



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer  
607-274-5555, Office  
607-227-2152, Cell  
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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **May 21, 2013** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Adopts 2014 Financial Goal, Fiscal Targets**

As the first step in the process of developing the 2014 County budget, the Legislature has approved a 2014 financial goal that directs the County Administrator Joe Mareane to prepare a recommended budget, including critical needs that he may identify, that could be supported with a tax levy increase of no more than 4%. The final vote was 10-4, with Legislators Pat Pryor, Mike Lane, Brian Robison, and Dave McKenna voting no and Legislator Nathan Shinagawa excused. In language added by Legislator Dooley Kiefer, the measure notes that, although based on what is known at this time, a tax levy increase of 4.5% would be justifiable, it is the desire of the Legislature to review a budget that can be supported with a levy increase of no more than 4%.

Legislators directed the Administrator to establish departmental and agency spending targets that can be supported with a 3.5% tax levy increase—about \$200,000 less than maintenance-of-effort for the operating budget. That increase would also support the Legislature's commitment to invest in already approved physical infrastructure improvements as part of the County's 20 Year Capital Plan. In approving the Capital Plan late last year, the Legislature committed to devote .75% of the levy to support the 2014 capital program. Administrator Mareane projects that another \$200,000 (or .5%) needed to address critical County needs, such as funding to support the County Library and Tompkins County Area Development.

Expressing concern about a lack of flexibility to meet needs that could arise during the budget process, Legislator Carol Chock proposed raising the upper limit of the goal to 4.5%, a proposal that failed by a 5-9 margin. Legislators Pryor, Lane, and Robison all expressed the view that the 4% goal is too high, Pryor saying she is mindful of the effect on taxpayers, especially because of the combined burden of property and school taxes. She maintained that her experience with the budget process shows that a 4% goal now shows that the Legislature is actually indicating that it could live with a much higher increase later. Budget chair Jim Dennis responded he would make every effort to make sure that doesn't happen. Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne said she is also concerned about the effects on people who face services being taken away year after year.

In a separate action, the Legislature also established the guidelines and fiscal targets for County departments and agencies, approved by a vote of 12-1, with Legislator Pryor voting no and Legislators Shinagawa and McBean-Clairborne excused. The action sets the fiscal targets for not-for-profit agencies at the amount approved in the adopted 2013 budget. For county departments, the target equals the 2013 budget target plus negotiated salary increases and associated fringe expense, minus a local departmental reduction of .5%. The departments' fiscal targets do not include any prior one-time funding nor any funds re-appropriated from previous years. The Legislature authorizes the County Administrator to reduce department targets as needed to achieve the tax levy goal set by the Legislature.

Also related to the 2014 budget process, the Legislature scheduled a public hearing for its next meeting to seek citizen comment on a proposed Local Law that would leave open the option of the County's overriding the State's property tax cap for 2014, should that become necessary. The vote was 10-3, with Legislators Pam Mackesey, Peter Stein and Kathy Luz Herrera voting no, and Legislators Shinagawa and McBean-Clairborne excused. The hearing will be held June 4 at 5:30 p.m. at Legislative Chambers of the County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca. Legislator Luz Herrera was one who said she sees no need to schedule the hearing this

early in the budget process. Language was added noting that information from New York State regarding the County's 2014 tax cap will not be available until late summer, and the State could penalize the County if its calculations were off and it had not passed a resolution permitting it to exceed the tax cap, if necessary. Administrator Joe Mareane advised that very preliminary calculations indicate the 2014 cap might be somewhere in the neighborhood of 2.5%.

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

### **Legislature Closes Out Center of Government Study**

The Legislature formally resolved its Center of Government Study, begun in 2010, accepting by unanimous vote the project business case analysis prepared by HOLT Architects, with involvement of expert partners, and expressing official thanks to all who contributed to that report. (Legislator Nathan Shinagawa was excused.) The expert analysis took a critical look at the County's space needs, considering a number of alternative space-use configuration options, to determine the cost-effectiveness of housing a number of County legislative and administrative options in a Center of Government building, as first recommended in the County's Space Use Master Plan back in 2005 and then included in the County's 20-Year Capital Plan, which had been projected for development in 2016.

Facilities Director Arel LeMaro and HOLT Architects president Graham Gillespie provided a detailed presentation on the Center of Government study and its findings, prepared with oversight from the Legislature's Capital Plan Review Committee over the past few years.

Considering potential alternatives, including construction of a Center of Government building on the site of the Old Library, expansion and renovation of the County's Annex C building, and renovation of the Human Services Annex, the consultants determined that the 20-year long-term cost of consolidation into a single Center of Government building would be substantially more expensive than other options, and would produce an estimated cost of approximately \$20 million, as much as \$7.5 million more than leaving departments in their current space. The consultants advised that a configuration involving a three-story addition to Building C would be the most cost-effective new-construction option, at a \$13.5 million estimated 20-year cost—still about \$500,000 more expensive than the status quo. Following receipt of the consultants' report, the committee recommended and the Legislature approved a design that could, for at least the near term, accommodate both Legislature Chambers and offices in the second floor of the Old Courthouse, avoiding approximately \$2.6 million in construction costs. With the Office for the Aging confirmed for location in the Human Services Annex, and two Community Justice Center programs relocated to existing space, it was noted that only the Day Reporting Program remains without an identified relocation site.

The Legislature's action notes that the business-case analysis "allowed the County to take an approach toward its space needs that placed the interests of the taxpayers first and has led to a pragmatic, cost-effective solution to nearly all of the County's near-term space needs," and that the information and perspectives developed through the analysis will have enduring value, should the Legislature choose to reevaluate future space needs. *Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Capital Plan Review Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440.*

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Awarded LaValley Brothers Construction, Inc. of Wolcott, NY the contract to replace the fuel storage and distribution system at the County Public Works Facility for its bid of \$488,924.
- Authorized the application for New York State Dedicated Transit Funding for Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit in the amount of \$898,256 to purchase two clean diesel replacement transit buses, and authorized annual the application for \$1.7 million in Federal Transit Administration funding to support TCAT operations, planning and capital projects, and County project administration and mobility management expenses as approved by the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council as part of the Transportation Improvement Program.

**- END -**