



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **August 20, 2013** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Approves Human Services Building Expansion**

The Legislature approved a modest expansion of the County's Human Services Building to house the Community Justice Center's Day Reporting Program, a relocation that will enable the County to vacate the Old Library. The vote was 13-2, with Legislators Frank Proto and Dave McKenna voting no.

The project will add a 1,600 square-foot one-story bump-out on the southeast corner of the building and reconfigure interior space to accommodate Day Reporting, while also maintaining current functions of the Department of Social Services and preserving a mid-size conference room in the building—the current Livesay Conference Room will be reduced by about 40%. Cost at this preliminary concept stage is estimated at just over \$1.5 million. As well as amending the County's five-year capital program to include the project, the Legislature also authorizes contracting with LaBella Associates for architectural and design services, at an expected cost of \$186,000.

County Administrator Joe Mareane told legislators that, in terms of the County's complex collection of relocation needs, "this gets us to the finish line" at an overall cost consistent with its planning numbers, and will also allow the County to vacate the Old Library, saving money. It was noted that the project's ongoing 20-year debt service cost, projected at \$112,000 a year, would be nearly offset by the approximately \$100,000 in annual building operation and maintenance costs associated with Day Reporting occupying the Old Library.

Legislature Chair Martha Robertson characterized the relocation of Day Reporting to the Human Services Building as a good solution, following an exhaustive process, an approach that maximizes staff adjacencies between Day Reporting and Probation, supports a level of respect and dignity for clients, and sets a higher standard that will benefit the program overall. Several other legislators described the project as a good compromise, and some said they'd support design that would enable the addition to potentially have capacity to add a second floor, should that ever be needed in the future.

Both Legislators Proto and McKenna supported an unsuccessful amendment that would have targeted any proceeds from possible sale of the Old Library building to offset the expense of the HSB project. Mr. McKenna also advanced the idea that the County consider purchase of a couple of portable classrooms in which to house Day Reporting for the short term, to allow the County to dispose of the Old Library building as soon as possible. Legislators were told that it could be at least 18 months before the renovation project is completed and Day Reporting can relocate to its new space.

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

#### **Legislature Backs Local Requests for State Emergency Disaster Funding**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, voiced its official support of local requests for New York State disaster funding to mitigate damage caused by the extraordinary rainstorm that swept through the area earlier this month. The storm deposited over five inches of rain in a very short period of time, causing extensive damage to municipal and County infrastructure, as well as county waterways—damage estimated at over \$500,000, \$300,000 of that to county government infrastructure. The measure, filed by Legislators Dave McKenna and

Jim Dennis, supports funding requests from the County Highway Division and local municipalities. It also supports allocation of State resources to repair damage to State parks, trails, and highways, and to area waterways. Director of Emergency Response Lee Shurteff told legislators that there was not enough damage statewide to seek a federal declaration, but that the State is being asked to make a state declaration to enable the considerable local costs to be reimbursed.

*Contact: Legislator David McKenna, 564-7243; Legislator James Dennis, 387-4058.*

### **County Accepts \$2.8 Million Statewide Interoperable Communications Grant**

The Legislature, without dissent, authorized the County to accept a more than \$2.8 million interoperable communications grant awarded to the Department of Emergency Response, the grant program targeted at supporting inter-county, regional, and statewide interoperability of emergency radio communications through use of county-based public safety communications radio systems. The grant award requires no local fund match. When the County's Public Safety Communications System was developed and constructed several years ago, it had been anticipated that the system would constitute a key part of the State Office for Technology's then-planned Statewide Wireless Network to achieve interoperability—a program, and associated financial support, that was not forthcoming.

*Contact: Lee Shurteff, Director of Emergency Response, 257-3888; Brian Robison, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 351-3601*

### **Legislature Hears Presentation on Proposed Public Safety Building Changes**

Although not yet ready to consider a resolution, legislators heard a report from LaBella Architects concerning proposed changes to the Public Safety Building that would construct an outdoor recreation area at the jail to free up interior dormitory space to accommodate seven inmates at the initial stage, a modification that would be expected to decrease the County's cost to board out inmates in neighboring counties. The preliminary cost estimate of \$900,000, currently being considered at the committee level would include construction of the outdoor rec. area and the initial seven-bed space, and design of that and an optional later phase that would provide seven more beds, should Sheriff's administrative functions be able to move to other quarters. At a current cost of \$80 per inmate per day, the County in 2012 spent \$244,000 to board inmates at other jails, not including the associated transport cost, and Public Safety Committee Chair Brian Robison commented that he believes the project would be a wise approach.

*Contact: Brian Robison, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 351-3601; Michael Lane, Chair, Capital Plan Review Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440.*

Among other business, the Legislature

- Heard a presentation from Assessment Director Jay Franklin and Jeff Bartholomew, Regional Director of the New York State Office of Real Property Tax Services regarding the Basic STAR exemption re-registration program. Letters are being mailed beginning this week from the State Department of Taxation and Finance. All property owners who receive the exemption on their primary residence must re-register by November 30 by accessing the Tax Department web site at <http://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/star13/default.htm> or by calling the department's help line at 518-457-2036. Legislator Mike Lane was one legislator who criticized the regulation as a burden on property owners and questioned the lack of a toll-free number for contacts.
- Authorized a contract with the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District, cost not to exceed \$25,000, to support stream corridor restoration and flood hazard mitigation projects under the County's flood hazard mitigation program. Among priority projects are restoration of the Campbell Meadows stream corridor on Fall Creek in the Town of Dryden and maintenance stream plantings throughout the county, as well as purchase of flood inundation mapping software.
- Approved allocation of \$90,000 the Housing Fund to support the three-unit White Hawk Ecovillage project in the Town of Danby, as recommended by the Housing Fund Program Oversight Committee, provided that certain conditions related to drainage and income verification are met.

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