



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

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Highlights of the **October 1, 2013** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Sale of Biggs Parcel Authorized for Cayuga Townhomes Project

The County Legislature, after nearly three hours of thoughtful discussion, approved three resolutions that pave the way for potential sale of the last County-owned parcel on the former Biggs Complex land on West Hill and development of 60 units of affordable housing in what is currently known as the Cayuga Townhomes project. In three separate actions, the Legislature determined that there remains no public use for the nearly 26 acres of County-owned undeveloped land, that the action does not carry adverse environmental impact, and authorizing a sales agreement with NRP Properties, LLC, of Cleveland, OH, in conjunction with Better Housing for Tompkins County, for development of the property, subject to certain conditions. The authorization gives NRP site plan control so that it can begin the necessary site plan approval process with the Town of Ithaca, and to move toward seeking financing for the project. The Legislature's action does not mean the project is yet approved; the Town of Ithaca has authority over land use for such projects.

The sale authorization ultimately passed by an 11-4 vote, with Legislators Peter Stein, Pam Mackesey, Kathy Luz Herrera, and Dooley Kiefer voting no. Both Luz Herrera and Kiefer indicated they support the initiative in general, but thought the action should be delayed to provide more time to consider input from West Hill residents. Ms. Kiefer had unsuccessfully proposed to delay consideration until the Legislature's next meeting. Several West Hill residents addressed Legislators, expressing concern about how the project could worsen traffic congestion, increase sprawl, urbanize a quiet area, and affect the overall quality of life. Mr. Stein said the project is worthwhile, but should be located in the City, not where transportation by car is encouraged.

The project, with a projected total development cost of \$13.5 million, would develop the 60-unit mixed income townhome community through a planned development zone, with about 65% of the property remaining undeveloped. NRP Vice President Chris Dirr told the Legislature the project would be an innovative, energy-efficient, compact, pedestrian-oriented community that is also affordable. The project is part of the County's Climate Showcase Communities program, which received grant support from the federal Environmental Protection Agency two years ago, to adapt and apply the climate friendly co-housing concepts of Ithaca's EcoVillage to other settings, serving as a model for such approaches elsewhere. The project would be developed by NRP and owned by Better Housing, and the residents of the rental units would have the opportunity to convert to owning the units after 15 years. NRP and Better Housing responded last year to a County Request for Proposals, offering \$500,000 for the property contingent upon certain conditions including obtaining financing and land use approvals, with the County expressing willingness to credit the developer for related pedestrian and transit improvements.

Among members of the public voicing support for the project were two past Chairs of the Legislature, Tim Joseph and Mike Koplinka-Loehr, who both spoke of the project's potential for addressing the need for affordable housing in the county, identified a decade ago. Mr. Joseph said he has become convinced that climate change is the largest most important issue facing the planet, and a climate-friendly project such as this is an important step to take. Ithaca Town Supervisor Herb Engman also said he personally has come to support the project.

Several Legislators commented that residents need to be assured that their interests are being served and that issues such as traffic congestion are being addressed—Legislator Jim Dennis was one who urged that the County work with the City and the State Department of Transportation to synchronize traffic lights and address traffic problems in the West End to make the situation better.

Contact: Carol Chock, Chair, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-9007; Planning Commissioner Ed Marx, 274-5560.

Legislature Accepts State Archives Shared Services Grant

Legislators voted unanimously to accept a \$150,000 State Archives Shared Services Grant, awarded to the Tompkins County Clerk's Office, to extend the County's Electronic Document Management System to four more county municipalities—the City of Ithaca, and the Towns of Caroline, Danby, and Ulysses. With the expansion supported by the latest archives grant, all county Towns and the Village of Cayuga Heights will share access to the County's Laserfiche document management system.

“Unlike larger governments, small local governments in New York State often do not have the resources to implement and support high-level uses of technology within their records management programs,” notes Tompkins County Clerk Aurora Valenti. “Often the best alternative is to pool resources and collaborate with other like governments to provide access to technological efficiencies. This will facilitate the incorporation of all Tompkins County municipalities in a system that ensures retention and historical accessibility of all records, preserving them for the future without necessity of constructing any facility to ‘manage’ records.”

The grant funds will support additional software licensing fees for the additional users, the scanning of more than a million permanent minutes, files, and building permits; and upgrade and expansion of the County's data storage capacity, with redundancy and disaster recovery between the two County data centers. A State Archives grant, received last year, supported extension of services to the Towns of Dryden, Groton, Ithaca, Lansing, Newfield, and Enfield.

The Legislature also approved establishment of the Tompkins Shared Services Electronic Records Repository Group, as an oversight group for the shared services program, adopting the group's agreement and bylaws.

Contact: County Clerk Aurora R. Valenti, 274-5431; Patricia Pryor, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 319-0507.

Public Hearing Scheduled on 2014 Budget

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, set the public hearing date for the 2014 Tentative Budget and the County's Capital Plan for the next five years. The hearing will be held Tuesday, November 12 at 7:00 p.m., and will take place at County Legislative Chambers, located at the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building (Second Floor), 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca. Following review of County Administrator Joe Mareane's Recommended Budget, the tentative budget and capital program are scheduled for adoption October 29. The adopted tentative budget will be the focus of the November 12 hearing, and Legislators may make changes to the tentative budget after that time, based on comments received at the public hearing.

Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.

Bid Awarded for Pilot Curbside Residential Food Scrap Collection Program

The Legislature awarded Casella Waste Systems, Inc., of Newfield, the contract for a pilot curbside food scrap recycling program. (The vote was 14-1, with Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne dissenting.) Casella was awarded the contract based on its submitted bid of \$161,505 to provide the curbside service from November 15 of this year to December 31, 2015. The pilot curbside collection service is an integral part of the County residential food scrap recycling program, a key element of meeting the County's goal of diverting 75% of the solid waste stream.

The initial pilot program will focus on about 400 residential properties located on West Hill in the City of Ithaca, then be expanded to other areas over the next two years. Tompkins County Solid Waste currently offers a free drop-off location for food scraps collection at the Public Drop-Off area of the Recycling and Solid Waste Center, and more drop-off sites are planned to be added at other county locations next year. Kitchen caddies

and certified compostable bags are available free of charge at the Tompkins County Solid Waste office, and will be provided to pilot residences in November.

Contact: Barbara Eckstrom, Manager, Tompkins County Solid Waste, 273-6632; Peter Stein, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 266-7579.

Among other business, the Legislature

- Appropriated \$33,000 in contingent funding to support a needed upgrade to the Assessment Department's ImageMate online database, which enables the public, as well as real estate professionals, to easily access property assessment information online. The upgraded system will also enable Assessment staff to manage property data from the field.
- Appointed Republican Elections Commissioner Elizabeth Cree to a new two-year term, commencing at the beginning of next year and ending December 31, 2015.

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