



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **August 16, 2011** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Aging Office/Justice Center Location Question Addressed Through Compromise Plan

Trying to decide among a half-dozen options regarding where to locate the County Office for the Aging (COFA) and the Community Justice Center, the Legislature, after more than an hour of discussion, opted for a seventh alternative, to address the issue, at least for now. By a vote of 12-3 (Legislators Jim Dennis, Mike Lane, and Pat Pryor opposed), Legislators approved a proposal, advanced by Legislator Peter Stein, to renovate the Human Services Annex (the former Carpet Bazaar building on West Martin Luther King, Jr./State Street, which had first been envisioned as the permanent home for COFA) for flexible use; move COFA to that space on a temporary basis; renew the search for alternative permanent locations for Aging and the Community Justice Center; and delay any decision on longer term occupancy in the Annex until review of permanent alternatives is completed.

The action stresses that it is the Legislature's desire to retain both COFA and the Justice Center in suitable permanent downtown locations. It acknowledges the benefits of relocating the Justice Center to the HSA, but notes that COFA must vacate its current space in the County Courthouse by early next year, requiring an interim, temporary location until an alternative permanent location is developed. Upon COFA's relocation to alternate space, the measure states it is the Legislature's intent to relocate the Justice Center to the Annex.

The Legislature's Capital Plan Review Committee last week had examined, but failed to reach agreement on any of the six alternatives—which included moving COFA to the HSA permanently as planned; or relocating it permanently or temporarily to available space at the Health Department; to the former Fall Creek Studios building on North Tioga; to the Old Courthouse (with Planning and the Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council moving to the Health Department); or temporarily to the Old Library. All options other than the original plan to permanently move COFA to the HSA relocated the Justice Center to the Annex. The committee had ended up recommending the Old Courthouse option, but some members had stressed they only voted that way to advance the matter to the full Legislature.

Legislator Jim Dennis sought to substitute a proposal to move COFA to the Health Department permanently, and Legislator Frank Proto asked to substitute the proposal to move COFA permanently to the Human Services Annex, but both those options failed to win support.

Before the issue was considered, eight people addressed the Legislature, all urging that COFA remain in a downtown location. Before the vote, Aging Office Director Lisa Holmes called the decision process complicated but positive, saying she feels seniors have been heard about the importance of keeping services downtown. She believes the option offers functional space, which can be occupied indefinitely until a permanent location is found. Probation Director Pat Buechel said she also believes the decision is the right one and that the Justice Center program can "sit tight right now."

Contact: Legislature Chair Martha Robertson, Chair of the Capital Plan Review Committee, 274-5434 or 272-0584; Legislator Peter Stein, 266-7579.

Legislature Hears Comment, Delays Action on Proposed Road Preservation Law

The Legislature took public comment on the latest version of a proposed Road Preservation Law, that would regulate high intensity truck traffic to protect county roads from damage, but decided to postpone any action until at least its next meeting. Eight people spoke—among them, several who expressed concern that the load limits contained in the law may be too low and need further review.

The law would amend the County Code to regulate certain temporary “high frequency, high-impact truck traffic on County roads from temporary projects—such as but not limited to the type of traffic that would be generated by gas drilling—that would carry the potential to cause “significant and measurable damage to County roads.” The new law, as currently proposed, would apply to traffic of more than 1,000 truck trips to and from a project site over the course of a project, involving trucks with a gross weight of more than 30 tons. The proposal includes the option of voluntary road use agreements as an alternative to the permitting process and excludes agricultural operations; school buses, law enforcement, fire fighting, and military vehicles; and vehicles performing municipal road work.

At the hearing, Bruno Schickel, who has spoken at an earlier public hearing and two public information meetings earlier this year, said he supports the intention of the law, but maintained it needs more revision, predicting it would create “a lot of unintended consequences and negative effects on local businesses. Both he and Dennis Mix, who operates Mix Brothers trucking, said the 1,000 load limit should be increased to 2,500 to avoid unintended impacts.

Government Operations Committee Chair Mike Lane moved to delay consideration until the Legislature’s next meeting September 6, saying he believes the proposed law is a good one, but needs more time to digest the comments. The vote to delay was 11-4, with Legislators Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Kathy Luz Herrera, Dooley Kiefer, and Facilities and Infrastructure Chair Carol Chock voting no. Chock said she had hoped to discuss where the Legislature might be headed; Kiefer questioned what work would be done before the next meeting. Chair Martha Robertson asked that the Facilities and Infrastructure Committee review the proposal again at its September 2 meeting and report back to the Legislature.

Contact: Carol Chock, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 273-9007; Michael Lane, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440.

Legislature Declines to Increase Budget for Ellis Hollow Road Reconstruction

The Legislature, by a narrow margin of 7-8, failed to come forth with the approval needed to appropriate \$93,000 from the Highway Fund Balance to support higher than anticipated cost for the Ellis Hollow Road reconstruction project, reconstructing 1.4 miles of highway in the Town of Dryden. (Legislators Brian Robison, Jim Dennis, Kathy Luz Herrera, Mike Lane, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Dave McKenna, Frank Proto, and Pat Pryor voted no.) Highway officials advised that change orders for the more than \$1.6 million project came in more than the permitted 10% project allowance—in part because of the need to spread the project over two construction seasons—pushing the expected contract value to more than \$1.8 million and requiring extra spending authorization of more than \$76,000. After considerable discussion, the narrow majority of Legislators was unwilling to spend the extra money, which will mean giving up colored road shoulders (a traffic calming mechanism) which would have cost \$100,000, the only cost reduction that could be made to finish the job within existing spending authorization. Some expressed concern about what this would mean for the message that had been sent to the neighborhood, where many had expressed support for the shoulder option, but Mike Lane, Pat Pryor, and others countered that decision must be made in the context of the unprecedented fiscal pressures the County will face for the year ahead.

Contact: Carol Chock, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 273-9007; Legislator Michael Lane, 844-8313 or 844-8440.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Authorized the Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance (MEGA), by a vote of 12-3 (Legislators Dooley Kiefer, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and Kathy Luz Herrera voting no) to bid for gas and electricity on behalf of the County and inclusion of all political subdivisions and districts within the State to

participate, succeeding contracts that terminate next year. Acknowledging that MEGA began in Tompkins County 14 years ago, Legislator Kiefer said she has become uncomfortable that, while it seemed that aggregating to achieve lower energy price saves money, the cheapest energy is also the dirtiest energy, and she does not like Tompkins County's name attached to bids that could be perceived to run counter to the principles of the County's Comprehensive Plan.

- Approved an Aquifer Study Agreement to support mapping needed to prepare for establishment of aquifer and stream corridor protection zones within the Town of Danby, in cooperation with the Town of Danby and the US Geological Survey, as part of the County's 20-year aquifer study capital program. County cost is \$6,825—35% of the total expense of \$19,500.
- Authorized a contract with the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District to implement flood hazard mitigation program projects, at a cost not to exceed \$14,000.
- Appropriated \$158,695 in certified unspent funds (known as “rollover”) from 2010 to departmental accounts of Assigned Council, the Probation Department, Weights and Measures, and the Sheriff's Office— for use in the current year's budget.

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