



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **December 20, 2011** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Recommends Statewide Ban on High-Volume Hydraulic Fracturing**

After approving three resolutions related to the issue of gas drilling two weeks ago, the Tompkins County Legislature has now called for a statewide ban in high-volume hydraulic fracturing in New York State. The resolution was approved by a vote of 14-1 (Legislator Frank Proto voted no).

Using language consistent with that advocating a ban in Tompkins County and the Finger Lakes region two weeks ago, the Legislature finds “many continuing flaws” in the document—its failure to assess industrialization of rural landscapes, greenhouse gas emissions from natural gas, and cumulative socioeconomic impacts—as well as a recognition that horizontal drilling and high-volume hydrofracturing “pose significant risks to water resources.” Therefore, the resolution states, “horizontal drilling and high-volume hydrofracturing should be banned in New York State.”

The measure asserts that risks and known impacts outweigh any positive economic benefits that may accrue from the industry in New York State and that there are no adequate requirements that would sufficiently mitigate the serious, severe negative impacts on the environment, public health, and socioeconomic conditions.

Legislator Pam Mackesey, chair of the Legislature’s Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee said she is convinced that hydrofracking is “an untested, untried process that could create irreparable damage.”

Supporting the statewide ban, Legislator Carol Chock noted that the negative impacts will not stop at the borders of Tompkins County. Legislator Will Burbank said he’s “stunned” at the incompleteness of the regulatory documents economic analysis, saying “sheer prudence necessitates a ban.” Legislator Jim Dennis called it “shocking” that the DEC may allow permitting in a few weeks, reportedly without funding to support inspection and regulation in next year’s State budget. Legislator Mike Lane noted that the fact that Tompkins County is calling on the state to enact a ban is important, saying “this is about protection of Tompkins County, and the rest of the state, as well.”

While he favors the Legislature’s past actions, such as preserving municipal home rule related to gas drilling, expressing concern through comments to the DEC, and favoring a ban in the Finger Lakes, Legislator Proto said he is opposed to the call for a statewide ban, that the State should take responsibility for its own actions.

Thanking the Planning Department and other staff and colleagues for their work on the issue, Legislature Chair Martha Robertson said, “the public in New York State has educated the DEC on this issue. I’m proud to be a part of that effort.”

*Contact: Pamela Mackesey, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-6203; Legislator Frank Proto, 277-4875; Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.*

### **Legislature Authorizes Increased Bond Authority for Human Services Annex Improvements**

The Legislature, by a vote of 12-3, increased bonding authority for improvements to the new Human Services Annex building. (Legislators Pam Mackesey, Frank Proto, and Kathy Luz Herrera voted no.) The Legislature authorized up to \$1.3 million in bonding to support design and construction of renovations to the building at 214 West Martin Luther King/State Street, to reflect added cost since preliminary plans and financial projections were prepared. The improvements will configure the space, first as an office for the County's Office for the Aging (which must vacate its space in the County Courthouse to accommodate court system needs), and through a flexible design will leave open the possibility to accommodate alternate future County uses, such as the Community Justice Center.

The Legislature took a long and careful look at the issue, over close to three hours, hearing a presentation from HOLT Architects and Facilities director Arel LeMaro, and analyzed aspects of the project design and cost estimates, including reductions suggested by the Capital Plan Review Committee. As he did earlier to the Capital Committee, LeMaro noted that the project cannot be completed for the \$750,000 contained in initial figures. The Legislature ended up approving bonding at the higher \$1.3 million level, rather than the \$1,175,000 recommended by the Capital Committee. It was noted the authorization does not commit the County to bonding for that full \$1.3 million amount.

Both Legislators Mackesey and Luz Herrera, who opposed the action, expressed their concern that the Legislature bought the building for COFA and now, from their perspective, essentially would be making improvements for the CJC. Mackesey said the Legislature never made that decision. Luz Herrera called the dual use approach unfair to both COFA and the taxpayer. Legislator Proto also recalled that the building was initially purchased for COFA, but said the initial \$750,000 figure amounted to a placeholder. While voting in favor of the bond authorization, Legislator Carol Chock stressed that she does not commit to any future action to change the building's use.

County Administrator Joe Mareane noted approval of the bond resolution keeps all of the County's options open, that the Legislature's action does not dictate a certain future outcome, and that any future use, if it is proposed, would need Legislature authorization to occur.

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

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Authorized acceptance of a \$75,000 grant from the New York State Archives to the County Clerk's Office to scan more than 1,800 boxes of District Attorney's Office case files into the Records Center Electronic Document Management System.
- Approved the award of more than \$43,000 in Federal Transit Administration Job Access and Reverse Commute funds to the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County to match Coalition funds to improve the Coalition's 2-1-1 Information and Referral software program. The upgrade will enable 2-1-1 to serve as a call center for coordinated transportation and mobility services information.
- Approved a number of standard year-end resolutions, including implementation of departmental fees, memberships, and position changes as part of the 2012 County budget. One of those resolutions authorizes Finance Director David Squires to issue and sell \$10 million in Revenue Anticipation Notes on behalf of the County during 2012, should the County experience a cash flow problem resulting from delays in state aid during the year.

**- END -**