



Inclusion Through Diversity

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the November 15, 2011 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Adopts 2012 Tompkins County Budget

After two-and-a-half months of budget deliberations, the final action took less than ten minutes, as the Tompkins County Legislature tonight adopted the County's 2012 budget and its capital program for the next five years.

The adopted budget is identical to the amended tentative budget approved by legislators earlier this month. It increases the County tax levy by 3.99% and the countywide average tax rate by 3.1% to \$6.67 per thousand. The budget passed by a vote of 11-2, with Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no. The levy increase is just over 1% above the 2.92% level that would be required to fall within the state property tax cap.

Budget committee chair Jim Dennis remarked that the core of the budget contains 24 fewer staff positions, making 68 fewer County positions since 2009, but that the County was able to sustain crucial programs during a time of ongoing economic downturn. The situation, he said, is not without risks, especially because of fiscal uncertainty at the State level, but the County was able to avert major layoffs and cutbacks because of matters that cut its way. Dennis noted that some counties are spending up to 70% of their fund balance to maintain services, something he described as "frightening."

Dennis, Legislature Chair Martha Robertson, and County Administrator Joe Mareane all thanked staff and their colleagues for hard work throughout the long budget process. Mareane told legislators, "I appreciate what you've done, and what agencies and department heads have done, in a year that was as challenging as ever." He credited legislators as being "careful, deliberate, thoughtful, caring about services, but also about the taxpayer." And he said, "We will now commit ourselves to keeping this budget in check."

Legislator Kiefer said, because the Legislature worked hard to arrive at a good compromise, she had the luxury of voting no. She said she remains concerned that reductions made in this budget will "set ourselves up for a harder time next year."

Comparison of 2011 and 2012 Tompkins County budgets:

Total Expenditures

2011: \$160,047,676

2012: \$161,924,448

(Percent change: 1.2)

Local Share (spending on local programs; revenue raised from the local community, primarily through property and sales tax):

2011: \$76,118,983

2012: \$77,511,307

(Percent change: 1.8)

Property Tax Levy (total amount to be collected from owners of taxable property):

2011: \$40,600,519

2012: \$42,220,798 (Percent change: +3.99)

Property Tax Rate (countywide average amount per \$1,000 of assessed property value):

2011: \$6.47

(Percent change: +3.1)

Tax change on a \$160,000 home \$31.85

In a separate action, the Legislature, by unanimous vote, also set the 2012 Solid Waste Annual Fee, which holds the fee steady at its current rate of \$56.00 per billing unit.

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

Legislature Urges Involvement, Support for County Health Departments Related to Gas Drilling

Maintaining that county health departments are responsible for ensuring the safety of local drinking water supplies and protecting public health, including the responsibility under pending regulations for water supply testing and investigating complaints related to potential contamination related to gas drilling, the Legislature is calling for local health department to be involved in determining procedures, processes, and funding requirements for aspects of drilling oversight that affect county health departments. The resolution, approved by unanimous vote, requests that the State obtain direct input from county health departments on potential impacts and resource needs, that the Governor and State Legislature establish financial resources to fund the entire cost of public health oversight, and that a contract or other mechanism be established to transfer needed funds to county health departments, with procedures, roles, and responsibilities of local health departments and the State Department of Environmental Conservation negotiated and formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding. Such requests, it says, should be fulfilled before permits for such gas drilling are issued.

Legislature Chair Martha Robertson thanked the Health Department for initiating the issue. "This is really important, she said. "I really thank the Health dept for taking a stand."

Contact: Frank Proto, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 277-4875.

Legislature Backs Legislation to Implement Phased State Takeover of Medicaid Costs

The Legislature, without dissent, urged passage of proposed State legislation that would implement a multi-year State takeover of the local share of Medicaid over the next eight years. It was noted that State Medicaid is the number one mandate facing counties and is costing Tompkins County property taxpayers \$11.6 million in 2011, and if the State takes over Medicaid, Count property taxes could be reduced by more than 28%, which Legislator Nathan Shinagawa said would be about a \$300 reduction for the average county taxpayer. The measure maintains the State could fund such a takeover through program reforms, state-derived savings, and other spending controls.

Contact: Frank Proto, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 277-4875; Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera, 273-8169.

Johanna Little Recognized as Distinguished Youth

The Legislature recognized Ithaca High School junior Johanna Little as recipient of this month's Distinguished Youth Award. Johanna for raising thousands of butterfly larvae and donating hundreds of caterpillars to all elementary schools throughout the county to enable teachers to teach a unit on the life cycle of the monarch butterfly. South Hill School kindergarten teacher Marcie Kidd, who nominated Johanna, credits her for "provid(ing) a wonderful learning experience to Tompkins County's elementary school children." Johanna also provided original artwork portraying the monarch lifecycle, which the children can cut out, color, then arrange in the proper order depicting the monarch's life. Johanna, aged 16, plans to pursue a degree in ecology or environmental science after graduation. 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

- Authorized the County to submit an application and the required fee to the New York State Department of Health for a Licensed Home Care Services Agency operating certificate for the County Health Department. The certificate will allow the department to maintain and provide public health services in client homes, now that the County has divested of its Certified Home Health Agency.
- Authorized a supplemental agreement with Erdman Anthony and Associates, Inc. for up to \$115,000 in additional design services for historic rehabilitation of the upstream Forest Home Drive Bridge over Fall Creek in the Town of Ithaca.
- Appropriated \$500 in contingency funding to contribute toward the cost of the December 1 public hearing at Ithaca's State Theatre, sponsored by the Tompkins County Council of Governments, to take public comment on the State's proposed regulatory document governing gas drilling by hydraulic fracturing in the Marcellus and Utica shales.
- Formally accepted several New York State grants for work at Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport—including update of the airport's Sustainable Master Plan, acquiring and refurbishing friction measuring equipment, constructing a sand storage building, designing rehabilitation of the terminal ramp, and expanding the airport apron.

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