



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **May 1, 2012** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Adopts 2.2% Maintenance-of-Effort Financial Goal for 2013

As a starting point toward preparing a 2013 County budget, the Legislature established a financial goal that directs the County Administrator to establish departmental and agency spending targets and develop a 2013 budget that can be supported with a 2.2% tax levy increase. The vote was 13-2, with Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no.

County Administrator Joe Mareane estimates that a 2.2% levy increase would support a maintenance-of-effort budget, following three years of very deep cuts—a plan that would support current operations, incorporating adjustments for such factors as new wage/fringe rates, uncontrollable mandates, and other fixed costs.

The action also authorizes the County Administrator to consider and include in his Recommended Budget over-target requests submitted by departments and agencies, provided that the Recommended Budget does not require a tax levy increase of more than 3.5%. That would provide the Administrator latitude to address some high-priority deficiencies in light of past cuts. The County's actual property tax cap will not be known until mid-summer. However, citing last year's adjusted tax cap of 2.9%, Mareane said the 3.5% increase in the levy could be within the adjusted tax cap for 2013.

The Legislature's action notes that budget reductions imposed since 2009 have been deep, and in some instances "beyond the level the Legislature finds necessary over the long term to maintain the health, safety, and quality of life of the citizens of Tompkins County."

While cautioning that projections this early in the year related to mandated costs and other factors could change, Mareane noted that the relative stability in 2013 budget projections is the product of difficult decisions and actions that the Legislature, department heads, and the County's bargaining units have taken during the most difficult years of the economic crisis. Unlike many other local governments, he said, these actions adapted to a hostile, volatile economy, without resorting to gimmicks and fiscal sleight-of-hand.

Legislators McBean-Clairborne and Dooley Kiefer, both who voted no, expressed concern about the numbers. McBean-Clairborne said she supports the 2.2% guideline, but not the 3.5, since she is uncomfortable about the potential effect on taxpayer. Kiefer said she believes the proper maintenance-of-effort number is 2.3% and that additional latitude for potential restoration should be set closer to 4.4%

In a separate action, the Legislature, by a vote of 13-2, authorized scheduling a public hearing on to take comment on a proposed local law that would leave open the option of the County's overriding the State's property tax cap for 2013, if that is deemed necessary. (Legislators Luz Herrera and McBean-Clairborne voted no.) The hearing will be held June 5, 2012 at 5:30 p.m. at Legislative Chambers of the Tompkins County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca.

Stressing that scheduling the hearing or that adopting such a local law does not mean that the County will exceed the tax cap, budget committee chair Jim Dennis characterized scheduling the hearing now as prudent, as a potential tool for the County's "tool box" as the budget process moves forward. Legislator Luz Herrera said she may support such a move at a later time, but not now, advocating restraint to wait until later in the process. *Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058.*

Jeffrey Smith Named County Highway Director

County Administrator Joe Mareane announced the appointment of Jeffrey Smith of Malone, NY, as Tompkins County Highway Director, following a national search.

Recommended by a broad-based search committee, Mr. Smith comes to Tompkins County with 17 years of experience in managing highway and public works operations, the last five years as Public Works Supervisor in the Village of Malone, where he manages highway operations, water and wastewater systems, and buildings and grounds. For 12 years before that, Smith was the highway manager for Franklin County. He began his career in Santa Barbara County, California as an engineering technician.

Administrator Mareane told Legislators he is confident Mr. Smith has the right blend of people and professional skills to serve the Highway Division well. Smith begins his new position as of June 4.

Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Supports Increase in State Minimum Wage

Following a thoughtful discussion, the Legislature, by a vote of 10-5, supported an increase in the New York State Minimum Wage—at a minimum from the current \$7.25 an hour to \$8.50 an hour, and to index it annually to the Consumer Price Index, as proposed in a bill before the New York State Legislature, sponsored by Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. The Legislature, however, went beyond what is included in that proposed legislation—also strongly urging the State to increase the minimum wage to \$10.39 per hour no later than April 1, 2013, the beginning of the State's next fiscal year. The \$10.39 rate represents a calculation of what the minimum wage would be, had the Minimum Wage kept pace with inflation over the past 40 years. (Legislators Dave McKenna, Frank Proto, Pat Pryor, Brian Robison, and budget chair Jim Dennis voted no.)

