



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **May 20, 2014** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Defers 2015 Budget Guidelines; Administrator to Issue Tentative Guidelines for County Departments and Agencies**

The Legislature has postponed action on setting a property tax levy goal and related spending targets until June 3, when all Legislators are expected to be present.

To avoid delays in the budgeting process, County Administrator Joe Mareane advised the Legislature that he will instruct department heads to begin their work on the 2015 budget using spending targets tied to the County's estimated property tax cap, which would limit an increase in the County property tax levy to 2.36% above the 2014 level.

The tentative spending targets will require departments to reduce their spending by 1% from their 2014 adopted budgets, after adjustments for uncontrollable items such as changes in fringe benefit costs. In the County's budget process, departments can also request supplemental appropriations called "over target requests" that are considered separately by the County Administrator and County Legislature. Agencies receiving direct funding from the County will be held to a 1% increase above this year's allocation. None of the fiscal targets include any one-time funding granted as a part of the 2014 budget.

If the Legislature elects to adopt a different property tax levy goal at its June 3 meeting, department and agency heads will be provided revised spending targets by the County Administrator.

#### *Hearing on proposed tax cap override law:*

Also related to the 2015 Budget, the Legislature held a public hearing on a proposed Local Law that would permit the Legislature to override the 2015 tax levy limit, if it opts to do so as a result of the 2015 budget process. Passage of such a law, which has been done every year since the Property Tax Cap went into effect, would not mean that the Legislature intends to exceed the cap, but would provide the flexibility to exceed the cap if deemed necessary, and would protect the County if it meets the cap, as calculated, but inadvertently exceeds it due to clerical or technical errors.

The only one to speak at the hearing was Town of Caroline Supervisor Don Barber, who urged the Legislature to support the tax cap override. He criticized the ongoing shift in tax policy that has created a two-tiered economic structure, with lower income people bearing a disproportionate tax burden. Maintaining that tax cap is a taxation issue not of our making, Mr. Barber said the property tax cap was created to place pressure on local governments, pitting constituents against our governments, while eviscerating local services. He urged that every state official representing the county be held accountable for voting for the New York State budget and said that the economic shift that has occurred in the county must be recognized.

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

#### **Legislature Accepts Waterfront Revitalization Grant for Feasibility Study**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Nathan Shinagawa was excused) accepted a \$56,000 Local Waterfront Revitalization Program Grant, administered by the New York State Department of State, to support a

study assessing the feasibility of relocating the State Department of Transportation maintenance facility located on Cayuga Inlet.

The action also incorporates \$22,000 in matching funds provided for the study by the City of Ithaca and appropriates from the Contingent Fund \$22,000 in County matching funds that had been set aside for this purpose as part of the 2014 budget process.

The project will conduct a feasibility study and financial plan for relocation of the DOT Maintenance Facility from its site on Cayuga Inlet to property in Dryden purchased by the DOT for that purpose nearly a decade ago. In materials provided to the Legislature, Commissioner of Planning Ed Marx notes that the DOT site is the most prominent waterfront property in the City of Ithaca for redevelopment, identified in both the Cayuga Lake Waterfront Plan and the County Comprehensive Plan as the priority waterfront development site, and that moving the facility will allow redevelopment of the Cayuga Inlet property for waterfront-related uses that can contribute to the local economy and can improve waterfront access for residents and visitors.

Recounting the history of the project over the past decade, Legislator Martha Robertson said she is confident that the feasibility study is what is needed to make a case to the DOT and to move this initiative forward.

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

### **John Varvayanis Honored as Distinguished Youth**

Dryden High School student John Varvayanis was recognized as this month's Tompkins County Distinguished Youth. Nominated by Cathy Wakeman, of Dryden, John is praised for his leadership and encouragement of younger musicians in the Dryden Music Program; for his language achievements both here and abroad; for his community and volunteer service, including as a referee for Sertoma youth soccer and in flight training; as an avid athlete in as many as six sports; and as an outstanding student, who has earned high honors every semester and numerous academic awards. Ms. Wakeman says, "There is much more I could say about this fine young man. It has been a pleasure to know him...and appreciating his service to his fellow students. He exemplifies this gift of putting the needs of others first." The Tompkins County Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by Specialty Trophy and Awards, Bangs Ambulance Service, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.

*Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.*

### **Hearing Scheduled on TC3 Operating Budget**

The Legislature set July 1 for the public hearing on the Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) 2014-2015 requested operating budget. The hearing will begin at 5:30 p.m., at Legislature Chambers, located in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

*Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.*

Among other business,

- Seven members of the public addressed the Legislature, again voicing concern about the jail renovation plan that would build a covered outdoor recreation space and convert the current indoor rec. area to dormitory space to accommodate seven jail beds. They also urged support for County investment in incarceration alternatives such as one-on-one mentoring programs, proposed to the County's Jail Alternatives Task Force this week.
- Legislature Chair Mike Lane recognized Graham Gillespie, president, and the rest of the HOLT Architects design team for its preservation award received from Historic Ithaca, for HOLT's retrofitting of the courtroom of the Old County Courthouse into the County Legislature Chambers

**- END -**