



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the April 20, 2011 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislators Mull Future of Legislative Chambers

Legislators began to wrestle with the prospect of moving from their current Chambers, most likely to interim space in the Old Courthouse, following the New York State Court System's request for the County to provide a firm timetable concerning when the Legislature will vacate that space, to make way for a courtroom for the Supreme Court. Legislature Chair Martha Robertson reported on administrative judge Robert Mulvey's discussion last week with the Capital Plan Review Committee, in which he stated the Courts could occupy space with only "minimal renovations," but needed the Legislature to vacate its space as soon as possible. Under the New York State Court Facilities Act counties are mandated to provide whatever space is needed by the Court System.

Several legislators stressed that it's important for the Legislature to move thoughtfully and carefully, paying close attention to what is practical and feasible. Legislator Mike Lane said that money is spent on an retrofitting for an interim solution, following by permanent facilities, such as a Center of Government administrative building, would amount to spending twice. Chair Robertson said she believes an interim move to the Old Courthouse would involve little expense, and stressed that a lot of information must still be gathered before any decision is made. Facilities director Arel LeMaro characterized the Old Courthouse option as a good interim plan. County Administrator Joe Mareane called the decision "a tough call," reminding legislators that, under law, the County could be ordered to do whatever the State wants.

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

Legislature Accepts Climate Showcase Grant

The Legislature formally accepted a more than \$375,000 Climate Showcase Communities grant from the federal Environmental Protection Agency. The County, in partnership with EcoVillage at Ithaca's Center for Sustainability Education, will demonstrate how highly energy-efficient, livable communities can be developed, develop model codes to support such development, and educate public officials, developers, planners, and designers on these techniques. The County was one of only three recipients in the Northeast .

Acceptance came by a vote of 14-1, with Legislator Frank Proto dissenting. Proto said his no vote did not reflect opposition to accepting the funding, but his concern about the potential use of County-owned land that is part of the Biggs property on West Hill for such housing as part of the grant-funded initiative. Proto said he believes the Legislature never formally agreed to such use at the time it was considering the Biggs property in planning for facilities for the Health Department. Planning Commissioner Ed Marx stressed the grant application only indicates the County, working with the Town of Ithaca, with develop a request-for-proposals from prospective developers, in cooperation with the Town of Ithaca, which would seek to demonstrate that private development can incorporate such housing principles. He said that over the three-year grant period, the program would be examined in a thoughtful manner, working closely with the town and incorporating input from neighbors and the community. Legislator Carol Chock was one who congratulated the Commissioner and his staff for succeeding in a very competitive grant process.

Contact: Planning Commissioner Ed Marx, 274-5560; Legislator Frank Proto, 277-4875.

Legislature Receives Annual Sustainability Team Report

The Legislature heard the annual report of accomplishments of the Tompkins County Sustainability Team during 2010. Senior Planner Leslie Schill noted the list of initiatives underway or completed has become quite long, after this team of employees from across the County working on the sustainability issue began five years ago. She characterized those accomplishments as “incredible.” Among the many accomplishments, Facilities director Arel LeMaro reported that energy reduction improvements undertaken four years ago through the Johnson Controls performance contract have so far saved the County \$1.2M in energy costs. Two County buildings, Public Works and the Solid Waste Office, are composting organic waste, diverting about 2 tons of food waste in 2010 from the waste stream. A new three-year contract with Challenge to shred confidential documents for the County is expected to generate 30 tons of recycled material for its first year.

Schill voiced the Sustainability Team’s special thanks to Cheryl Nelson, who spearheaded the group since its inception, for “leading the sustainability charge these last five years all for all of her dedicated work on the County’s behalf.”

Contact: Leslie Schill, Senior Planner , 274-5560.

Vincent Monticello, Jr. Recognized as Distinguished Youth

The Legislature recognized 19-year-old Vincent Monticello, Jr. as this month’s Tompkins County Distinguished Youth, Monticello recognized for his dedicated and selfless service as an emergency responder with the Varna Volunteer Fire Company. Joining the company three years ago, at the age of 16, Vincent has advanced quickly, receiving certifications from numerous training courses. He is the company’s top responder—responding to more than 84% of emergency calls—and has been elected to several officer positions, most recently Assistant Chief, and also serves as an Emergency Medical Technician with Dryden Ambulance. A letter of nomination from the Varna Fire Chief Roy Rizzo calls Vince “the friendliest, most mature and responsible, eager to help, ambitious, committed, highly qualified, enthusiastic, and just-great-to-be-around person I’ve met as a volunteer responder.” A letter from Dryden Town Supervisor Mary Ann Sumner noted, “It is particularly unusual and important to have someone as young as Vince quietly spreading the culture of volunteerism among his peers...Beyond honoring this exceptional young man, we want our community to see what volunteers can do, what young people can do, what young volunteers can do.” 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

- Appropriated more than \$340,000 in grant funding from the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration to support the 2011-2012 budget for the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council, as provided through contract with the New York State Department of Transportation. Legislators also approved a 1.5% salary increase, to \$78,784, for Staff Director Fernando deAragon, , retroactive to January 1, as approved by the Council. Legislature approval was required since the salary is above the position’s salary range. The director’s salary is supported totally through federal grant funds.
- Authorized the County to submit an up to \$750,000 application under the New York State Community Development Block Grant Program for 2011. The funding, through Better Housing for Tompkins County and Tompkins Community Action, would support a comprehensive rehabilitation program in homes of low to middle income county residents to replace dilapidated roofs and make water and sewer improvements. A public hearing on the proposal was conducted before the vote.
- Awarded more than \$168,000 in tourism program grants, supported through County Room Tax dollars.
- Approved a resolution, sponsored by Legislator Dooley Kiefer, acknowledging the importance of Earth Day and supporting community-wide activities and events marking the day.

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