



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **November 20, 2012** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **In Unanimous Vote, Legislature Adopts 2013 Tompkins County Budget**

Culminating two-and-a-half months of budget deliberations and more than two hours deliberation tonight on proposed budget amendments, the Tompkins County Legislature, without dissent, adopted the County's 2013 budget and its capital program for the next five years. Approval came by a 14-0 vote, with Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera excused. And after approving a series of amendments that would have boosted the levy increase slightly, Legislators approved taking \$65,000 from the County's fund balance to meet the New York State property tax cap—adjusted for the County at 3.69%

The adopted budget increases the County tax levy by 3.69% and the countywide average tax rate by 12 cents (1.87%) to \$6.79 per thousand, an increase of \$19.95 for the average \$160,000 home. County property taxes on that average home stand at \$1,087.15.

Before adoption, Legislators made the following amendments to the budget:

- Legislators, by a vote of 8-6, removed from the budget \$25,567 that would have partially supported a Sustainability Planner position, since the City of Ithaca did not include partial funding for the position in the 2013 City budget. A proposal to redirect the money to increased Planning Department staff hours to perform sustainability work failed by a 6-8 vote; proposals to allocate \$23,000 and \$15,000 toward restoration of Planning hours also failed.
- \$30,000 was added to support Youth Services, priorities to be determined by the Youth Services Department, approved by a vote of 10-4. (A proposal to restore \$39,700 failed by a tie vote of 7-7; a proposal to restore \$9,700 for the Municipal Youth Services System, failed to win support by a 3-11 margin.)
- By a vote of 8-6, \$15,000 in one-time funding was approved for the Soil and Water Conservation District to support staff expense related to Hydrilla eradication, reduced from \$40,000 that had initially been requested.
- A half-time Cleaner position was added to the Facilities budget for a cost of \$25,000, approved by a vote of 11-3; an initial proposal for a full-time cleaner for \$41,778 failed by a 6-8 vote.

A proposal to change the way funds were allocated to begin to address a structural funding deficit for Tompkins County Area Development was considered, but failed to win support. The proposal to change \$170,000 in one-time funding to \$70,000 in target funding and \$100,000 one-time failed by a vote of 4-10.

The amendment to use \$65,000 in reserves to meet the cap, moved by Budget Chair Jim Dennis, was criticized by some as not the right way to use reserve money to meet what they consider an artificial cap. But others countered that, with excess fund balance at 10%, this use is a good message to send to taxpayers—Legislator Brian Robison noted that the Legislature must remember all County resources, including reserves, are the people's money. Legislator Nate Shinagawa stated that use of a small amount of reserves is proper, and said he believes the Legislature gains credibility when there are some years when it can make the cap and some where it

can't. A proposal to take another \$80,000 in fund balance to meet the Legislature's original 3.5% levy target failed by a 3-11 margin.

After the adoption vote, Budget Chair Dennis thanked Administration, department heads, and his legislative colleagues for their hard work and many contributions throughout the budget process. He said the budget continues essential services, while filling gaps identified by the County Administrator, and investing in technology and training. Administrator Joe Mareane reflected that the budget process actually began in late 2008 when the nation's economy fell apart, and he credited the Legislature for taking a balanced approach and making decisions throughout the period that have helped the County navigate through this difficult time. "I pay tribute to what you and this organization have accomplished over four of the most difficult years imaginable," he said.

In a separate budget-related action, the Legislature, by unanimous vote, also set the 2013 Solid Waste Annual Fee, which holds the fee steady at its current rate of \$56.00 per billing unit.

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

### **County Electricity Consumption Will be Offset by Renewable Energy Certificates**

The Legislature authorized the County to contract with Integrys Energy Services, through the Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance, for the purchase of electricity through the end of 2013, with the option to renew for an additional year. Under the agreement, 100% of the County's electricity use will be offset by Renewable Energy Credits (RECs)—RECs are a tradable commodity created when harnessing energy from renewable energy sources. Approval came by a vote of 12-1, with Legislator Dooley Kiefer voting no and Legislators Carol Chock and Kathy Luz Herrera excused.

County Administrator Joe Mareane noted the purchase approach represents "best practice" consistent with the County's Greenhouse Gas Emission goals and, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency the County's consumption will be "100% Green," attributed to carbon-free energy production. The County will purchase electricity from Integrys, along with national wind RECs, with "Green-e" certification of how the RECs were applied. Estimated electricity consumption in 2013 is estimated at 6.9 million Kilowatt hours, for an estimated cost of \$827,000. Cost of the RECs is estimated at \$13,000. Legislator Kiefer said she believes it much more important to put that amount toward a new energy project underway, the reason behind her negative vote.

*Contact: Will Burbank, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee 272-7555; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.*

### **Bonding Authorized for TC3 Projects**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislators Carol Chock and Kathy Luz Herrera excused), approved issuance by the Tompkins County Development Corporation of \$45 million in tax-exempt revenue bonds for the Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) Foundation. The bonds, which carry no indebtedness to the County, will facilitate refinancing of existing debt for past dormitory projects, as well as renovations to two purchased buildings. The tax-exempt bonding, which must be approved by the Legislature under state law, give non-profits access to tax-free financing under the federal Internal Revenue Code.

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

### **Jr. Tailwaggers Members Recognized as Distinguished Youth**

Members of the Tompkins County Jr. Tailwaggers 4-H Drill Team are recognized as Tompkins County Distinguished Youth for November. Nominated by Extension Community Educator Brenda Carpenter, the 16 member team, who captured Reserve Champion Honors in the Drill Team category at the New York State Fair, are recognized for their many successes in Tompkins County, not for their success in the show ring. They are praised as a valuable community resource, sharing their "passion of pooches" with the community, including at many community events, where they demonstrate what youth can accomplish with their dogs, and help the public learn more about their favorite canines. In the Drill Team, youth plan the routine, select and organize the music, develop costume ideas, and facilitate the practice sessions, exhibiting leadership, patience, diligence, and

practice—as well as respect and support for each other. Jr. Tailwaggers Drill Team members include Abigail and Lindsey Caskey, Ian Chan, Claire Conklin, Monika Conrad, Brandon and Lizzy Drake, Caleb George-Hinnant, Elisa Godoy, Brian Lampman, Melissa LoPinto, Bailey Lyons, Jacob Ragusa, Hannah Ritter, and Erin and Claira Seely. Club Leader is Cindy Wagner. The Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by A&B Awards and Engraving, Bangs Ambulance, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.

*Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.*

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Authorized the County to apply for a Federal Transit Administration for a \$5.6 million Section 5309 State of Good Repair grant on behalf of the City of Ithaca, with funds passed through to the City to apply toward reconstruction of the Ithaca Commons. \$4.5 million in federal funding would be focused on the actual Commons improvement, with a grant match of \$1.1 million from City and State sources.
- Heard Pete Meyers, of the Tompkins County Workers Center, and two staff working at ReCommunity, contractor at the County Recycling and Solid Waste Center, urge the County to extend its principles as a Living Wage employer to contract employees working on behalf of the County.
- Accepted a \$27,560 State Agricultural and Farmland Protection grant for update of the County's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan.
- Accepted nearly \$162,000 in State transportation grants, as the State's match for five federal Airport Improvement Program projects.

**- END -**