There was considerable discussion of the issue of a livable wage—with several Legislators, including Leslyn McBean-Clairborne (Chair of the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee) and Kathy Luz Herrera, who had brought forth an alternate member-filed resolution that advocated that the State to move toward establishing a Livable Wage as the Minimum Wage. The Legislature failed to amend the resolution twice with provisions focused on the Livable Wage before passing the final version.

Legislators Pryor, Mike Lane, and Dooley Kiefer, and Chair Dennis were among those who expressed the view that the Livable Wage issue could best be approached through a separate action that would ask the State to address the issue statewide.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, 277-5104.

Bargaining Agreement With Blue Collar Unit Ratified

The Legislature, without dissent, ratified a five-year bargaining agreement between the County and the Blue Collar Unit, Civil Service Employees Association, Local 855. The agreement, retroactive to 2010 and extending through 2014, mirrors basic provisions of agreements in place for other County bargaining units, including CSEA White Collar. It provides 0% pay increases in 2010 and 2011; a \$1,250 one-time bonus (not added to base) to those on the payroll at the time of ratification, with a pro-rated bonus for any part-time employees; and 2% increases in 2013 (based on 2010 base salary) and 2014. Benefit adjustments include drug co-pay increases for non-generic drugs, beginning in 2013, as well as access to vision coverage provided by the Health Benefits Consortium at member expense. The tentative agreement, covering 82 employees, was ratified by rank and file April 19.

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

Chair Calls for Study of County Clerk Position

As the Legislature prepares for its next review of the Tompkins County Charter and Code, Legislature Chair Martha Robertson announced she has charged the Government Operations Committee to study the position of County Clerk, whether the position should continue to be an elected position, or to be changed to an appointed office. The County's Charter Review Committee in 1996 had recommended the County Clerk position, which functions basically like other appointed department heads on the County, should be changed to an appointed office. Stressing that there is no perceived "problem" with the current performance of the incumbent or department, which is operating at a high degree of excellence, Robertson is asking the committee "to conduct a comprehensive investigation and draw whatever conclusions that investigation supports."

The Chair asks the Committee to consider factors including professional qualifications needed for the position; its administrative vs. policy-making role; external relations beyond county government; fiscal implications; practice and results in other New York State counties and other states; and political implications, as well as any process implications if the committee recommends a change in status. The Committee shall present an interim report to the Legislature by September 1, with a final report no later than year's end.

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

Desiree Cochran Recognized as Distinguished Youth

Charles O. Dickerson High School senior Desiree Cochran was recognized as the County's latest Distinguished Youth. Nominated by Carissa Mann Parlato of Trumansburg/Ulysses Youth Services, Desiree was honored for her extensive volunteering with children—including mentoring middle schoolers through the Big Friend Little Friend program, teaching a nutrition program to elementary children at Beverly J. Martin School in Ithaca, and teaching chemistry to youth at the Sciencenter. All the while, Desiree maintains a demanding academic schedule and is praised for her reliability, consistency, and "always exhibiting a cheerful and easygoing demeanor." 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:

- Scheduled a public hearing for May 15 at 5:30 p.m. at Legislature Chambers, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca on a proposed Local Law to opt out of the Solar/Wind Exemption of Section 487 of the New York State Real Property Tax Law, a provision that applies to both residential and commercial properties. The Law is being considered related to potential effects on the payment-in-lieu-of-taxes agreement expected to be negotiated for the large commercial wind farm in Enfield.
- Heard a report on Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport's first-in-the-nation Sustainable Master Plan, a plan that has been recognized in the aviation industry and across the nation as an important sustainability leader.

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