



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **October 2, 2012** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Endorses Grant Application to Extend County Broadband Service

The Legislature threw its unanimous support behind the grant application of Clarity Connect, Inc. under the “Connect NY” Broadband Grant program, to expand broadband Internet service to unserved homes and businesses in Tompkins County. (Legislators Carol Chock, Kathy Luz Herrera, and Nathan Shinagawa were excused.)

The “Connect NY” initiative offers \$25 million for broadband Internet development statewide, to be allocated through the State’s Regional Economic Development Councils. Clarity seeks approximately \$3 million to support a project that would be undertaken, with Clarity as lead applicant, to extend high-speed Internet service to unserved areas in Tompkins and Cayuga Counties. For two years, the County’s Special Committee on Broadband has studied and researched the problem of disparate Internet access throughout the County, where a significant number of the County’s rural homes and businesses—more than a quarter of the county’s geographic area—lack the broadband coverage that is virtually essential in today’s society. The Clarity proposal would reach about 98% of the currently unserved population of Tompkins County with broadband Internet service that meets or exceeds Federal Communications Commission standards, which Broadband Committee Chair Pat Pryor said would fulfill the Committee’s charge on how to best extend broadband technology countywide. The Broadband Committee on Monday recommended the Clarity proposal by a 9-0 unanimous vote. Clarity’s application has already received official support from six towns in Tompkins and the Cayuga County Legislature.

Clarity’s wireless solution would be offered in partnership with Finger Lakes Technologies Group, and there was considerable discussion concerning whether the Legislature should also endorse a second local proposal, advanced by Haefele TV of Spencer, which currently serves part of the Town of Enfield. Haefele’s cable-based solution, taken alone, would serve a smaller portion of the county, and both Legislator Pryor and Chair Martha Robertson, who serves on the Regional Council, advised that, for maximum effectiveness, the County should strongly support one proposal, rather than weaken the competitive position of its endorsement with support of two. Before the Legislature’s vote, however, Clarity and Haefele representatives committed to work to coordinate their proposals, and the Legislature’s support resolution was amended to reflect that.

Among aspects of the Clarity proposal that Legislator Pryor said impressed the Broadband Committee were its “shovel ready” nature, its widespread municipal support, its well developed plan for bringing digital literacy programs and awareness to potential users, and partnerships with the county library system and school districts, with discounted service offered for low income families.

Chair Robertson praised the application as “terrific” and “a fantastic opportunity,” and promised to enthusiastically support it before the Regional Council.

Contact: Pat Pryor, Chair, Special Committee on Broadband, 319-0507; Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.

Legislature Approves Support for Old Courthouse Renovation Project

The Legislature, by a pair of unanimous votes of amended the County's Capital Program to include renovation of the Old County Courthouse to accommodate relocation of the County Legislature chambers and offices, as is required to accommodate the needs of the New York State Court System, and authorized up to \$1.2 million in serial bonds and notes to support project costs. (Legislators Carol Chock, Kathy Luz Herrera, and Nathan Shinagawa were excused.)

The project includes several potential "add-on" elements, including renovations to expand and improve a basement-level conference room, which will be considered for inclusion depending on results of the bidding on construction contracts for the project.

"It probably early next year by the time we move in," advised Legislator Mike Lane, Chair of the Capital Plan Review Committee.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Capital Plan Review Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 38-4058.

Legislature Closes Out Redistricting Process

The Legislature brought to a close the more than year-long process of reapportioning County legislative districts based on the 2010 Census, by taking formal action expressing appreciation to and disbanding the County's Independent Redistricting Commission. The resolution was approved without dissent, with Legislators Carol Chock, Kathy Luz Herrera, and Nathan Shinagawa excused. Through its action, the Legislature expressed "its deepest gratitude to the members of the Independent Redistricting Commission for its diligence, thoroughness, and comprehensive recommendations in providing an independent and non-partisan effort," and it also thanked Information Technology Services Director Greg Potter and his staff for their professional information and expertise in support of the Commission, which made it possible for the redistricting process to move forward within the timeline requested.

The Legislature notes that the Legislature, in establishing the Independent Redistricting Commission and adopting its recommendation, has set a standard that more counties and the State Legislature should recognize and emulate."

Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 257-7453; Legislator Michael Lane, 844-8313 or 844-8440.

Development Focus Areas and Conservation Strategies Endorsed

After hearing presentations from representatives of the Tompkins County Planning Department, the Legislature endorsed two related planning documents: the Tompkins County Development Focus Areas Strategy and Tompkins County Conservation Strategy, both studies prepared by the Planning Department consistent with the principles of the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan after soliciting input from municipal officials and the public. The Development Focus Areas Strategies recommends nodes where mixed use, walkable, compact development could be encouraged, also serving to preserve the county's rural areas. The Conservation Strategy builds upon the County's Conservation Plan and Agriculture Resource Focus Areas Plan, proposing an integrated approach to resource protection by identifying critical action to conserve resources.

The Development Focus Areas and Conservation Strategies were both approved by votes of 8-4, Legislators Brian Robison, Dave McKenna, Frank Proto, and Mike Lane voting no in each case (Legislators Carol Chock, Kathy Luz Herrera, and Nathan Shinagawa were excused.)

While praising the work product the studies represent, Legislator Lane expressed concern said the County to be careful about unintentionally encroaching upon the land use authority of local municipalities. Planning Commissioner Ed Marx stressed that there is nothing new in the strategy documents, that the strategies represent voluntary guidance to communities and amount to a "fleshing out" of the County Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2004. He said, the County is a partner of communities that wish to be partners in the effort.

Legislator Pam Mackesey noted that the plans provide a valuable framework for a recommended strategy that addresses “big picture” tools for recommended development extending into the future.

Contact: Will Burbank, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee 272-7555; Joan Jurkovich or Leslie Schill, Tompkins County Planning Department, 274-5560.

Environmental Health Permitting System Approved

The Legislature, without dissent, amended the County’s Capital Program and appropriated more than \$285,000 in rollover funds from the Health Department to support purchase and implementation of an Environmental Health Permit Management System for the Tompkins County Health Department. (Legislators Carol Chock, Kathy Luz Herrera, and Nathan Shinagawa voted were excused.) The online data management system is being instituted to improve the efficiency of collecting, managing, and documenting permit data, field inspections, and financial transactions related to the health permitting process. The new permitting system, which may also be able to be applied to other departments and agencies, was also mentioned as part of the County’s 2013 budget process.

Contact: Frank Proto, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 277-4875; Public Health Director Frank Kruppa, 274-6674.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Authorized use of up to \$70,000 from the Highway Fund Balance to assist with completion of an erosion mitigation and stream stabilization project on Banks Road in the Town of Caroline near the County’s Banks Road bridge in the Town of Caroline, addressing conditions that led to damage during last year’s floods following Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. It is expected the funds will eventually be reimbursed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- Appropriated \$22,500 from the Contingent Fund to upgrade the County’s financial system application software.
- Heard a summary of the Independent Living Survey of homeless youth in Tompkins County, conducted in partnership with the County Youth Services Department, from Dale Schumacher and Patrick Doty of the Learning Web.

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