



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Comments Heard on Proposed Tax Cap Override Law

The Legislature took public comment on a proposed local law that would authorize the Legislature, if needed, to override the tax levy limit for 2012 under the New York State property tax cap—a limit that, with permitted adjustments, would limit the tax levy increase to 2.92% in 2012. The proposed law, if approved by 60% of the Legislature (nine Legislators), would not mean that the Legislature will necessarily exceed the cap, but it would preserve override of the cap as an option that the Legislature could consider, at the time it votes on adoption of the budget.

The Legislature heard from two citizens—one in support of the proposed law and one against. Richard Hunter, who grew up in Newfield, owns property there, and wants to move back, told Legislators he cannot afford to because of local increases in school and County taxes year after year. He said the County should not set a precedent of going above the cap in the first year and should instead push back against the State. Richard Flaville, of Lansing, urged the Legislature to override the cap, to preserve the programs that make Tompkins County special.

The Tentative Budget Administrator Joe Mareane presented to the Legislature earlier this month takes what could be supported under the cap as a starting point, but recommends spending that could be supported with a tax levy increase of 5.4%, in line with the Legislature's levy goal. Administrator Mareane has advised Legislators that the \$1.5 million in reductions that would be required under the property tax cap would have adverse effects on what he considers essential services.

The Legislature is scheduled to consider the proposed local law at its next meeting October 4.

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

Legislature Authorizes Bonding for Racker Centers Improvements

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, authorized the Tompkins County Development Corporation to issue up to \$4 million in tax-exempt revenue bonds to support facility improvements at Franziska Racker Centers at its headquarters on Wilkins Road in the Town of Ulysses.

The Legislature's action qualifies the interest payable on the bonds as tax-exempt under the federal Internal Revenue Code and does not involve any financial obligation on the part of Tompkins County. Tompkins County Area Development director Michael Stamm reminded Legislators that the action serves as a conduit to the tax-exempt bond market for local non-profits, so they can get financing at the lower tax-exempt interest rate.

The Tompkins County Development Corporation was formed by the County's Industrial Development Agency, with a primary role of providing bonding support of this type to qualified non-profits, filling the gap left when State legislation authorizing IDAs to issue Civic Facility Revenue Bonds was not renewed three years ago.

The Legislature also, by a 13-2 vote, approved a bylaws change for the Development Corporation that will allow such bonds to be issued to local non-profits for out-of-county projects. (Legislators Kathy Luz Herrera and

Dooley Kiefer voted no.) Legislator Luz Herrera expressed concern that the bonding could potentially benefit out-of-county contractors that would not necessarily abide by local rules regarding employment and wages. Director Stamm assured that all normal regulations will exist for out-of-county projects. *Contact: Pamela Mackesey, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-6203; Legislature Chair Martha Robertson, Chair of Tompkins County Development Corporation, 274-5434 or 272-0584.*

Housing Fund Allocation Approved

The Legislature approved payment of \$200,000 from the Housing Fund to the Holly Creek Townhouses, Phase II project of Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, located on West King Road in the Town of Ithaca. (The vote was unanimous, with Legislator Carol Chock abstaining.) The County serves as fiscal agent for the Housing Fund, supporting real estate development projects primarily benefiting low- and moderate-income households, and jointly funded by Tompkins County, Cornell University, and the City of Ithaca. The County's share of support (\$70,000 for this project) comes from federal Housing and Urban Development program income funds. In a separate action, the Legislature also affirmed that such authorization carries no adverse environmental impact.

Contact: Pamela Mackesey, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-6203

Stephanie Baxendell Recognized as Distinguished Youth

The Legislature recognized Stephanie Baxendell, of Groton, as recipient of this month's Tompkins County Distinguished Youth Award. In their nomination letter, Groton High School principal Barbara Case and National Honor Society advisor Cathy Spallone cite Stephanie's many academic, co-curricular, and community service achievement, calling her "an exemplary student," as well as "a quiet force of compassion and thoughtfulness beyond measure" – a student who always asks, "What can I do to help?" Stephanie is very involved in the performing arts, both in and out of school. She enjoys showing goats and county and state fairs, volunteers for the Cayuga County Fair, and is an active member of her church. She also maintains many home responsibilities, including care of over 100 goats, four horses, and three cows, and works part-time at the Groton Public Library. Stephanie is praised as representing "the high standards of excellence at Groton High School." 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 \$15,000 from the Contingent Fund to support the bail fund for OAR (Opportunities, Alternative, and Resources). OAR director Deborah Dietrich told Legislators bails typically are higher than in the past, and there are often delays in getting bail funds returned by the Courts. She noted the bail forfeiture rate is less than 5%.
- Accepted more than \$122,000 in State Social Services funding under the "Solutions to End Homelessness Program" for 2011. The funding supports contracts with the Learning Web, Human Services Coalition, Catholic Charities, Tompkins Community Action, as well as some County staff costs related to homelessness prevention services.
- Authorized \$40,000 in contracts for a Supervision and Treatment for Juveniles Program within the Department of Social Services.

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