



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **February 18, 2014** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Considers, But Fails to Support Delay for Jail Renovation Project

The Legislature considered, but failed to approve, a proposal to authorize a one-year delay on the planned renovation of the county jail—that moratorium urged by community members deeply concerned about the addition of seven more jail beds. Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne proposed the measure to delay the project to allow the new Jail Alternatives Task Force, being formed through the County's Criminal Justice Advisory Board, to complete its work before any action is taken on the jail project. While noting that Tompkins has been "at the cutting edge of counties" in the area of incarceration alternatives, she maintained delay would be prudent to allow the new task force to do its work before proceeding with the capital project.

Legislators listened to nearly two hours of impassioned comments by those concerned about the project and urging the moratorium. More than 100 people packed the Legislature Chambers, and at least a quarter of them addressed the Legislature—urging that the county not join in what was described as society's move toward mass incarceration and maintaining that the time had come to make a difference at the local level in the criminal justice system. In more than an hour of thoughtful discussion that followed, many Legislators thanked those expressing concern for their initiative and their input—saying they have had an impact in prompting the renewed examination of additional ways to reduce the jail population. But, ultimately, most indicated that, while they firmly support that review, they do not support project delay. The moratorium measure failed by a vote of 3-11, Legislators McBean-Clairborne, Kathy Luz Herrera, and Mike Sigler voting in favor. Several pointed to the human costs of waiting—inmates boarded out for lack of space and removed from their families and services. Legislator Dan Klein said, "If I thought this project would put even one more person in jail, I wouldn't approve it." Public Safety Chair Brian Robison maintained the project would produce benefit by reducing jail overcrowding, even with a reduction of the jail population, and he noted that the close to quarter-million dollars the County pays annually in inmate board-out costs could support some of the new alternatives to be recommended.

County Administrator Joe Mareane said a bonding resolution for the jail project, and for \$1.5 million to renovate the County Human Services Building to provide a new home for the Day Reporting program, will come through County committees and to the Legislature next month. Legislator Dooley Kiefer cautioned she is not prepared to vote for the project before seeing a very detailed plan.

Legislator McBean-Clairborne said the issue of incarceration is actually a larger community conversation involving more than just the County Legislature, and she urged those concerned to become involved in other areas, such as the court system, and to create a sustained movement to make change happen.

Contact: Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, 277-5104; Brian Robison, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 351-3601

Grant Funds Accepted For New Alternatives-to-Incarceration Program

The Legislature, without dissent, authorized acceptance of a more than \$100,000 grant from the New York State Office of Indigent Legal Services—\$35,000 each year over three years—to support a defender-based advocacy sentencing initiative for criminal defendants in Tompkins County, in partnership with the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA), of Syracuse. CCA will work in partnership with the County Assigned Counsel Office and

defense counsel to provide training, consultation, investigation, and report preparation services for identified cases, as well as referral information for relevant support services for defendants. Public Safety Chair Brian Robison told legislators the grant award is very significant, and could almost be considered the first step in the county's study of additional alternatives, to be examined in depth by the new Jail Alternatives Task Force being formed through the County's Criminal Justice/Alternatives to Incarceration Board.

Contact: Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, 277-5104; Brian Robison, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 351-3601

Legislature Approves Assessment Shared Services Agreement

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, authorized Tompkins County to enter into a joint services agreement, under the New York State Real Property Tax Law, to provide assessment services to the Town of Covert, located in Seneca County. Through the agreement, the Tompkins County Department of Assessment will provide a full-time assessment office for the Town of Covert. That office will be staff most of the time in the City of Ithaca, but there will be office hours of at least four hours per week at the Covert Town Hall. The measure notes that the joint-services agreement is consistent with Governor Cuomo's stated priority for shared services on the part of local governments. The County will receive \$15 per parcel for approximately 1,500 parcels in the Town of Covert—Assessor's fees of \$23,160 for the first full year, which amounts to \$17,370 for the remaining ten months of 2014.

Contact: Jay Franklin, Director of Assessment, 274-5517; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; Nathan Shinagawa, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 280-7557.

Contract Awarded for Courthouse Basement Renovations

The Legislature awarded Andrew R. Mancini Associates, of Endicott, the general contract to renovate the basement space of the County Courthouse for use by the New York State Unified Court System, for Mancini's bid of \$298,700 and a total contract expense of \$330,000. The project will renovate approximately 3,000 square feet of existing Courthouse basement space, most of it formerly occupied by the Office for the Aging, into new surrogate clerk offices, three holding cells, and meeting space for the court system. The County will initially pay all design and construction costs and be reimbursed by the State court system.

Contact: Arel LeMaro, Director of Facilities, 274-3500.

Industrial Development Agency Members Appointed

The Legislature by unanimous vote approved Chair Mike Lane's 2014 appointments to the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency. Legislators Nathan Shinagawa, Will Burbank, Martha Robertson, and Jim Dennis will continue on the IDA for another year, with Mr. Dennis appointed as Chair, succeeding Martha Robertson. City of Ithaca Mayor Svante Myrick was appointed to continue as an At-Large member for the completion of his two-year term.

Contact: Will Burbank, Chair, Economic Development Committee 272-7555.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Approved an \$80,000 budget adjustment incorporating grant funds received from the Park Foundation into the Planning Department budget as a pass-through of grant funds to the Solar Tompkins project, for which Planning Department will act as fiscal agent. The vote was 13-1, with Legislator Brian Robison dissenting.
- Accepted grant awards, including a four-year federal grant—more than \$48,000 each year—to the Youth Services Department to reduce underage drinking through programming of the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth. Funds come from the Sober Truth on Preventing Underage Drinking (STOP Act) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- Also accepted, a more than \$21,000 award from the State Department of Criminal Justice Services to help defray costs of implementing Leandra's Law and the monitoring of ignition interlock devices.

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