



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

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Highlights of the **September 4, 2012** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Administrator Releases 2013 Recommended Budget

Tompkins County Administrator Joe Mareane has delivered to the County Legislature a 2013 Recommended County Budget that increases total spending by just four-tenths of one percent, sustains current levels of service, and can be supported within the 3.5% tax levy goal set by the Legislature. In his budget message to the Legislature, Administrator Mareane points out that the 2013 recommended budget is the first in four years to reflect stability, rather than further retrenchment.

The recommended budget includes one of the lowest property tax increases of the past 15 years, raising the average residential tax bill by just \$18.

“In an era characterized by economic uncertainty, stability is a real accomplishment,” Mareane notes. “The budget is the product of hard work and clear thinking by the County Legislature, department heads, and County staff as we have worked to adapt to a changed environment. It is also a reflection of a mutually-held understanding that success rests on the principle of shared sacrifice.”

The administrator says the budget is the product of careful, shared decisions over the past four years—to reallocate resources where needed, achieve higher levels of productivity with a reduced workforce, and allocate reserves modestly to avoid abrupt, jarring cuts. He recognizes the County’s largest unions for working with the County to achieve long-term wage agreements that align with the times.

“We are a different, smaller, and more efficient government than we were four years ago,” says Mareane. “But barring another economic setback, I believe we have regained a fiscal equilibrium that remains elusive for many other local governments throughout the country.”

The 2013 Recommended Budget supports total expenditures of \$164.8 million (an increase of 0.4%) and local dollar spending of \$80.0 million—a 3.1% increase that reflects diminished state and federal aid. The property tax levy would increase by 3.48%, within the Legislature’s 3.5% levy goal and slightly above the 3.31% estimated property tax cap imposed by New York State. The property tax rate would rise by 11 cents to \$6.78 per \$1,000 assessed value, resulting in the \$18 increase to the owner of an average \$160,000 home.

While maintaining essential services, the budget addresses what Mareane describes as some of the “cracks and fissures” in the organization revealed after consecutive years of cutting, and it invests in productivity-enhancing technology and training to help sustain operations with a diminished workforce.

Among allocations recommended to address areas of critical need: applying savings within the Highway Division budget to support a Motor Equipment Operator position, and increasing the highway materials budget by \$233,000; a \$159,000 increase in target support for the County Library (along with \$20,000 in onetime funding for technology) to begin to address a structural funding deficit; and \$170,000 in onetime funding to help sustain Tompkins County Area Development (TCAD), in light of recession-related decline in project fee revenue.

Among technology-related enhancements: adding a Deputy Director position to provide technical and managerial support for the Information Technology Services department, and also investing in several new systems including a records management and permitting system for the Health Department's Environmental Health division, a highway management system, and replacement of a 20-year-old case management system in the District Attorney's Office.

"I extend my deep appreciation to the County's department heads and County staff who have worked hard to craft a 2013 budget that addresses the priorities and targets established by the Legislature—and who have, over the last four years, contributed mightily to the efforts that have preserved core services and brought us to a point of relative stability," Mareane states. "I am also grateful for the guidance and assistance of the Legislature in shaping this budget, and for the leadership it has shown as we have navigated through some very turbulent fiscal times." The administrator also recognized the many contributions of Finance Director David Squires, who will retire next fall, for the "steady hand" and sound financial management he has brought to County finances over the past 20 years.

Public copies of the 2013 Tentative Budget are available at the County Administration office, 125 East Court Street, and at the Office of the County Legislature, 320 North Tioga Street. As of Wednesday, September 5, the document also will be posted on the County website at www.tompkins-co.org, where the public also is invited to comment on the budget.

Contacts: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.

Legislators Adopt 14-District Redistricting Plan

The Legislature, after more than two hours of careful deliberation, accepted the recommendation of the County's Independent Redistricting Committee and adopted a new Local Law that realigns the boundaries of County legislative districts based on the 2010 Census, culminating a nearly two-year-long process. The final vote was 10-5, with Legislators Carol Chock, Kathy Luz Herrera, Dooley Kiefer, Pam Mackesey, and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no. The law reduces the number of legislative districts from 15-14, and the number of districts within the City of Ithaca from five to four.

Before the adoption vote, there was considerable discussion regarding a proposed amendment, advanced by Legislators Chock, Kiefer, and Mackesey that would have substituted an alternate 14-district option to align City districts differently, combining East Hill, Cornell, and South Hill in a single district, and would have directed staff to prepare a revised Local Law, to be put to another public hearing. Several City residents, including former County legislators, had advocated the alternate scenario at the public hearing two weeks ago. Proponents of the change maintained sentiments expressed at the hearing should be taken into account, and that the alternate would provide more balanced representation, had been supported by the City's redistricting committee, and at one point found adequate by the County Commission, though not its favored choice. The proposed amendment failed by a 6-9 margin; another proposal to send the matter back to the Redistricting Commission for further review (to follow procedure outlined in the Commission's charge) failed by a 7-8 vote. In making the redistricting decision, several urged that the Legislature stand by the independent process that it established.

In remarks to the Legislature before the votes, Commission Chair Hank Dullea told legislators the 14-district plan contained in the Local Law "was and is the Commission's preferred configuration of legislative boundaries within the City of Ithaca" and said it coordinates much better with the City's five wards, with only a few unique election districts that can be easily managed by the Board of Elections.

Many legislators—including those who dissented in the final vote—praised the Commission for its work. Legislature Chair Martha Robertson stated, "I want to congratulate the Commission, and I want to thank us. Debate is hard; there is no perfect system; this decision represents a tremendous amount of work by our volunteers and our staff, and we deeply appreciate it." Legislators Kiefer and McBean-Clairborne stressed that their votes in no way should be interpreted as critical of the Commission.

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

Among other business, the Legislature

- Authorized acceptance of \$2.9 million in grants from the Federal Aviation Administration grants for Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport. The grants cover purchase of snow removal equipment, constructing an addition to the Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Building, performing a terminal expansion feasibility study, preparing an airport pavement management system, and rehabilitating the Airport Terminal apron.
- Authorizing refunding of 9.5 million in outstanding public improvement funding serial bonds (first issued in 2004) to potentially realize savings in debt service expense. Early retirement of the bonds could save \$1 million per year.

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