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TWO PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **November 1, 2011** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Adopts 2012 Budget Amendments**

The Tompkins County Legislature, by a vote of 12-3, formally adopted amendments to the 2012 tentative budget, as recommended by its Expanded Budget Committee. (Legislators Dooley Kiefer, Carol Chock, and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voted no). The amended tentative budget will be sent on for review and comment by the public at the Legislature's public hearing on the budget Wednesday, November 9.

The \$161.9 million recommended budget, including \$77.5 million in local dollar spending, would raise the tax levy (the total amount of property tax revenue needed to balance the budget) by 3.99%. The countywide average tax rate in the recommended amended budget would increase by 3.1%, to \$6.67 per thousand dollars assessed property value, an increase of \$31.85 for the average \$160,000 home. The recommended levy increase is just over 1% above the 2.92% level that would be required to fall within the state property tax cap.

Before adopting the recommended amended budget, Legislators considered, but declined to approve, two changes proposed by Legislator Dooley Kiefer:

- A motion to restore \$115,000 to the Department of Social Services budget, to prepare and cover half the future cost of an "extra" weekly Medicaid payment—which the State recently indicated it would move from 2012 to 2013—failed by a 5-10 vote (Legislators Kiefer, Carol Chock, Will Burbank, Pam Mackesey, and Chair Martha Robertson voting in favor).
- A proposal to add \$400,000 to the Highway materials budget in 2012 and again in 2013 failed by a 2-13 margin, Legislators Kiefer and Burbank voting in favor.

Those and other changes may still be considered by Legislators before the final budget adoption vote.

As requested by Legislators at the last Expanded Budget Committee meeting, before the vote on the amended budget County Administrator Joe Mareane also presented information and responded to questions on the Capital Program for the next five years, as part of the County's 20-Year Capital Plan.

The amended package, now known as the Legislative Tentative Budget, replaces Administrator Joe Mareane's tentative budget as the basis of budget deliberations. The Legislature will hold the public budget hearing on Wednesday, November 9, beginning at 7 p.m. at Legislature Chambers. The final budget adoption vote is scheduled at the Legislature's next meeting on Tuesday, November 15. The amended budget will be available for review online at the County website at [www.tompkins-co.org](http://www.tompkins-co.org) (click on "County Budget") with paper copies available at the County Legislature office at the County Courthouse and at County Administration, 125 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

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

### **Five-Year Employment Contract with White Collar Employees Approved**

The Legislature, by a vote of 14-1 (Legislator Frank Proto voted no) ratified a five-year collective bargaining agreement between the County and Civil Service Employees Association Local 855 (White Collar unit). The employees have been working without a contract since the beginning of 2010.

The agreement, which has already been ratified by rank and file, provides salary increases of 0% for the calendar years 2010 and 2011; for 2012 a one-time cash payment, that does not add to base wages, of \$1,250 for full-time employees (prorated for part-time employees); and 2% increases in 2013 and 2014. (The 2013 increase is based on 2010 wages.)

Under the agreement, prescription drug coverage employee copayments will also increase at beginning in 2013 and again mid-year in 2014—with higher copayments specified for non-generic drugs. As of the beginning of 2012, employees will also have access to vision and dental coverage, paying 100% of premium expense through payroll deduction.

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

### **Legislature Approves Minutes Policy**

After over a year of deliberation and study, the Legislature approved an updated policy governing minutes of meetings of the Legislature and its committees. The final vote was 12-3, with Legislators Dooley Kiefer, Carol Chock, and Frank Proto voting no. The policy authorizes official “action only” minutes, with a companion compilation of meeting notes that provide additional and detail and annotated comments.

In more than an hour of deliberation that preceded the final vote, Legislators carefully considered several proposed word changes—among those approved, clarification of when and how meeting notes will be posted online and be available for review, including by the public. In view of the volume of potential changes proposed, there was some discussion regarding whether to return the matter to committee or whether to postpone action until the next Legislature meeting, to permit more time for review before action.

Following the final approval vote, Legislator Kiefer expressed dismay about the revised policy, maintaining that the lack of full detail in the official minutes will shortchange the public.

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

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Heard a presentation from planner Darby Kiley and Art Pearce entitled “Looking Down from Above: Mapping Potential Drilling Activity in Tompkins County.” The presentation projected what the potential local land use impact could be, once hydrofracking is permitted in the Marcellus shale.
- Approved, by an 1104 vote, an updated policy regarding land transactions in which the County is involved, including related reporting and documentation concerning County-owned lands.
- Reappointed Republican Election Commissioner Elizabeth Cree to a new two-year term, ending December 31, 2013.

**- END -**