



Inclusion Through Diversity

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **June 7, 2011** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Sets 2012 Budget Guidelines**

County departments and agencies are being directed to prepare 2012 budget scenarios showing how they would reduce spending by 7.8% and 11.2%, as a starting point in the 2012 County budget process. The fiscal targets, approved by the Legislature without dissent (Legislators Peter Stein and Kathy Luz Herrera were excused), are recommended by both County Administrator Joe Mareane and the Legislature's budget committee as the reductions needed to achieve the 2012 tax levy goal set by the Legislature. The Legislature has directed that the County Administrator deliver a tentative budget that shows what can be supported by a 2% tax levy increase (which would require a \$4.5 million total reduction in locally controlled spending), and by a recommended tax levy increase of 5.4% (requiring a more than \$3 million reduction). Fiscal targets represent the maximum amount of general revenue spending authority that a department may request without initiating an over-target request as part of the budget process.

At the request of Legislator Frank Proto, Administrator Mareane presented Legislators preliminary dollar estimate breakdown of how reductions of 7.8% and 11.2% would affect individual budgeting units. Proto said that information will be helpful as committees begin to review finances for departments that report to them. Legislators Proto, Brian Robison, and Jim Dennis all stressed that the targets are only a starting point, that prioritization is needed, and that many programs cannot survive an across-the-board cut. Legislator Dennis said that, among his personal priorities, he believes that if there is a County program that can be done elsewhere, without taxpayer expense, that is an area the Legislature must carefully review.

The provisions apply to County departments, not-for-profit agency grants, towns and villages seeking reimbursement for countywide services, and human service and criminal justice agencies receiving reimbursement related to the sales tax agreement between the County and City of Ithaca. For County departments, the 2011 fiscal targets must be adjusted to include funding for the required fringe rate increase, then the modified target decreased in the two scenarios by the 7.8% and 11.2%. The action also authorizes the County Administrator to adjust department targets, as needed, to achieve the Legislature's levy goal and states that the Administrator will consult with department heads and division managers before making any needed target reduction.

*Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.*

#### **Legislature Appoints Independent Redistricting Commission**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislators Peter Stein and Kathy Luz Herrera were excused), appointed the nine-member independent commission charged with preparing a recommended reapportionment plan for County legislative districts to present to the Legislature for approval. Appointed to the Commission are Henrik (Hank) Dullea, Linda Duttweiler, John Gutenberger, Michael Hattery, Margaret Hobbie, Daniel Konowalow, Erick Lerner, Sarah Reistetter-Akiri, and Jeffrey True. (Hattery and Lerner are former County legislators; Gutenberger former mayor of the City of Ithaca).

The Legislature appointed Dullea Chair of the Independent Redistricting Commission. Dr. Dullea, Cornell University Vice President for University Relations Emeritus, is a recognized expert on constitutional issues in

state government. He is author of *Charter Revision in the Empire State: The Politics of New York's 1967 Constitutional Convention* and co-editor of *Decision 1997: Constitutional Change in New York*. He has served in a wide variety of governmental and higher education positions in New York State, including eight years as Director of State Operations and Policy Management for Governor Mario Cuomo, where he was responsible for directing the day-to-day activities of more than 65 State departments and agencies.

Legislator Mike Lane, Chair of the Legislature's Government Operations Committee expressed high hopes for the committee, one that is diverse politically and are people "who can work with each other, work with each other, and do the best for our county." Legislature Chair Martha Robertson thanked the Government Operations Committee, commending the committee for all its work in assembling the independent commission, which she called a "standout" in New York State.

*Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440.*

### **Personnel Commissioner Anita Fitzpatrick Reappointed**

The Legislature confirmed County Administrator Joe Mareane's reappointment of Anita Fitzpatrick to a new six-year term as the County's Personnel Commissioner. The vote was 12-1 (Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voted no; Legislators Peter Stein and Kathy Luz Herrera were excused). Fitzpatrick has served as Commissioner since 1993 and has been employed by the County since 1977. Administrator Mareane said told legislators his recommendation follows a "very rigorous" review process, which involved survey of department heads, union leadership, and Personnel Department staff, and produced very positive results. Based on that input and his own annual review, Mareane said he recommends Fitzpatrick's reappointment "very strongly." The administrator expects this approach will be a precedent for future reappointments of this type.

