



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **February 15, 2011** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislators Express Ongoing Concern About Impending Property Tax Cap

Calling this “a critical time for counties,” Legislature Chair Martha Robertson told her colleagues that representatives of the State’s 62 counties attending last week’s conference of the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) were united in their concern about the property tax cap proposed by the Governor and approved by the State Senate—legislation that fails to provide any relief from the mandates counties face. Robertson maintained it is time for the State to take responsibility for its own decisions, instead of shifting more and more of the cost to the property tax. “We are very concerned,” said Robertson, “and everything we heard at NYSAC made us even more concerned.”

County Administrator Joe Mareane said that the message that the County has been sending to officials in Albany is that, by capping property taxes without mandate relief and being unwilling to consider “home rule” revenue requests such as the County’s request to increase the Mortgage Recording Tax, the State will prevent counties from continuing the balanced approach they use to cope with increased costs. “There must be a concerted discussion on real mandate relief,” he said, related to the bills counties are “sent every year and directed to pay.”

Predicting that this year’s budget landscape will be very different, Legislator Brian Robison urged that the Legislature seek input from constituents, since it will be important for legislators to determine spending priorities. Legislator Will Burbank agreed that the community must pay attention a lot earlier than budget season, since the Legislature will have to make “some very tough decisions” that could impact programs. Legislator Dooley Kiefer said that it’s residents legislators must be worried about, and the services people want. Robertson noted that suggestions being advanced to address the tax cap will take time to implement and that mandates need to be changed before the cap is in place—a cap that excludes pension costs, for example, she said, would help “in real time,” as mandates are being reformed. Both Robertson and Legislator Nathan Shinagawa urged support for the so called “millionaire’s tax;” Legislator Frank Proto urged that all the taxing districts in Tompkins County begin to collaborate now, to seek common ground to come up with a long-term solution, which Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne added must include a common view of what level of tax increases all entities can collectively live with. Through advocacy, collaboration, and education, Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera expressed confidence that the Legislature will be able to meet this difficult challenge.

Written information presented to Legislators also provided additional detail on expected budget impacts on the County should the Governor’s budget be adopted. The outline of Administrator Mareane’s presentation on 2011 State Budget and Legislative Issues may be reviewed online at <http://www.tompkins-co.org/ctyadmin/Budget/documents/Statebgimpactpres2-11.pdf>.

Contact: *Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.*

Federal Stimulus Grant Approved for Health Department

The Legislature, by unanimous vote accepted more than \$30,000 in federal stimulus funds awarded to the Health Department through the New York State Department of Health. The grant provides supplemental funds to offset local costs of administering the Early Intervention Program. The funds are authorized for such uses as

educational and communications equipment, educational and promotional materials, and educational programming opportunities for staff and providers.

Contact: Brenda Grinnell Crosby, Interim Director of Public Health, 274-6674; Frank Proto, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 277-4875

Marcus Wilkinson Recognized as Distinguished Youth

The Legislature recognized Marcus Wilkinson, a senior at Ithaca's Lehman Alternative Community School as this month's Tompkins County Distinguished Youth. In a nomination letter from LACS principal Joe Greenberg, Wilkinson was recognized as a "lead by example Distinguished Youth." He Wilkinson was recognized especially for his many community service contributions—including support of the community's youth farm initiative, the LACS mentoring and ally program, and leading a mentoring workshop at a national education conference. Marcus has also committed hundreds of hours of community service, which has included working with incarcerated youth at the Lansing Residential Center and with the Freedom School, located on the Akwesasne reservation, which strives to preserve through teaching native Mohawk language and culture. 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 actions, the Legislature:

- Awarded the firm Information Management Associates, of Edison, NJ, the contract to implement an electronic medical records system for the Department of Mental Health Services. The County was awarded a New York State Archives Grant through the Local Government Records management Improvement Fund to help support the program.
- Reappointed Legislators Nathan Shinagawa, Will Burbank, Jim Dennis, and Chair Martha Robertson to new one-year terms on the County Industrial Development Agency, and members Jeff Furman, Dan Cogan, and Larry Baum to new two-year terms, with Legislature Chair Robertson continuing to serve as IDA chair.
- Set two public hearings to take comment on housing, public facilities, and economic development needs related to the 2011 Community Development Block Grant program, administered by the New York State Office of Housing and Community Renewal. The hearings will take place on March 1, 2011 and April 20, 2011—both to be held at Legislative Chambers at the Tompkins County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca, beginning at 5:30 p.m.
- Approved a nearly \$380,000 budget adjustment to salary lines for the Sheriff's Office, reflecting the recent Arbitration Award, covering the period of March 1, 2006 through February 28, 2008. Funds had been set aside in the 2011 budget to provide the required adjustments.

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