



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **June 19, 2012** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

County Redistricting Process Moves Forward

Tompkins County is one step closer to reapportioning County legislative districts, as the Legislature, after well over an hour of thoughtful discussion accepted the concept of a 14-member Legislature, as advanced by the County's Independent Redistricting Commission, and directed staff to draft a proposed Local Law to implement the Commission's most recent recommendations, to be advanced to public hearing. The vote was 10-3, with Legislators Pam Mackesey, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and Carol Chock voting no; Legislators Nathan Shinagawa and Kathy Luz Herrera were excused.) The independent commission this week slightly adjusted boundaries within the City of Ithaca, as contained in its initially recommended plan, to minimize the number of added election districts needed within the City to accommodate four County legislative districts and five City wards.

Legislators Mackesey, McBean-Clairborne, and Chock all said that more time is needed before advancing to preparation of the Local Law, to permit Legislators to fully understand the district boundaries and implications of recent changes. Mackesey expressed concern that failing to do that amounts to a shortcut in process. Legislators Chock and McBean-Clairborne also both expressed concern about reducing the number of City legislators from five to four. A motion to return the matter to committee for further discussion, before drafting the proposed Local Law, failed by a 6-7 vote. Many Legislators expressed appreciation for the dedicated work of the independent commission in preparing its recommendations over the past year. Legislator Mike Lane said it is now time to prepare the proposed Local Law and have the public weigh in.

Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 257-7453; Legislator Mike Lane, 844-8313 or 844-8440; Legislator Pam Mackesey, 273-6203.

Legislature Authorizes Fund Application to Implement Pine Tree Road Project

The Legislature, after considerable discussion, authorized the County to seek funding to support the Pine Tree Road Bike and Pedestrian Paths Project under New York State's Multi-Modal aid program. The project, intended to safely connect bike- and walkways between Route 366 and Cornell and the East Hill Plaza area, has been in development since 2008, with County Administrator Joe Mareane telling the Legislature the opportunity for funding under the State's economic development program would allow the County to implement the full scope of the project, to fully achieve objectives of safety and slope despite cost escalations that have occurred since the project was first approved four years ago.

The \$512,000 grant would increase the project budget to more than \$1.4 million and, contingent upon award of the full grant amount, the County in its action commits to make available the full project amount in the project capital account, to be reimbursed by federal and state funding. Much discussion before the vote concerned design—specifically ongoing concern by residents of one element of the project, replacing and raising the height of the old railroad bridge at Pine Tree and Route 366, which many residents fear will lead to increased truck traffic in their neighborhood, and are concerned that the action amounts to a commitment to the bridge. Administrator Mareane said there will still be an opportunity to fine-tune design before the project becomes final. The Facilities and Infrastructure Committee this week also formally asked staff to move toward a study of the southern area of Pine Tree Road, focusing on whether traffic volumes and speeds warrant traffic calming measures in that area and, if so, to recommend specific measures that the County should undertake.

Contact: Carol Chock, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 273-9007; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislators Repeat Calls for Constitutional Amendment to Restore Balance in Political Campaigns

The Legislature passed two more resolutions calling upon the United States to amend the Constitution in response to Supreme Court decisions, including the Citizens United decision, which rolled back legal spending limits in the electoral process. A measure sponsored by Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Will Burbank, which in part calls for the amendment to “unambiguously state that inalienable rights recognized under the constitution belong to human beings only, not to entities such as corporations, and that money is not speech, passed by an 8-5 vote. (Legislators Frank Proto, Brian Robison, Dave McKenna, Mike Lane, and Jim Dennis voted no.)

A second resolution, advanced by Legislator Peter Stein, called for an amendment focused on campaign finance reform, which would allow federal and state governments to ban, limit, or otherwise regulate broadcast and cable advertisements, other than those financed by candidates or political parties that directly refer to candidates during and immediately prior to elections. That resolution was approved by a 10-3 vote, with Legislators Proto, McKenna, and Robison voting no. (Legislators Nathan Shinagawa and Kathy Luz Herrera were excused.

The Legislature also discussed, but declined to reconsider, by a 5-8 vote, a third resolution, passed two weeks ago, supporting a constitutional amendment to abolish corporate personhood. Legislator Jim Dennis called for reconsideration, expressing displeasure and deep concern about e-mail communication that legislators received following that vote. Legislators Robison, Proto, Kiefer, and Mike Lane, joined Dennis in supporting reconsideration.

Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 257-7453; Legislator Peter Stein, 266-7579; Legislator Jim Dennis, 387-5058.

