



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Legislature Supports IDA Bonding for Lansing Development

The Legislature, after two hours of thoughtful discussion, provided the approval needed for the County's Industrial Development Agency (IDA) to proceed further in considering bonding for a mixed use development project in the Village of Lansing, adjacent to the Shops at Ithaca Mall. The vote was 8-6, with Legislators Peter Stein, Will Burbank, Carol Chock, Dooley Kiefer, Pam Mackesey, and Legislature Chair Martha Robertson (who also chairs the IDA) voting no and Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera excused.. Action was based on a member-filed resolution from Legislator Jim Dennis. Last week, the Legislature's Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee, in a split vote, failed to recommend an identical measure to the full Legislature.

The action authorizes the IDA to issue up to \$2.3 million in Recovery Zone Exempt Facility Bonds for the Arrowhead Ventures project and to make available dedicated payments under a payment-in-lieu-of-tax (PILOT) financing agreement (known as PILOT increment financing) to support debt service on the bonds or other qualifying project costs. The project, proposed by the Triax Management Group, would include a BJ's Wholesale Club, 12 units of senior housing, and expansion of a reclaimed wetland for bird habitat—the senior housing and wetland development elements required by the Village of Lansing. The recovery zone bonds, made available as part of the federal stimulus program, expire at year's end. The IDA must still approve the financing. All taxing authorities in question also need to approve the increment financing, with the Ithaca School Board yet to act.

Debate before the vote reflected the difficulty of the decision for many Legislators. Legislator Chock and Chair Robertson were among those who questioned the public benefit the project would create to justify the tax abatement financing and, with developers maintaining that the PILOT financing arrangement would assist with the housing portion of the project, not retail, providing an abatement for 12 senior housing units. And while they were assured repeatedly that BJ's was not receiving the benefit and would pay taxes and market rental rates, several expressed concern that it might set a troubling precedent for the IDA, which has not provided incentives for big-box retail. Several said they had started out skeptical about the project, but in the end found they couldn't ignore the projected economic benefits to the county, both through as much as \$750,000 projected in sales tax revenue (recapturing sales now occurring outside the county) and the construction and retail jobs the project is expected to create.

A proposal to separate the bonding and increment financing portions of the action failed by a vote of 5-9. IDA president Michael Stamm said approving the bonds without the financing arrangement would kill the project.

Among a dozen people addressing the Legislature prior to the vote were City of Ithaca officials including Mayor Carolyn Peterson, who expressed city concerns over tax abatements for retail, and Lansing Village Mayor Don Hartill, who called the project important to the community's well-being.

IDA action is scheduled at a special meeting Monday, December 13.

Contact: Legislator James Dennis, 387-4058; Legislature Chair Martha Robertson, Chair of the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency, 274-5434 or 272-0584.

Legislators Support Federal Law to Change Terminology for “Developmentally Disabled”

The Legislature urged support of pending federal bills, commonly known as “Rosa’s Law,” which ask that all references to “mental retardation” be amended to “developmental disabilities.” The action, approved without dissent with Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera excused, urges that all federal, state, and local governments amend references to “mentally retarded” and “mental retardation” to “people who are developmentally disabled” and “people with a developmental disability.” Clinical language regarding developmental disabilities has changed, it was noted, and such “people-first” language is widely used, and considered as acceptable, and appropriate terminology, included by the New York State, while the outmoded terms are often used in a way to discriminate against people with developmental disabilities. The Tompkins County Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee and the Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee of the Tompkins County Mental Health Board also join in the recommendation and also urge the County to update the terminology in all titles and documents.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget and Capital Committee, 387-4058, Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, 277-510, Chair, Tompkins County Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

Legislature Requests Continued Sales Tax Authorization

By a vote of 13-1 (Legislator Frank Proto voting no and Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera excused), requested State authorization to extend the additional one percent sales tax rate in Tompkins County, which expires at the end of next year, such authorization requested and received since 1991. Under state law, the authorization, beyond the 3% authorization possessed by counties by law, must be approved by the Legislature every two years. The measure notes that should the additional one percent authority expire, it would require a more than \$10 million reduction in County expenditures or a 25% increase in County property tax rates, and would also significantly affect other county municipalities. The current tax authority expires as of November 30, 2011.

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

Among other actions, the Legislature:

- As a standard year-end precautionary measure, delegated to Finance Director David Squires authorization to issue and sell \$10 million in revenue anticipation notes, if needed, in anticipation of receipt of state aid during the 2011 fiscal year. The vote was unanimous, with Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera excused.
- Approved the Fall 2010 round of tourism program grants in three grant programs, funded entirely through Room Occupancy Tax: Community Celebrations grants; Fall 2010 Tourism Marketing and Advertising Grants; and Tourism Project Grants. It also continued the designation of the Ithaca/Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau as the county’s tourism promotion agency.
- Awarded AMSTAR of Western, New York, Inc., of Cheektowaga, NY the contract for county bridge painting for its \$740,000 bid, pending approval by the State Department of Transportation, and Scale Service and Supply Co, Inc., of Rensselaer, NY, the contract for inbound and outbound scale replacement at the Solid Waste Management Division for its bid of \$259,010.
- Approved a number of year-end resolutions, including scheduling of the Legislature’s 2011 organizational meeting on Tuesday, January 4, 2011.

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