



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Youth Services the Focus at County Budget Hearing

As the Tompkins County Legislature tonight took comment on the recommended amended County Budget for 2013, legislators were asked to take reexamine requests for over-target funding for Youth Services programs, allocations characterized as a small investment now to produce long-term benefits for youth at risk.

Seven people attended tonight's hearing (including some department and agency representatives), and all four people who spoke asked the Legislature to reconsider the funding requests for youth. Linda Schoffel, Rural Youth Services Coordinator, asked the Legislature to take another look at a \$9,700 request that would maintain the Municipal Youth Services System at this year's level despite State reductions. She said the system is "alive, but wounded" after significant State and County cuts over the past three years. Suzanne Schlough, who coordinates the 4H Urban Outreach Program at West Village through Cooperative Extension, said her program's funding has been cut 64% over the past few years, with 86% of its funding now coming from grants and donations, and that the program is hard pressed to meet a growing need. Asher Hockett, chair of the County Youth Services Board, maintained that an investment of some \$20,000 in over target spending now would help address precarious funding over the past three years, amounting to "pennies on the dollar" to make a huge difference in children's lives, and called it "vitally important" to backfill support that's being lost from the State.

Randy Brown, of Newfield, pledged to personally donate \$10,000 to Cooperative Extension to support youth programs in his town, and challenged the County to match it. Brown said there could be better coordination between the County and schools to meet the needs of youth.

At tonight's hearing, County Administrator Joe Mareane briefed legislators on the State property tax cap, specifically a recent change directed by the State in the way the cap is calculated that would require counties to include in the formula factors including the amount of sales tax some towns apply against County sales tax to reduce County sales tax within their towns. At the beginning of the budget process, the County's cap had been estimated at 3.15%, but the formula change, Mareane said, would raise the County's cap to 3.75%, about \$8,500 below the levy increase currently proposed in the amended budget. Mareane said the formula change "confuses an already confusing way to calculate the cap," makes no sense in respect to public policy, and is being contested by the New York State Association of Counties on behalf of counties across the state.

The \$165.1 million recommended 2013 budget, which includes \$80.3 million in local dollar spending, would raise the tax levy (the total amount of property tax revenue needed to balance the budget) by 3.77%. The countywide average tax rate in the recommended amended budget would increase by 13 cents (1.96%), to \$6.80 per thousand dollars assessed property value, an increase of \$20.92 for the average \$160,000 home.

The Legislature can further amend the budget before final passage. The adoption vote is scheduled for the Legislature's next meeting on Tuesday, November 20, which begins at 5:30 p.m. at Legislative Chambers in the County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca.

Citizens are also encouraged to submit budget comments online at the County's web site at www.tompkins-co.org (click on "County Budget") or through the county budget Facebook page, which also may be accessed through the county website budget page. They may also call the Legislature Office at 274-5434, if needed, to obtain contact information for their county Legislator.

There will be another opportunity to comment on the budget at the beginning of the Legislature's November 20 meeting.

Contact: Nathan Shinagawa, Vice Chair of the Legislature, 280-7557; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058.

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