



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the March 4, 2014 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Supports Alternative to Governor's Property Tax Freeze Proposal

Maintaining that Governor Cuomo's proposed two-year tax freeze and rebate program is not the way to achieve meaningful property tax relief, the Tompkins County Legislature has voted official support of an alternative approach—with the State assuming the cost of its own mandated human services programs, beginning with Medicaid, to produce immediate and meaningful tax relief for property owners.

The resolution, advanced by Legislature Chair Mike Lane and approved by unanimous vote (Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne was excused), states that the Legislature agrees with the need to prioritize property tax relief, but that "Tompkins County finds no quantifiable evidence that the property tax freeze would result in significant property tax relief, while a phased state takeover of the costs of its own mandated human services, starting with Medicaid, would provide immediate, permanent, and measurable property tax reductions for all classes of property owners." Such realignment, the Legislature maintains, "would achieve historic levels of property tax relief."

Based on the County's 2014 budget, the amount of the proposed rebate for an average Tompkins County homeowner is estimated at \$7.31, the measure notes. But if the State began the realignment of responsibilities by paying \$11.8 million of its own Medicaid bill shifted to Tompkins County, county taxpayers would see an immediate 26% reduction in County taxes, saving the average homeowner \$294 per year—an amount that would increase to a 57% cut in the property tax levy (\$636 per year for the average homeowner), once the State assumed the full cost of its mandated human service programs.

There was some discussion of proposed wording changes—such as including language that would indicate that the tax cap basis on counties would be adjusted to take into account a reduction due to the mandate takeover—but in the end, those changes were not accepted.

The Legislature's action comes six weeks after legislators heard a presentation from County Administrator Joe Mareane, which first suggested the alternative tax relief approach. Administrator Mareane said the alternative has been drawing favorable reaction since it was first proposed—in part, through the New York State Association of Counties. Meetings have taken place with Assemblywoman Lifton and Senator O'Mara, with a session with Senator Seward expected soon. The Tompkins County Council of Governments has formed a working group to address how to support this on the municipal level. The Administrator said Assemblywoman Lifton encouraged the Legislature to act on the resolution passed tonight.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Weighs in on State Energy Plan

The Legislature approved comments and recommended revisions to the 2014 Draft New York State Energy Plan. The vote was 10-4, with Legislators Peter Stein, Mike Sigler, Jim Dennis, and Brian Robison voting no. The Legislature's resolution, accompanying a two-page bulleted list of specific recommendations, applauds the Governor's initiatives on renewable energy and clean technology, and its reaffirmation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 and 80% by 2050. But the Legislature calls upon the State to revise the Draft Plan

“to include specific measurable targets to transition to a renewable energy future”—a wide range of specific actions it maintains must be undertaken to meet those greenhouse gas emission reduction goals. It also urges that the State’s projected energy mix contained in the plan should reflect those targets, actions, and greenhouse gas emission reduction goals. While praising the proposal overall, Legislator Peter Stein unsuccessfully sought to delete language that spoke against increasing state reliance on natural gas as part of the plan. That amendment, however, failed by a 6-8 vote.

Contact: Carol Chock, Chair, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-9007.

Hearing Scheduled on Proposed Real Property Tax Exemption

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, scheduled a public hearing on a proposed new Local Law that would provide an exemption from County taxes, under certain conditions, for up to ten years for construction of buildings meeting LEED standards. The maximum taxable value to be abated under the proposed law would be \$100,000. The hearing will be held March 18, at 5:30 p.m., at County Legislative Chambers, located in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building (second floor), 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434; Nathan Shinagawa, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 280-7557.

Gabe Shapiro Recognized as Distinguished Youth

The Legislature recognized Lehman Alternative Community School senior Gabe Shapiro as Tompkins County Distinguished Youth. Gabe, who lives at Ithaca’s Ecovillage, is praised in 14 Letters of Recommendation submitted to the Legislature. Last spring Gabe helped organize the local Youth Power Summit that brought together young people to explore economic, social and climate justice issues, and in the fall he generated funds and co-led a local delegation of youth to the Power Shift conference in Pittsburgh, which addressed issues of climate change and explored alternatives for a clean energy economy. Among his many accomplishments, Gabe has been active in the Ithaca Youth Council, has served as student representative to the Sustainability Center and on the TCAT Advisory Committee, and helped organize the *Get Your Green Back Tompkins* campaign.

One of the many people who recommended Gabe, LACS Principal Diane Carruthers described him as “courageous, passionate, reflective, strong, kind, generous, inspirational, and confident...a young man who has become a true leader”—a caring friend dedicated to learning and who pitches in to help every way he can and, most impressive, his involvement in civic action. She said, “Gabe truly embodies all that we hope to inspire in our students—from deeply and critically thinking about political issues from multiple perspectives, to moving theory into practice, actively engaging his school as well as the world beyond...a citizen in every aspect of the word.”

The Tompkins County Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by Specialty Trophies & Awards, Bangs Ambulance Service, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.

Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Approved creation of the position of Professional Development Coordinator in the Department of Emergency Response, a position included as part of the County’s 2014 budget, but not yet filled, that will provide quality assurance, training, and accreditation services in the County 9-1-1 Center. The vote was 12-2, with Legislators Kathy Luz Herrera and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne dissenting. Ms. Luz Herrera expressed some concern about what she sees as a change in description from what had been discussed as part of the budget.
- Approved by unanimous vote some revised Environmental Health fees for the Department of Health, among them revised fees for the Finger Lakes Grassroots Festival, now classified as a mass gathering, rather than campgrounds, upon advice from the New York State Department of Health.

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