Bonding Approved for Cooperative Extension Building Improvements

The Legislature authorized issuance of \$350,000 in serial bonds to help support the cost of interior improvements to the Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) headquarters, located at 615 Willow Avenue. The vote was unanimous, with Legislators Kathy Luz Herrera and Nathan Shinagawa excused. Cooperative Extension holds the lease to the building, leases it to the County, which subleases it back to Extension. The bonding will support necessary building rehabilitation, including replacement of the HVAC system. Anticipated debt service is \$30,000 per year, with full cost of the debt to be paid by Extension through its lease payment to the County, in an arrangement similar to that used for payment of debt service on bonds the County issued to support earlier building acquisition and improvements. CCE also will initiate a capital fundraising effort to raise approximately \$400,000 to pay for physical expansion of the facility.

By a 12-1 vote, the Legislature also amended the County’s 2008-2012 Capital Program to recognize funding and revenue from the project, which involves no cost to the County (Legislator Frank Proto voted no; Legislators Nathan Shinagawa and Kathy Luz Herrera were excused). Mr. Proto had asked that the Capital Plan Review Committee review it before the Legislature acted; a motion to postpone failed by a margin of 4-9.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; Carol Chock, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 273-9007

Legislature Approves Local Law Regarding Property Tax Cap

The Legislature, by a vote of 10-3, adopted a Local Law that preserves the Legislature’s option to override the State’s property tax cap, if that is determined to be necessary in adopting the 2013 County budget. (Legislators Pam Mackesey, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and Frank Proto voted no; Legislators Kathy Luz Herrera and Nathan Shinagawa were excused.) The action does not mean that the Legislature will override the cap, but it provides flexibility to exceed the cap if deemed necessary and ensures that any State recalculation of the limit will not make the County inadvertently out of compliance. No one commented on the issue at a public hearing held at the Legislature’s last meeting two weeks ago. Legislators Mackesey and Peter Stein both maintained the action was being taken too early in the budget cycle.

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

Hearing Scheduled on Proposed Aquatic Invasive Species Law

The Legislature authorized a public hearing regarding a proposed Local Law to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species in Tompkins County, scheduled for July 3, 5:30 p.m. at Legislative Chambers, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca. (The vote was unanimous, with Legislators Nathan Shinagawa and Kathy Luz Herrera excused.) The proposed law is intended to protect the ecology of water bodies by preventing the introduction of any aquatic invasive species (such as Hydrilla), helping to protect the environment and economy of Tompkins County. The law, in part, would prohibit hauling or launching of watercraft with any plant or animal material attached to it, as well as introducing any aquatic invasive species into a water body.

Contact: Will Burbank, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee 272-7555

Legislature Supports Amendment to Sales Tax Law

The Legislature, by a 12-1 vote, voiced official support of proposed state legislation before the Senate and Assembly that would amend the State Tax Law to end the requirement for localities to seek State legislative authority every two years to levy sales taxes in excess of 3%. (Legislator Frank Proto dissented; Legislators Kathy Luz Herrera and Nathan Shinagawa were excused.) The measure notes that the requirement to secure such State approval every two years adds to the significant fiscal uncertainty faced by local governments.

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

Kimberly Webbe Honored as Distinguished Youthl

The Legislature recognized Ithaca High School senior Kimberly Webbe as this month's Tompkins County Distinguished Youth. Nominated by IHS Associate Principal Samantha Little, is recognized for her ethics, morals, and values; her love and commitment to family and friends; and her many school and community contributions—including involvement in the African-Latino Club and other organizations, and serving at Kendal at Ithaca and the Greater Ithaca Activities Center, while being “an enthusiastic and driven student.” 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

- Supported, by unanimous vote, a new community prescription drug discount card program, offered by ProAct, Inc. of Gouverneur, NY, which will provide prescription drug discounts for uninsured and underinsured county residents, at no cost to taxpayers. The action authorizes the County to contract with ProAct, Inc. for a period of five years.
- Authorized a supplemental agreement with C&S Companies, of Syracuse, to conduct a feasibility study to better accommodate the Transportation Security Agency (TSA) at Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport. The study will focus on terminal facility and security improvements potentially needed related to new equipment to improve efficiency of baggage handling. The study's more than \$160,000 cost is borne mostly by Federal Aviation Administration funds, with the \$8,100 local share coming from airline fees. The vote was 9-3, with Legislators Chock, Mackesey, and Burbank voting no.
- Scheduled a public hearing on the 2012-2013 Tompkins Cortland Community College Operating Budget. The hearing will be held July 3, at 5:30 p.m., at County Legislature Chambers of the County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca.

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