



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer
607-274-5555, Office
607-227-2152, Cell
September 6, 2011
THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **September 6, 2011** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Administrator Releases 2012 Recommended Budget

Tompkins County Administrator Joe Mareane has delivered to the County Legislature a 2012 Recommended County Budget that maintains needed core services within constrained fiscal targets, responding to the ongoing challenges posed by an uncertain economy. The Recommended Budget calls for a 5.4% increase in the County property tax levy, meeting the Legislature's 2012 tax levy goal.

Despite serious ongoing financial pressures related to the economic downturn, including significant rises in health and pension costs, a \$600,000 increase in Medicaid expense, and an \$800,000 decline in state and federal aid, the Administrator reports the effects of internal savings in several areas have enabled the County, under the Recommended Budget, to maintain most County services at or near present levels, though with a smaller workforce. Savings reflect such factors as reduced utility costs, pension costs slightly lower than expected, and the County's recent decision to divest of its Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA).

The 2012 Recommended Budget supports total expenditures of \$161.3 million (an increase of 1.4%) and local dollar spending of \$77.8 million—a 2.2% increase that reflects diminished State aid. The County tax rate would be \$6.47 per \$1,000 assessed value, resulting in a \$47 increase to the owner of an average \$160,000 home. The budget reduces the County workforce by 3.3% (24 full-time equivalent positions). With these reductions, the County will have reduced its personnel roster by 68 positions (8.7%) since 2009, representing an ongoing annual savings of \$4.8 million.

The Property Tax Cap:

As requested by the Legislature, the budget's starting point is the level of spending that can be supported within the State's 2% property tax cap. Permitted adjustments for modest "carve-outs" for tax base growth and a small portion of pension cost increases are estimated to increase the County's tax cap to 2.92%, providing \$1.2 million in taxing authority. In a budget message accompanying the budget document, Mareane advises the "Cap Budget" would require \$1.5 million in spending cuts, affecting what he considers essential services. In conjunction with his Recommended Budget, the Administrator will submit a proposed local law to authorize the County to exceed the cap—an action that will require a public hearing and support of 60% of the Legislature.

The Recommended Budget:

The 2012 Recommended Budget incorporates several Over Target Requests (OTRs) that, taken together, require a 5.4% (or \$2.2 million) increase in the property tax levy.

While it allows the County to maintain most programs and services, the Recommended Budget does not include \$400,000 in restorations requested by departments. The Administrator cautions that significant reductions will still be required under his Recommended Budget—in areas including the highway paving program, child welfare programs affected by state aid cuts, support for Human Services Coalition agencies, and other programs. The Recommended Budget supports a few new initiatives—including those at the departments of Health and Mental Health—that are focused on higher efficiency, productivity, and customer service. Apart from a more than \$400,000 temporary draw on reserves to support the County CHHA until a sale is finalized, the budget does not rely on significant use of "onetime" funding for ongoing expenses. The budget does recommend

approximately \$438,000 in reserves and \$305,000 in department rollover expense be applied to support various non-recurring costs.

“The Recommended Budget reflects the best efforts of the Department of Administration, department heads, and staff to maintain essential programs at an affordable cost to taxpayers,” Administrator Mareane states. “I especially recognize our department heads for identifying internal savings that have enabled needed programs to be sustained across the entire County organization. I look forward to working with the Legislature to ensure the final budget allocates available resources to areas of highest priority and greatest need.”

Legislators will review the recommended budget in detail at the first meeting of the County’s Expanded Budget Committee (any legislator may participate) on Monday, September 12, beginning at 4:00 p.m. in Legislature Chambers at the Tompkins County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca—the first in a series of meetings that will continue through September and October. At these meetings, departments and agencies will have the opportunity to explain their budget requests and how programs would be affected by the recommended budget. The Expanded Budget Committee will accept or alter the Tentative Budget, and will present to the Legislature the Tentative Budget with its recommended changes. The Legislature then will vote on whether to accept the changes, and the amended Tentative Budget will be presented to the public for comment.

Among initiatives to inform the public about the budget and gather input while the Expanded Budget Committee’s deliberations are in process, the County will sponsor its annual public information meeting on the Tentative Budget on Monday, September 26, beginning at 7:00 p.m., at the Tompkins County Public Library, Borg Warner Room, 101 E. Green Street, Ithaca. The formal public hearing to accept comment on the amended Tentative Budget will be scheduled in November 2, prior to the final budget adoption vote.

