



Inclusion Through Diversity

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **January 17, 2012** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Robertson Reelected Legislature Chair, Vice Chair Not Yet Decided

The Legislature overcame repeated deadlock at its last meeting two weeks ago, and reelected Martha Robertson (D – District 13, Dryden) to her third year as Legislature Chair in 2012. The Chair’s position is filled each year by a majority vote of the 15 members of the Legislature and is responsible for overseeing all Legislative functions.

While the Legislature at its last meeting voted nine times but failed to reach a decision because of repeated, 7-7 tie votes, tonight’s decision came by a single ballot, with 9 Legislators voting for Robertson and 5 for Mike Lane (D – District 14-Dryden). Voting for Robertson were Legislators Pat Pryor, Jim Dennis, Will Burbank, Peter Stein, Dooley Kiefer, Nathan Shinagawa, Robertson, Carol Chock (who had been excused from the last meeting), and Brian Robison, who changed his vote from the previous rounds two weeks ago. Voting for Lane were Legislators Pam Mackesey, Frank Proto, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Dave McKenna, and Lane. Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera, who had voted for Lane the last time, was excused from tonight’s meeting.

Congratulating Roberson on her election, Lane said he believes this year’s leadership process was valuable, that the more the process is open to public view, the better it is for everyone. Chair Robertson told her colleagues she looks forward to working extremely hard with them in the year ahead.

For Vice Chair, five candidates were nominated: Legislators Jim Dennis, Will Burbank, Peter Stein, Frank Proto, and Kathy Luz Herrera. In one ballot, results were split—with 5 votes for Proto, 4 for Burbank, 2 each for Dennis and Stein, and 1 for Luz Herrera. In comments before the ballot, several legislators commented on the importance of the person in the Vice Chair position to serve as a complement to the Chair. After the single Vice Chair ballot, Legislators voted 12-2 to postpone the decision until the Legislature’s next meeting February 7. Last year’s Vice Chair, Dooley Kiefer, will continue to serve until a new Vice Chair is elected.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584; Legislator Michael Lane, 844-8313 or 844-8440.

Committee Issues Recommendations to Achieve Universal Broadband Service

After more than a year of research and deliberation, the Tompkins County Broadband Committee presented its recommendations to the County Legislature regarding how to best extend broadband Internet service to all in Tompkins County. The Committee was charged to “advise the Tompkins County Legislature on how to best promote broadband technology countywide, to address the needs of unserved and underserved residents, foster public-private innovation, enhance existing capabilities, and support good governance.”

Noting that quality Internet access is a necessity for daily communications and transactions for every citizen, the Report documents that, according to a “gap map” recently prepared by the Committee, more than 4,700 households and businesses in the County’s rural areas lack reliable broadband access (a greater number that state and federal sources identify). Although broadband technology exists, the Report notes that the cost for commercial providers and the price for individual subscribers are too great to extend the infrastructure into the County’s less densely populated areas.

Based on its analysis of the options available, the Committee recommends that the County, in collaboration with other stakeholders, proceed to implement universal broadband Internet access in Tompkins County, using “fixed wireless” technology. In the “fixed wireless” approach, a broadband signal is relayed from a central office to a distribution point, such as a cell tower or telephone pole; the distribution point then sends the signal wirelessly to a fixed end point (receiver) on the home. The Committee recommends this technology as the most cost-effective option for meeting current requirements, with a projected capital cost of from \$300 to \$800 per household. The Report states the technology could be easily deployed through local companies and could be easily enhanced in the future.

“Implementation of a Fixed Wireless option now will allow us to accomplish the goal of universal broadband Internet access at a moderate cost, while preserving options for future upgrades,” the Report states. “We are confident that this approach will serve the citizens of Tompkins County well, enabling the County to address both current and future needs.” Among other recommendations, the Committee calls for drafting of a business plan, so that the County is prepared to respond rapidly to future funding opportunities, and that the County have substantial funding available and be ready to commit matching funds, should such opportunities become available.

The Report is available for review and download on the Legislature's website: <http://www.tompkins-co.org/legislature/>. A paper copy may be obtained from the Legislature Office, located on the second floor of the County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca.

Contact: Legislator Patricia Pryor, Chair of the Tompkins County Broadband Committee, 319-0507.

Ian Sloan Recognized as Distinguished Youth

The Legislature recognized Ian Sloan, a senior at Ithaca’s Lehman Alternative Community School, as the latest Tompkins County Distinguished Youth. In his letter of nomination, Principal Joe Greenberg describes Ian as “a lead-by-example distinguished youth,” one who believes those in the community can work together to achieve justice, instead of relying on others to think and act. Sloan is praised for basing his ideas and opinions on issues on “well-read, well-reasoned research and inquiry,” but going further than most by backing them up with action. Ian is recognized for ongoing assistance at the Workers Center, talking politics with those at Loaves and Fishes, where he works weekly, and discussing his work for the peace movement during weekly mentoring at Beverly J. Martin elementary school. Greenberg credited Ian’s “steadfastness, intelligence, and willingness to do the ‘grunt work’ of activism and service. 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. 277-4875

Among other business, the Legislature accepted a \$1 million grant from the Cleaner, Greener Communities Program of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) for preparation of a Southern Tier Regional Sustainability Plan. The Tompkins County Planning Department applied for, and was awarded, the grant, and will work jointly with the Southern Tier Central and Southern Tier East regional planning boards, and other contractors to complete the project.

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