



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer  
607-274-5555, Office  
607-227-2152, Cell  
January 18, 2011  
THREE PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **January 18, 2011** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Chair Announces Committee Assignments and Appointments for 2011**

The Legislature's committee structure will remain much the same for the coming year, but Chair Martha Robertson's committee assignments and appointments contain several key changes. Regarding chairmanships, Carol Chock will succeed Dooley Kiefer as chair of the Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, and Peter Stein will replace Nathan Shinagawa as chair of Public Safety. Shinagawa, as vice chair of the budget committee, which has been renamed Budget, Capital, and Personnel, has been asked to take special leadership responsibility to focus on the committee's personnel issues, especially the need to make real progress in diversifying the County's workforce. Jim Dennis will continue to chair the budget committee in 2-11; Mike Lane Government Operations, Frank Proto Health and Human Services, and Pam Mackesey Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality. The Capital Plan Review Committee, with Legislature Chair Robertson continuing as chair, will continue as a special committee in 2011, with Leslyn McBean-Clairborne continuing as chair of the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and Pat Pryor continuing to chair the Broadband Committee, with Dave McKenna serving as vice chair.

Among suggested committee goals, Chair Robertson suggests the budget committee work with County Administration to take a fresh look at the Legislature's budget process; that Facilities and Infrastructure look toward ways to improve communications with the public about road and construction projects; that Government Operations define a transparent and inclusive process for redistricting, considering establishment of an independent body to tackle that important task. Among her recommendations, Robertson suggests the planning committee focus to a greater extent on economic development, with greater engagement with the Workforce Development, Tompkins County Area Development, and others involved in creating jobs and supporting economic activity; that Public Safety review data on speeding on county roads and develop ideas to mitigate the problem; and that Health and Human Services participate in the process of advising the state and the New York State Association of Counties on Medicaid and other mandates, oversee the move by the Office for the Aging, and recommend action on the future of the County's Certified Home Health Agency.

*Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.*

#### **Gail Holst-Warhaft Named Poet Laureate**

Legislature Chair Martha Robertson has appointed Gail Holst-Warhaft as Tompkins County Poet Laureate for 2011. Born in Australia, the new Poet Laureate brings to the position a diverse background, including experience as a journalist, broadcaster, writer, academic, musician, poet, and translator. An adjunct professor of Near Eastern Studies, Comparative Literature and Classics at Cornell University, Holst-Warhaft currently directs a program of Mediterranean Studies.

"It's a delight to welcome Gail Holst-Warhaft as our newest Poet Laureate!" said Chair Robertson. "Among a number of highly qualified nominees, Gail stood out for the diversity of her work and the eloquent power of her poetry. I look forward to seeing the special touch that she will bring to this important post. "I also want to thank the panel who made this selection: Brett Bossard of the Community Arts Partnership, two of our past Poets Laureate, Paul Hamill and Michelle Courtney Berry, our 2010 Laureate Jay Leeming, Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and former Chair of the Legislature Stuart Stein."

Among the new Poet Laureate's many publications are *Road to Rembetika* (1975) (4th edition 2006. Translated into Greek, French, Turkish, German and Hebrew), *Theodorakis: Myth and Politics in Modern Greek Music* (Hakkert, Amsterdam, 1980), *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (Routledge, 1992), *The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses* (Harvard U.P., 2000), *I Had Three Lives: Selected Poems of Mikis Theodorakis* (2005), and *Penelope's Confession* (poems, 2007). She has published translations of Aeschylus, and of a number of well-known modern Greek poets and prosewriters, including Nikos Kavadias, Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, Iakovos Kambanellis, and Alki Zei. Her poems and translations of Greek poetry have appeared in journals in the US (*The Literary Imagination*, *Bookpress*, *Seneca Review*, *Antipodes*) the U.K. (*Agenda*, *Stand*), Australia (*Southerly*) and Greece (*Poetry Greece*). Her first collection of poems, *Penelope's Confession*, was published by Cosmos Books (New Jersey and Athens) in 2007.

