



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **September 16, 2014** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Accepts Jail Alternatives Report**

The Legislature accepted the report of the Jail Alternatives Task Force, as presented last month. The report, the result of nearly half-a-year of in-depth review, recommends additional measures that could be employed to safely and prudently reduce the population of the Tompkins County Jail. Despite numerous positive comments about the report itself and appreciation for the work and dedication of Task Force members over many months, debate centered on the phrase indicating endorsement of the report, and after considerable discussion, the resolution passed—with the endorsement phrase included—but by a split 9-5 vote.

As part of the report, the Task Force recommends near-term actions, including restoring one staff position to Opportunities, Alternatives, and Resources (OAR) to return it to three full-time Client Service Workers, which would allow OAR to provide low-bail assistance to additional inmates, and to provide additional re-entry and case management assistance. Several legislators—among them, budget committee chair Jim Dennis—objected that calls upon the County Administrator to include an item in the budget, indicates support outside the proper procedure for the budget and may improperly influence the budget. Legislator Martha Robertson said she felt strongly that the word “endorse” implies a pre-judgment about a budget line for a full-time staff person, and she does not want to be committed to that decision at present.

Legislators Carol Chock and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne were among those who did not agree—Chock calling it a “false distinction,” when other programs are often supported before action on the budget, and McBean-Clairborne maintaining that including reference to endorsement properly conveys serious appreciation for the work that was done.

A proposed amendment to strike the endorsement language failed by a tie vote of 7-7, with Legislators Dennis, Martha Robertson, Mike Sigler, Peter Stein, Public Safety Chair Brian Robison, and Legislature Chair Mike Lane voting in favor. Then the resolution, with the endorsement language included, passed by the 9-5 vote, with Legislators Dennis, Robertson, Sigler, Stein, and committee chair Robison voting no.

The measure, as finally approved, thanks members of the Task Force, and co-chairs Suzi Cook and Deborah Dietrich, “for their diligence, insights, and recommendations regarding this important public policy issue,” and includes the language indicating the Public Safety Committee’s endorsement of its recommendations.

The Task Force report, with appendices, is available for review on the County website at [www.TompkinsCountyNY.gov](http://www.TompkinsCountyNY.gov).

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

#### **Legislature Approves Electricity Procurement Agreement**

The Legislature authorized the County to enter into an electricity procurement agreement, through the Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance (MEGA) that, as part of that agreement, will purchase Nationwide Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) to supply County structures with electricity. The aim is to attribute 100% of the County’s consumption to carbon-free energy production. The vote was 12-2, with Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Will Burbank voting no.

Last November, the Legislature authorized purchase of electricity from with Integrys Energy Services, MEGA's supplier, for a period ending at the end of this year. Administrator Joe Mareane told legislators the purchase will enable the County to achieve affordable rates with clean power and will, for about \$12,000, purchase the RECs to leverage "Green-E"-certified production of domestic wind power. He said it would not preclude the next wave of energy purchases the County is working toward with MEGA, to procure renewable energy through remote net metering agreements in this area.

Legislator Kiefer, however, voiced serious concern about whether the RECs, in fact, do buy green power, or whether money is used to support providers' costs, and she said her research did not show that the provider in this case would be producing new, renewable energy.

The procurement agreement covers the period of January 1, 2015 through September 30, 2016.

*Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; Kathy Luz Herrera, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 273-8169; Legislator Dooley Kiefer.257-7453.*

### **Bids Awarded for Human Services Building Renovation Project**

The Legislature awarded \$1.3 million in construction contracts to construct a modest one-story addition to the County Human Services Building and reconfigure the interior to provide space for the Community Justice Center Day Reporting Program, enabling it to vacate the Old County Library. The vote was 13-1, with Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera, Chair of the Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, voting no. (Ms. Luz Herrera said her no vote stemmed from an issue with one of the contractors.)

Welliver McGuire, Inc., of Montour Falls, NY, was awarded the General Contract (bid: \$876,000); King & King Mechanical, Auburn, NY, the Mechanical Contract (\$163,109); Netcorp Electrical Contracting Corporation, Endwell, NY, the Electrical Contract (\$198,900); and Frey & Campbell, Inc., Hammondsport, NY, the Plumbing Contract (\$75,500).

County Administrator Joe Mareane reported the bids came in within budget and called acceptance "an important milestone" in the project which comes after a very competitive process. He noted the lowest bidder for the General Contract did not meet the County's requirement of having a certified apprenticeship program, so the County selected Welliver as the lowest qualified bidder. Discussion at the Facilities and Infrastructure Committee prompted the committee to decide that it would be a good idea to do a "look-back" at the County's apprenticeship requirement and whether it is achieving its objectives in terms of hiring and placement. Legislature Chair Mike Lane asked the Government Operations Committee to take up the policy for review.

Completion of the Human Services Building project is expected by the end of next year.

*Contact: Kathy Luz Herrera, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 273-8169*

### **Legislature Accepts Audited Financial Report for 2013**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, accepted the audit report for Fiscal Year 2013, the first time the Legislature has procedurally acted to accept the report, received by the County's Audit and budget committees. Finance Director Rick Snyder told the Legislature auditors again determined no material instances of non-compliance and no internal control weaknesses. Among highlights, he reported that the County's financial position is even better than in 2012, and the unassigned fund balance stands at 12.6%, with outstanding bonding standing at 10% of the County's constitutional debt limit. He noted that a negative fund balance in the Airport Fund, arising from decreased flight revenue and increased borrowing from other funds, was one matter than the County would address.

Budget Chair Jim Dennis said the auditors found, over the continued process of auditing, that Tompkins County has done an outstanding job in how it, and its departments, handle taxpayer money.

*Contact: Finance Director Rick Snyder, 274-5544; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058.*

**Design Funding Agreement with State Approved for Pine Tree Road Intersection Safety Improvements**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote authorized the County to enter into an agreement with the State Department of Transportation for reimbursement of costs related to the scoping and design phase for safety improvements on Pine Tree Road in the Town of Ithaca, at Ellis Hollow Road and the East Hill Plaza entrance. Federal funding (90% reimbursable) was awarded through the Highway Safety Improvement Program. For the locally administered project, the State requires the County to appropriate non-federal project costs up-front, then file for reimbursement of eligible costs. The action authorizes \$62,000 to be made available through the Road Maintenance Program capital account for the Scoping and Design phase.

*Contact: Jeffrey Smith, Highway Director, 274-0300; Kathy Luz Herrera, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 273-8169.*

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