



Inclusion Through Diversity

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September 3, 2013  
THREE PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **September 3, 2013** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Implements Additional Mortgage Tax**

The Legislature, by a vote of 13-1, implemented a provision of New York State Tax Law that authorizes the County to apply an additional .25 percent Mortgage Recording Tax for mass transportation services. (Legislator Dooley Kiefer voted no; Legislator Nate Shinagawa was absent.) Last month, State Tax Law was amended to permit Tompkins County to retain that additional quarter-percent mortgage tax for that purpose, instead of having proceeds from that tax go to the State. In its action, the Legislature repealed a 1969 resolution of the Board of Representatives that had temporarily suspended imposition of the additional tax.

The additional quarter-percent tax will specifically be devoted to support of the county's bus system, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT), generating an expected \$800,000 in annually, which County Administrator Joe Mareane notes will provide a stable stream of revenue for TCAT to address capital and operating needs. The three TCAT partner—the County, City of Ithaca, and Cornell University—will continue to allocate annual operational funding, each currently contributing about \$900,000 each year.

TCAT Operations Director Nancy Oltz thanked the Legislature for its action, calling it an exciting time for TCAT and the community. Legislator Pam Mackesey, a member of the TCAT board said a “tremendous debt of gratitude” is owed to Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton and Senator Tom O'Mara, who advanced the measure in the State Legislature.

Legislator Kiefer indicated that she “sadly” voted no. She had advanced some proposed wording changes, but those changes were not considered, since legislators were informed the language in the resolution had been specified and approved by the State.

The action will bring Tompkins County's total mortgage tax to 1% as of December 1, when the additional tax will take effect.

*Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.*

#### **Public Safety Building Capital Project Approved**

The Legislature approved a capital project that will renovate the County Public Safety Building to increase jail capacity and be expected to decrease the County's inmate board-out expenses. (The vote was unanimous, with Legislator Nate Shinagawa absent.) The project will construct a covered outdoor recreation area and convert the little-used current indoor recreation space to dormitory space for seven inmates. The project, initially estimated to cost \$900,000, will also include design work for an optional later phase that would provide seven more beds, should Sheriff's administrative functions be able to move to other quarters. The County will contract with LaBella Associates for architectural and engineering services.

The county jail has maximum capacity of 75 inmates, and has operated with temporary variances over most of the past decade, with the current allowed maximum of 93. 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. With the average board-outs per day at between 6 and 8, it was noted that the 7 additional beds would reduce the need

to board out inmates and increase capacity to 82, the jail's current average daily population, without additional staff cost. County Administrator Joe Mareane again advised that a strong business case exists for the project, and said design of the later phase as part of the project will demonstrate the County's good faith in working toward a longer term solution. Sheriff Ken Lansing believes the project will demonstrate to the State that progress is being made toward increasing jail capacity and Public Safety Chair Brian Robison noted that the project will pay for itself in five years through reduced board-out costs.

*Contact: Brian Robison, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 351-3601.*

### **Legislature Adopts Report Addressing Library Budget Challenges**

The Legislature, without dissent, adopted a work group report that recommends a short-term financial strategy to respond to a sizable structural budget deficit for the Tompkins County Public Library, projected at more than \$400,000 for 2014. (Legislator Nate Shinagawa was absent.)

The work group report recommends, in part that County "target" support for the Library increase by at least \$100,000 for each of the next three years, that the Library spend down all but \$75,000 of its reserves over the next two years to support operating expenses, and that the County appropriate County reserves to close the remaining budget gap—this strategy to provide short-term support while the Library develops a long-term fiscal strategy to achieve a sustainable revenue structure. With a 15% reduction in staff over the past four years, the work group concluded further personnel reductions cannot be made without hurting service and program, and identified the County as the only significant source of short-term funding.

In response to legislator questions regarding what it would mean for the Legislature to "adopt" the report, Administrator Mareane advised it communicates a strong endorsement of the findings and recommendations, but does not commit to allocating funds, decisions that will be part of the 2014 budget process.

*Contact: Patricia Pryor, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 319-0507.*

Among other actions:

- County Administrator Joe Mareane told Legislators that, with the reduced amount of increase that New York State will require for pension contributions in 2014, he believes he will be able to achieve budget priorities legislators have set as a starting point for the 2014 budget with a tax levy increase that is less than the 4% target the Legislature set last spring. The Administrator will deliver his recommended budget to the Legislature in two weeks.
- The Legislature heard a presentation regarding how the new Health Exchanges will work under the federal Affordable Care Act from Jean McPheeters, president of the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce, and Beverly Chin and Cassandra Aikman of the County Health Planning Council. Staff in the two organizations have been approved as local navigators to guide citizens and organizations regarding the health exchange process and will begin having office hours as of October 1. Citizens can call 2-1-1 or the Chamber (at 273-7080) for more information.
- The Legislature awarded the contract for reconstruction of the historic upstream Forest Home Bridge over Fall Creek in the Town of Ithaca to Economy Paving Company, Inc., of Cortland, for its bid of over \$1.7 million. Estimated County cost is nearly \$248,000, with contributions also from Cornell University and the Town of Ithaca as part of the federally funded project. The Legislature also approved a supplemental agreement for project construction inspection and support services with Erdman Anthony, of Rochester at a cost of \$165,000 beyond the amount already allocated for design. Legislators also approved an \$85,000 budget transfer from the Highway fund balance to the project's capital account, to prepare for added project funds that could be needed, since construction and inspection costs came in slightly over what had been budgeted.
- The Legislature approved \$2,500 in contingent funds for OAR (Opportunities, Alternatives, and Resources) to support the cost of complying with new State legislation governing charitable bail organizations—required application and licensing fees, testing costs, fingerprinting, and surety bonds

for staff. The Legislature also appropriated \$10,000 in contingent funding to the OAR bail fund. In 2012, OAR provided bail assistance to 69 clients, averting an estimated \$455,000 in jail board-out costs that would have otherwise been borne by the County.

- Appropriation of \$40,000 from STOP-DWI fine money was approved to purchase a STOP-DWI fully equipped road patrol vehicle for the Tompkins County Sheriff's Office.

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