



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **June 5, 2012** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Examines, Delays Action on Redistricting Report**

The Legislature took a long and careful look at the issue of reapportioning County legislative districts, but delayed action on whether to accept the report of the County's Independent Redistricting Commission that recommends reducing the number of legislative districts by one, to a 14-member Legislature.

That report, as amended in April, recommends a 14-district configuration including four County districts within the City of Ithaca, with boundaries consistent with City ward boundaries that had been favored by the City's Redistricting Committee. But after hearing that Ithaca's Common Council last night narrowed its favored ward configuration alternatives to two—a five-ward option and a four-ward option, but not the one favored by the City Committee—Legislators agreed to postpone consideration for two weeks, after it is expected that Council will have reached a decision on City ward boundaries. Independent Redistricting Commission Chair Hank Dullea, who is also a member of the City Redistricting Committee, reported that Common Council's favored four-ward option is the same configuration that initially recommended by the County Commission for County legislative districts, but then modified by the Commission to be consistent with the City Commission's favored option.

For nearly two hours, Legislators examined the redistricting issue, much of that discussion focusing on the boundary configuration within the City and what changes there might mean. A four-district arrangement within the City, whether or not consistent with City ward boundaries, would be self-contained and not affect other legislative districts, but a five-district configuration would not be possible without affecting districts outside the City, an approach not recommended by the Independent Redistricting Commission. If the City opts to keep five wards and there are four County districts, those boundaries would differ within the City, which some said could lead to voter confusion and produce added cost for the County Board of Elections from the need for additional election districts.

Some City legislators expressed concern about proportional representation with a reduction to four districts—among them, Legislator Carol Chock who maintained the arrangement would diminish City representation compared to other areas of the county related to County business and would work against intermunicipal cooperation, since districts (such as the one she currently represents) would not include both City and Town.

Calling for balance in district configuration within the city, Legislator Pam Mackesey noted the County must respond to its own needs, not necessarily align with the City. Ultimately, Government Operations Chair Dooley Kiefer withdrew the resolution, Chair Martha Robertson asking that the committee ask the Board of Elections to estimate any cost differences from the alternative district configurations. On the issue of legislative workload, Robertson also said she believes committee work, through the existing structure could be absorbed with a reduction from 15 to 14 members.

Many legislators expressed appreciation for the work of both County and City Redistricting committees, and their staff, and several said they would be reluctant to go against the Commission's recommendation.

*Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 257-7453.*

### **2013 Budget Guidelines Adopted for County Departments and Agencies**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote of those present, established fiscal targets for departments and agencies as part of the 2013 budget process. (Legislators Peter Stein and Nathan Shinagawa were excused.) The Legislature last month directed County Administrator Joe Mareane to establish fiscal targets to achieve a maintenance of effort budget that could be supported by a 2.2% increase in the property tax levy, while also allowing him the latitude to consider over-target requests from departments and agencies and present a recommended budget to the Legislature that could be supported by a levy increase of 3.5%.

The action sets the fiscal targets for not-for-profit agencies, for county municipalities applying for reimbursement for county-wide services, and agencies receiving reimbursements under the Sales Tax Agreement with the City of Ithaca at the amount approved in the adopted 2012 budget. For county departments, the target equals the 2012 budget target plus negotiated salary increases and associated fringe expense, and a 10% adjustment in amounts allocated in 2012 for vehicle fuel. None of the fiscal targets includes any prior one-time funding nor any funds re-appropriated from previous years. The Legislature authorizes the County Administrator to reduce department targets as needed to achieve the tax levy goal set by the Legislature.

Also related to the 2013 budget process, the Legislature held a public hearing, seeking citizen 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, should that become necessary. No one commented at the hearing.

*Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.*

### **Legislature Supports Constitutional Amendment to Abolish Corporate Personhood**

In what is expected to be the first of three resolutions on the topic to be considered by the Legislature, the Legislature after discussion, by a vote of 11-2, called for an amendment to the United States Constitution to abolish corporate personhood, in the wake of the Citizens United Supreme Court decision, which rolled back legal limits on corporate spending in the electoral process. (Legislators Frank Proto and Brian Robison voted no; Legislators Nathan Shinagawa and Peter Stein were excused.)