Public copies of the 2012 Tentative Budget are available at the County Administration office, 125 East Court Street, and at the Office of the County Legislature, 320 North Tioga Street. As of Wednesday, September 7, the document also will be posted on the County website at www.tompkins-co.org, where the public also is invited to comment on the budget.

Contacts: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.

Legislature Schedules Hearing on Proposed Tax Cap Local Law

The Legislature, by a vote of 10-5, scheduled a public hearing on a proposed local law that would authorize the Legislature, if needed, to override the tax levy limit for 2012. (Legislators Peter Stein, Pam Mackesey, Dave McKenna, Frank Proto, and Pat Pryor voted no.) The hearing is scheduled for the Legislature’s next meeting Tuesday, September 20, beginning at 5:30 p.m., at Legislature Chambers, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca.

Supporters for scheduling the public hearing, including Legislators Mike Lane and Brian Robison, stressed that it’s important to get public input on this matter early, and that adopting such a local law, if that happened, would not mean that the final tax levy would necessarily exceed the Property Tax Cap, but would preserve flexibility in balancing all options in the current environment. Other Legislators expressed concern that scheduling the hearing may be premature, Legislator Pryor indicating she’s uncomfortable with taking steps toward a local law when the Legislature has not yet delved into the 2012 budget.

In response to questions on timing, County Attorney Jonathan Wood advised that such a hearing would have to be held no later than October 18 to have any local law in place by the normal mid-November time of passing the budget. To authorize the Legislature to exceed the Cap, the proposed local law would have to be approved by 60% (nine members) of the Legislature.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058

Legislature Adopts Road Preservation Law

Many months after it was first discussed and following two public hearings and several other opportunities for public input, the Legislature, by unanimous vote, adopted a County Road Preservation Law. The law amends the County Code to regulate certain temporary “high-frequency, high-impact truck traffic” that could cause

damage to County roads (such as, but not limited to that related to gas drilling). To trigger the law's system of posting, permitting and bonding, the legislation sets a threshold 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. Exempted from the law are agricultural operations; school buses; law enforcement, fire fighting, and military vehicles; and municipal vehicles engaging in road work on behalf of municipalities.

As in the past, much of the discussion focused on the law's threshold—whether it should be set higher or lower—as well as whether local businesses could be adversely affected. Before the vote, ten local residents spoke in support of the law, many of them suggesting the specified limits be set lower. Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce president Jean McPheeters urged the law not be approved or that provisions be reconsidered to increase the load limits, saying it will impede development undertaken by the area's major employers and will unintentionally harm local business.

Legislator Mike Lane proposed the threshold be increased to 1,250 trips, a measure that failed by a 5-10 vote. Legislator Will Burbank suggested an 800-trip limit, a proposal that failed for lack of a second. Legislator Frank Proto questioned whether an exemption could be incorporated to minimize the impact on local businesses. While there is no such provision, County Attorney Jonathan Wood said he believes pre-determination provisions could be incorporated regarding certain roads as part of the law's implementation.

It was again stressed that the load limit simply triggers the point at which a developer needs to consult with Highway officials and not an automatic requirement to post a bond, with determination of the appropriate bonding and assessment of expected effects developed in discussion between the developer and Highway officials regarding a specific project. The law will take effect as of January 1, 2012—that delay to allow necessary procedures to be put into place.

Facilities and Infrastructure Chair Carol Chock thanked everyone who has been involved in helping to shape the law over the past eight months—staff, businesspeople, and members of the public who have provided input. She remarked, “It has been a very long haul.” Both Chock and Government Operations Chair Mike Lane observed that the extra development time, and the input received, have resulted in a much better law.
Contact: Carol Chock, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 273-9007; Mike Lane, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Among other business, the Legislature

- Approved by a vote of 14-1 (Legislator Frank Proto dissenting) the extension of one-percent sales tax, in effect since December 1992, for two more years, as authorized by New York State, keeping the County sales tax at its current 8% through November 30, 2013.
- Appropriated \$400,000 from the Solid Waste Capital Reserve to support the Recycling and Solid Waste Center capital project—including such additional elements as site drainage repair, pavement work, and expansion of the Center's education room.
- Approved several airport improvement items, including award of bids and approving consulting services for the “apron” expansion, on the condition the availability of funding through the Federal Aviation Administration.
- Heard that Highway officials have found a less durable, experimental treatment has been found to preserve colored shoulders as part of the Ellis Hollow Road reconstruction project and still remain within budget. Administrator Joe Mareane said the project element will permit the County to conduct study the effectiveness of colored shoulders in traffic calming.

- END -