mike Lane, Brian Robison, Pat Pryor, and Dave McKenna voted in favor (Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Jim Dennis were excused). Legislator Proto, who will submit comment as chair of the County’s Water Resources Council, said the DEC is concerned that EPA is asking it to oversee on behalf of New York State discharge level requirements that are impossible for the state to meet, and is asking for delay in implementing the water quality restrictions.

Contact: Legislator Frank Proto, 277-4875.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- As part of a statewide effort to educate the public on effects of mandates and proposed property tax cap legislation, was briefed by County Administrator Joe Mareane on the proposed New York State property tax cap. The Administrator noted that nine major mandates account for 90% of the local tax burden for taxpayers across the state and represent about three-quarters of the total tax levy in the proposed 2011 County budget. For true property tax relief, he said, there must be a change in the way services are delivered and paid for and that mandates must be controlled or eliminated.
- Reappointed Democratic Elections Commissioner Stephen DeWitt to a new two-year term, effective January 1, 2011.

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