Legislator McBean-Clairborne, who had recalled from the last time the issue was discussed that the Legislature would have a greater role in the review process, stressed that her no vote in no way reflects dissatisfaction with Commissioner Fitzpatrick's performance, saying the Commissioner is doing a "stellar job."

*Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.*

### **Legislature Reconsiders Home Rule Request for D.A. Investigator**

The Legislature reconsidered a measure that failed to win approval at its last meeting and, by a vote of 9-4 (Legislators Mike Lane, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Brian Robison, and Frank Proto voted no; Legislators Peter Stein and Kathy Luz Herrera excused), supported a home rule request that would amend State retirement law to authorize the County to make the new investigator position in the District Attorney's Office eligible for full retirement benefits after 20 years of service without regard to age, as do other such positions across the State. Legislator Nathan Shinagawa, who was excused at the time of the last vote, asked for the matter to be reconsidered so that he could vote on it. Shinagawa called the issue a matter of fairness. District Attorney Gwen Wilkinson offered to delay filling the position and instead put it through the 2012 budget process, if that is what the Legislature desired.

*Contact: Legislator Nathan Shinagawa, 280-7557; Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Vice Chair, Public Safety Committee, 277-5104.*

### **Legislature Joins in Urging Greater Latitude for Local Revenue Requests**

The Legislature, by a vote of 12-1 (Legislator Frank Proto voted no; Legislators Peter Stein and Kathy Luz Herrera were excused), joined its budget committee in asking State officials to establish permanent rate thresholds for five State-authorized county revenue sources, currently subject to State approval through "home rule" requests. The proposal would provide counties the ability to make their own decisions about establishing rates within those thresholds without seeking State approval, most of the recommended thresholds reflecting current reality. The plan recommends a maximum 4% rate for local sales taxes; 0.5% for local Mortgage Recording Taxes; \$1 per \$500 for local deed transfer taxes; \$1 per line per month for land line emergency communications telephone surcharges; and \$1 per month for wireless emergency communications telephone surcharges. Counties, it was noted, would not be forced to adopt the recommended rate, and could still seek special authorization to exceed those rates.

*Contact: Legislator James Dennis, 387-4058.*

### **Legislature Declines to Take a Stand About Proposed Status Change for Cornell Africana Center**

A proposal advanced by Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne which would have expressed official County concern regarding a change in status for Cornell University's Africana Studies and Research Center, failed by a vote of 5-8. The University has announced a decision to change the Center, established more than 40 years ago, from a cross-disciplinary intercollegiate unit, to an academic entity within the College of Arts and Sciences. Legislator McBean-Clairborne was joined in support by Legislators Pam Mackesey, Will Burbank, Carol Chock, and Nathan Shinagawa; Legislators Peter Stein and Kathy Luz Herrera were excused.

The measure would have asked that Cornell administrators consider implications of its proposed realignment, and that it delay the restructuring plan to permit a "meaningful, transparent, and productive dialogue that can lead toward a mutually agreed upon decision." Legislator McBean-Clairborne noted that the issue is not just a University issue, but a community issue, especially in view of the Center's ongoing involvement with this community. Legislator Nathan Shinagawa said that, as a Cornell student, the Center had a significant impact on his life and his service to this community. Several legislators questioned the Legislature's involvement in what could be considered an internal University issue, and expressed concern about process—some indicating the matter should have gone through the Legislature's committee process to incorporate additional viewpoints. Several said they had, or could, support such an expression of concern as individuals, but not as a formal opinion of the Legislature.

*Contact: Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, 277-5104.*

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Approved a contract agreement with HOLT Architects, of Ithaca to provide architectural and design services for the Human Services Annex building renovation project, at a cost not to exceed \$135,000. The building, located in the 200 block of W. Martin Luther King, Jr. Street/W. State Street, will house the County Office for the Aging and another human services-related program.
- Scheduled a public hearing on the Tompkins Cortland Community College 2011-2012 operating budget. The hearing will be held June 21, 2011, beginning at 5:30 p.m. at Legislature Chambers of the County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca.
- By a vote of 9-3 (Legislators David McKenna, Pat Pryor, and Frank Proto dissenting; Legislators Peter Stein and Kathy Luz Herrera excused), allocated \$5,750 from County Room Tax Reserves to the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce, to support the County beautification program.

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