



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **March 27, 2012** Special Meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Approves Relocation to Old County Courthouse

After many months of study through its Capital Plan Review Committee, the Legislature, meeting in special session, tonight approved relocation of County Legislature Chambers and offices to the second floor of the historic Old County Courthouse, space currently used as a Supreme Courtroom. After more than two hours of presentation and deliberation, the vote to proceed with the decision and a favored design schematic was 13-1, with Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no. (Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera was excused.)

Through its action, the Legislature commits to moving into the Supreme Courtroom “as soon as is practical,” but no later than the end of this year. The Legislature also identified its favored floor plan for the space—one of numerous potential designs prepared by HOLT Architects and that recommended by the Capital Committee—as the best option available, “making good use of the space while largely preserving the historical nature of the room at a cost that is likely to be modest and cost-effective.” The building, built in 1854, is the oldest Gothic Revival courthouse in New York State.

The Legislature is required to vacate its current chambers and offices in the Main Courthouse, which it has occupied since the 1930s, to accommodate the needs of the New York State Court System under the State court facilities law. The current legislative chambers and offices will be renovated to become the new Supreme Courtroom.

The Legislature met in the Supreme Courtroom space that, as a result of tonight’s decision, will become its new space, examining ten proposals prepared by the architects and getting a feel for how the space could be configured, from sections marked off to represent new features. Facilities Director Arel LeMaro and Miles Cogolle, of HOLT, noted that the new space is almost twice as large as what the Legislature now has. Cogolle noted relocation gives the Legislature to repurpose the historic building in a sustainable manner and will create for the Legislature a new, positive public identity. The favored design incorporates new desks and a curved desk arrangement for legislators, to improve functionality and sight lines, and more than doubles the Chamber’s public seating.

Concerns expressed by some Legislators included the lack of adjacent space for executive sessions, provisions for space within the Chamber offered for committee meetings, whether adjacent bathroom facilities would be adequate, and potential loss of the existing judge’s bench, due to accessibility requirements, which was seen by many as a significant visual element. A proposal to return the proposal to committee, to consider tonight’s comment, failed by a vote of 3-11 (Legislators McBean-Clairborne, Dooley Kiefer, and Peter Stein voting in favor, with Legislator Luz Herrera excused).

Several Legislators maintained that the decision should not be seen as a permanent solution, and that ultimately it would be best for staff space to be moved to the first floor and other features to be incorporated. The resolution notes that the Capital Committee believes the space can accommodate Legislative staff and the public on a temporary basis, but that to provide adequate office and meeting space for Legislative business may require making use of more space in the Old Courthouse in the future, and that the alternative would, at least

temporarily, avoid the need to construct alternative space for the Planning Department and the Ithaca-Tompkins Transportation Council at a cost of approximately \$2 million.

Capital Program Review Committee Chair Mike Lane acknowledged that the using the space for both Chambers and offices amounts to a compromise, and that while a future Legislature may need to make further enhancements, this action meets in an affordable manner the need for the Legislature to relocate by the end of the year. Many Legislators thanked the architects and staff for the expert work and creativity devoted to the project. The Legislature has directed staff to next develop the budget for the renovations to present for its final approval.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Capital Plan Review Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440.

Legislature Supports Resolution Urging Counties to Unite in Support of Meaningful Mandate Relief

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Kathy Luz Hererra was excused), backed a resolution calling on all counties to unite to bring about real and meaningful mandate relief in New York State. Calling State mandates “the number one barrier to providing property tax relief to New Yorkers,” with nine State mandates consuming more than 90% of the county property tax levy statewide, the Legislature calls upon counties across the state to join in partnership with the New York State Association of Counties “to influence the enactment of serious mandate relief measures” by the State Legislature, the Governor, and all Executive Agencies, and urges that counties take local action to inform citizens of the need for mandate relief and how it affects local service delivery and property taxes, as well as to consistently communicate with State officials regarding the impact of these mandates.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584

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