



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer  
607-274-5555, Office  
607-227-2152, Cell  
January 15, 2013  
TWO PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **January 15, 2013** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Looking Back, Looking Forward, Chair Robertson Announces 2013 Committee Appointments**

As the Legislature enters the final year of its four-year term, Chair Martha Robertson in her annual State of the County message reflected on challenges faced and achievements so far; now the focus must to how best to further move the County forward toward further accomplishments in 2013.

The biggest changes in legislative structure this year will be an increase the number of standing committees from six to seven, splitting the current Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee into two committees—Economic Development; and Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality—and to initiate a Charter Review Special Committee, to oversee the once-a-decade County Charter review, once work of the Capital Plan Review Committee concludes.

“Looking back, there have been some difficult times and some tough decisions since 2010, but it’s also been a productive time,” the Chair remarked. “We have one more year; what do we want to do with that time? What mark do we want to make?”

Among accomplishments the Chair cites: a Census count achieving a more than 100,000 population, and redrawing of County legislative districts by an independent commission (both for the first time ever); achieving balanced budget solutions during the most challenging fiscal times in memory, including closure of the County’s Certified Home Health Agency; and taking important steps to stabilize funding for TCAD and TCAT. “We’re now living with a property tax cap but have yet to see meaningful mandate relief,” Robertson said. “Perhaps the biggest surprise of the last three years is that we are *not* living with hydrofracking—at least not yet.”

Clearly, she said, we would like to make a mark on unemployment and income inequality, with the related issues of diversity and social justice, much affected by national and state policies. More, she said, needs to be done. Acknowledging the “amazing assets” in the county’s public, private, and higher education sectors, as well as Tompkins County Area Development, Robertson said that “it’s time to give economic development, including workforce development more of our attention and time as a legislature,” one way that county government can help create jobs. Therefore, she is appointing the new Economic Development Committee, to work with TCAD, Workforce Development, the Strategic Tourism Planning Board, tourism partners, and the regional Economic Development Council, as well as TC3 concerning their employment-related programs. That committee will be chaired by Legislator Will Burbank.

Legislator Carol Chock will chair the refocused Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, which will address and the daunting issue of climate change, giving sustainability an even higher priority than it has had in the past. Robertson said the goals and action items contained in the Cleaner Greener Southern Tier Plan, created by County planning staff, will provide the basis for the committee’s work, and the committee also will play a key role in monitoring developments regarding hydrofracking in New York State.

With Chock’s move to lead the Planning committee, Legislator Peter Stein will assume the chairmanship of Facilities and Infrastructure, and Brian Robison will succeed Stein as Chair of Public Safety. Pat Pryor will assume the chairmanship of Government Operations, in addition to continuing to chair the special Broadband

Committee. Jim Dennis will continue to lead the Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, and Frank Proto will stay on as chair of Health and Human Services. Among assignments to standing committees, the Chair is asking Public Safety to examine the issue of gun violence, and Health and Human Services to also examine gun safety from a broad perspective—including how to improve access to mental health care and to collaborate with community partners to foster a closer-knit community to reduce violence. Leslyn McBean-Clairborne will continue to lead the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee, working closely with Deputy County Administrator Paula Younger to bring the County's Diversity Plan in final form to every county department. Legislature Vice Chair Mike Lane has been asked to continue as chair of the special Capital Plan Review Committee, then to chair the new Charter Review Committee—among its issues to address, revised rules for electing legislative leadership with a 14-member body next term. The new committee assignments will take effect February 1.

“I want to thank you for your confidence and support in my role as chair of this body,” Robertson concluded. “I deeply appreciate the opportunity to serve another year. You were all very generous with your time in meeting with Mike and me about our direction for 2013. My gratitude especially goes to Mike, for his partnership in developing this committee structure and assignments. I look forward to Mike's wise counsel throughout the year. We have many challenges ahead of us in 2013 as we complete this legislative cycle. On behalf of our 101,000 constituents, let us work hard together, and as Peter (Stein) says, always seek to learn something.”

Chair Robertson's full address may be found on the Legislature's web site at <http://www.tompkins-co.org/legislature>.

*Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.*

### **Tish Pearlman Introduced as 2013 Tompkins County Poet Laureate**

Chair Martha Robertson said she is honored to appoint Tish Pearlman as the County's 2013 Poet Laureate. The well-known poet, broadcast journalist, and community activist was selected through a nomination and review process overseen by the Community Arts Partnership. Expressing shock and amazement at receiving the appointment, Pearlman said she is “very honored and very pleased,” and looks forward to “sharing the special healing force and voice of poetry in this community” through workshops and readings, and all that is needed to get the word out about this important program.

*Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.*

### **Bids Awarded for Legislature Relocation Project**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, awarded construction contracts for the Tompkins County Legislature Relocation Project, which will renovate and improve the second floor of the County's historic Old Courthouse to become the new home of County Legislature Chambers and offices.

McPherson Builders, Inc., of Ithaca, was awarded the General Contract for its bid of \$298,721; Climate Control Technologies, Inc., of Endwell, the Mechanical Contract for its bid of \$53,280; and Richardson Brothers Electrical Contractors, Inc., of Ithaca, the Electrical Contract for its bid of \$481,300, for a total cost of \$833,301. The County has opted not to award a Plumbing Contract, since it has been concluded that the work can be done by county staff at a cost savings of about \$21,000.

Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera said she is proud that two of the three project contractors are local, and the third is from nearby in the region. Legislator Carol Chock praised staff and HOLT Architects “an incredible job” for bringing this important project in within budget. The Legislature may consider potential future construction additions in the future, should the funding remain in the project contingency budget. Capital Plan Review Committee Chair Mike Lane said construction is scheduled to begin in February, with the Legislature scheduled to take occupancy in June.

*Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Capital Plan Review Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440.*

Among other actions, the Legislature approved rescheduling the Legislature's February 5 meeting to January 29, to avoid significant legislator conflicts arising with other County business.

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