In Ithaca, Holst-Warhaft was a founding member, in the early 1980's of O.S.I.P. (Organization for the Singing of International Poetry), a group that lasted for 10 years and was comprised of poets and scholars working on translations of poetry from other languages. Later, she joined other local groups including Ithaca Poets, Madeleine's Poets, and Aladdin's Lunch. She was Poetry Editor of *Bookpress*, and has given a number of readings in Ithaca, New York, San Francisco and Athens. Most recently, with John McDermott, she gave the 2010 annual 'Poets in the Garden' annual reading at McCulloch Hall in Morristown, New Jersey. She won the *Poetry Greece Award* in 2001 for her poem *Three Landscapes*, and the Van der Bovenkamp award from Columbia University's Translation Center, in 1984 for her translations of the collected poems of Nikos Kavadias. *Penelope's Confession*, her first collection of poems, published in New Jersey and Athens, is a bilingual edition with translations into Greek by several Greek poets and by Holst-Warhaft herself.

The new Poet Laureate calls Ithaca "one of the most fortunate cities in the United States" in terms of poetry, with a lively local poetry scene and nationally acclaimed poets on the faculty at both Cornell and Ithaca College, who have inspired hundreds of young poets. As Poet Laureate, Holst-Warhaft says she will work to build greater interaction between the local poetry scene and poets who teach at the colleges; organize events combining poetry and music; showcase the poetry of immigrant communities in the County; support the efforts of Ithaca City of Asylum to keep Ithaca a refuge for persecuted writers, and work with the Ithaca school district to bring poets into the schools.

The Community Arts Partnership coordinated the nomination process for the position of Tompkins County Poet Laureate. Further information about the new Poet Laureate and the poet laureate program may be found at the organization's web site at <http://www.artspartner.org/content/view/tompkins-co-poet-laureate.html>.  
*Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.*

### **Contract Awarded to Examine County Certified Home Health Agency**

The Legislature provided the approval needed to conduct an expert review of the County's Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA). The Legislature, by unanimous vote, awarded the firm of Jack Venesky, CPA & Associates, of Syracuse, the contract to support the first phase of the study, at a cost not to exceed \$17,500, which will assist the County in identifying ways to improve efficiencies, identify internal cost controls, and ways to maximize revenues for operation and management of the agency. The project is intended to help the County objectively examine the range of financial and operating options to increase agency efficiency and decrease costs, while preserving the quality of services to clients.

Funds to support the study were set aside in the 2011 budget to support the study to help determine whether the County can continue to operate the CHHA without the current \$400,000 annual property tax subsidy.  
*Contact: Frank Proto, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 277-4875; Brenda Grinnell Crosby, Interim Public Health Director, 274-6674.*

### **Housing Funds Directed to Two Local Projects**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote with Legislator Carol Chock abstaining, disbursed \$215,000 from the Housing Fund, as recommended by the Fund's Program Oversight Committee, to help support two affordable housing programs in the county. The Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services Community Housing Trust was awarded a \$140,000 grant to assist in development of seven units of energy-efficient scattered site housing

located in the City of Ithaca, to be sold to low-income first time homebuyers, providing a development subsidy of \$20,000 per unit, one of several subsidies that enable affordability. Better Housing for Tompkins County received a \$75,000 loan to help support preliminary expenses for development of an 80-unit multi-family affordable housing development on Northwoods Drive in Lansing.

The Community Housing Affordability Program and Community Housing Trust Program, collectively known as the Housing Fund, are a joint effort of Tompkins County, the City of Ithaca and Cornell University and will help communities and organizations throughout Tompkins County respond to the diverse affordable housing needs of their residents. Projects must include units of affordable housing for low and moderate income households.

The Legislature, in a separate vote, also determined that award of the funds would not produce an adverse environmental impact.

*Contact: Pamela Mackesey, Chair, Planning , Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-6203.*

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Approved, without dissent, amended bylaws for the Tompkins County Community Mental Health Services Board. The amendments incorporate “people first” language amend use of the terms “mentally retarded” and “mental retardation” to “developmentally disabled’ and “developmental disability” in any titles and documents.
- Heard a report from County Administrator Joe Mareane highlighting the many accomplishments of County departments during 2010, which the administrator said is especially significant considering the constraints departments were under during the year. The accomplishments summary will be posted online at <http://www.tompkins-co.org/ctyadmin> .

- END -