Acknowledging that other resolutions are scheduled to come before the Legislature in two weeks, Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera, who sponsored the resolution recommended by the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee and the Legislature's budget and personnel committee, said she believes it important for the Legislature to pass a resolution with a title and language consistent with those passed by other entities across the country, to communicate solidarity and that the County "stands in unison" with others.

Some legislators said they would prefer considering all three resolutions together. A move to postpone failed by a vote of 4-9, Legislators Mike Lane, Jim Dennis, Dooley Kiefer, and Chair Martha Robertson voting in favor.

The action calls on the US Congress to "join tens of thousands" of other individuals and organizations and governments to enact such an amendment and "return our democracy, our elections, our communities back to America's human persons, and to thus reclaim our sovereign right to self-governance." It also urges other communities to pass similar resolutions, and supports education to increase public awareness on the issue.

*Contact: Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera, 273-8169; Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Chair, Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee, 277-5104.*

### **Engineering and Design Funding Approved for New Legislature Chambers**

The Legislature, by a 12-1 vote, authorized amendment of the existing agreement with HOLT Architects, of Ithaca, to cover architectural and engineering design services for renovations to the Old Courthouse for Legislature Chambers, at a cost not to exceed \$89,750. (Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera voted no; Legislators Peter Stein and Nathan Shinagawa were excused.) HOLT identified the historic Courtroom in the Old Courthouse as a potential home for the Legislature as part of its Center of Government business case analysis and has been working on the project as part of that contract. The Legislature has already approved the architects' conceptual plans to renovate the space and to move Legislature chambers and offices, scheduled by

the end of this year. The Legislature must vacate its current facilities in the County Courthouse to satisfy needs of the New York State Court System. Renovations are scheduled to begin in September.  
*Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Capital Plan Review Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440.*

### **Legislature Repeats Call for Mandate Relief**

As part of its ongoing call for New York State to provide meaningful mandate relief for county governments, the Legislature urged the State's Mandate Relief Council to act swiftly to submit a package of mandate relief proposals to Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature to be voted on this session. Approval came by a unanimous vote of those present (Legislator Peter Stein and Nathan Shinagawa were excused.) The action notes that the State requires delivery of State programs using local resources, causing some counties to dedicate more than 80% of their entire budgets to fund State-mandated programs and fixed costs; that the New York State Association of Counties has identified just nine State mandates that equal 90% of all county property taxes (outside of New York City) levied in 2010 (\$4 billion of \$4.4 billion levied); and that these mandates are the root cause of high county property and sales taxes, and that have led to a decline in the delivery of important local services.

Legislator Frank Proto questioned the effectiveness of passing the symbolic resolution this late in the legislative session. Budget chair Jim Dennis characterized it as a collegial move in joining many other counties in the state that have passed similar resolutions.

*Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; Legislator Frank Proto, 277-4875.*

Among other business:

Summarizing his year-end report for 2011, County Finance Director David Squires reported the County ended the year in a positive fiscal position, including a \$2.5 million surplus in the general fund balance—a situation arising from three unanticipated one-time events: sales tax revenue, with a strong fourth quarter, up by \$.9 million; \$1 million from federal stimulus impacts that lowered expenses; and a pension bill \$.6 million less than budgeted because salaries were flat.

Legislature Chair Martha Robertson announced that the Southern Tier Regional Economic Council has scheduled a Consolidated Funding Application Workshop in Ithaca on June 12. The forum will take place at the Ithaca Holiday Inn, 222 S. Cayuga Street, 6:00-8:30 p.m. If possible, attendees are asked to RSVP for at <http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/content/june-12th-cfa-workshop-southern-tier>. This is strongly recommended, so that staff can adequately prepare, but not absolutely required.

The Legislature welcomed the County's new Highway Director, Jeff Smith, who began service this week. County Administrator Joe Mareane and Facilities and Infrastructure Chair Carol Chock both praised the new director's qualifications and experience. Smith said he appreciates the opportunity the County has provided and looks forward to a long career here.

**- END -**