



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **November 16, 2010** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Adopts 2011 Tompkins County Budget

The Tompkins County Legislature tonight adopted the County's 2011 budget and the County's capital program for the next five years, concluding two-and-a-half months of budget deliberations. The adopted budget is identical to the amended tentative budget approved by legislators earlier this month. It increases the County tax levy by 5.98% and the countywide average tax rate by 7.9% to \$6.47 per thousand. The budget passed by a vote of 11-4, with Legislators Kathy Luz Herrera, Mike Lane, Pam Mackesey, and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no.

Budget chair Jim Dennis noted that the budget adds roughly \$350,000—or nearly 1% on the levy—to the tentative budget prepared by County Administrator Joe Mareane to meet the Legislature's 5% tax levy goal, to support what he described as some of the most critical programs in the county to benefit the people who need them the most. Reflecting on the budget and the difficult process of developing it during more than an hour of discussion preceding the adoption vote, even many legislators who ended up approving the budget said they are not happy about it—that while its reductions pose challenges for departments working to deliver services, it will be difficult for property owners and taxpayers, especially considering the compound effect of the County's tax increase with those of other taxing jurisdictions. Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Pat Pryor both maintained the budget fails to include sufficient funding to maintain roads and infrastructure, and several expressed concern that the County's budget challenges will likely become even greater next year. Since a 12% tax levy increase would have been required to maintain current programs, Legislator Brian Robison remarked the tax levy could be seen either as a near 6% increase or as a 6% decrease from what has been done before.

Legislator Mike Lane said he believes the Legislature has not done its very best—that he did not support a goal as high as 5%, that people are struggling and the County needs to go back to basics. Lane proposed the only budget amendment, which failed by a vote of 2-13 (he and Legislator Mackesey voting in favor), which would have reallocated \$200,000 in departmental rollover to the fund balance to reduce the tax levy.

Legislators Pryor and Peter Stein, both completing their first year of the county budget process, expressed concern over what they see as ambiguity in the final steps of the budget process and were among those who said the Legislature should have been more committed to the 5% levy goal. Legislator Luz Herrera suggested that, while administration and departments did their part in meeting the goal, legislators did not.

Both Legislator Pam Mackesey and Legislature Chair Martha Robertson said the time has come to band together and push back against unfunded state mandates that have the greatest effect on the budget and tax levy. "This government has been responsible; these are the toughest decisions we have ever had to make," Chair Robertson said, and she called passage of the budget "a relief, but not really something to celebrate."

Comparison of 2010 and 2011 adopted Tompkins County budgets:

Local Share (spending on local programs; revenue raised from the local community, primarily through property and sales tax):

2010: \$73,959,890

2011: \$74,961,766 (Percent change: 1.35)

Property Tax Levy (total amount to be collected from owners of taxable property):

2010: \$38,309,070

2011: \$40,600,519 (Percent change: +5.98)

Property Tax Rate (countywide average amount per \$1,000 of assessed property value):

2010: \$6.00

2011: \$6.47 (Percent change: +7.90)

Tax change on a \$160,000 home \$75.30

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

2011 Solid Waste Fee Established

The Legislature, by unanimous vote set the 2011 Solid Waste Annual Fee, which holds the fee at its current rate of \$56.00 per billing unit. As in the past, single-family residences, mobile homes, and churches are charged as one billing unit. The action also establishes charges for other types of property, such as colleges, recreational, and health care facilities, whose charges are governed by formula. Legislator Mike Lane proposed an amendment that would have decreased the fee to \$55.00 per unit, which failed by a 1-14 vote (only Lane voting in favor). Lane maintained that in this difficult tax year, the Legislature should limit the fee as much as possible to reduce the fee as much as possible. Solid Waste Manager Barbara Eckstrom told legislators setting the fee at \$56.00 represents a prudent long-term approach in maintaining the division's fund balance.

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

Bonding Authorized for Transonic Systems Project

The Legislature approved the issuance of up to \$4.5 million in tax-exempt private activity bonds by the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency to support expansion of Transonic Systems' headquarters, located at the Warren Road Business Park in Lansing. The bonding will support a 30,000 square foot addition to the building, as well as improvements to the current structure and new equipment. Transonic Systems, founded more than 25 years ago by a Cornell researcher, manufactures devices that measure blood flow in human and animal surgery and research. The private activity bonds do not create a financial obligation for the County or the IDA; but qualify Transonic for a lower interest rate, since buyers of the bonds do not have to pay federal or state income tax on interest earned.

Contact: Pamela Mackesey, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-6203; Michael Stamm, President, Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency, 273-0005.

Ulysses Students Recognized for Summer Service Projects

The Legislature recognized six students from the Town of Ulysses as this month's Tompkins County Distinguished Youth. Paul Kenjerska, Chris Sibley, Maliki Whitford, Nadia Roberts, Brian English, and Boon Herden are members of the Trumansburg/Ulysses Youth Services Summer Squad 2010. The students, nominated by program manager Carissa Mann Parlato, are recognized for community service projects including cleaning up the Montessori school, refinishing benches on Trumansburg's Main Street, planting seeds for an elementary school garden, cleaning up the "children's village" on Main Street, and stickering cases of alcohol at local stores to build awareness for the summer "Sticker Shock" campaign. The Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by A&B Awards and Engraving, Bangs Ambulance, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.

Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Authorized the County to apply for a grant from the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation under the Green Innovation Grant Program to support construction of a pilot on-site wetland to treat leachate from the closed Caswell Road landfill. The grant would cover up to 95% of the projected \$104,000 cost.
- Awarded the firm Loomacres of Warrenton, NY the contract to conduct a mandated wildlife hazard assessment at Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport, following a deer-aircraft accident on the runway July 25. Nearly all of the more than \$89,000 cost will be supported through federal and state sources, the remainder through airline fees.

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