



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer  
607-274-5555, Office  
607-227-2152, Cell  
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TWO PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

#### **Legislature Requests Assistance to Seek State Reform on Non-Emergency Medical Transportation**

Expressing deep concern about the effects that a change in State Department of Health policy on non-emergency medical transportation has had on Tompkins County's GADABOUT Transportation Services and other upstate demand response transit providers, the Tompkins County Legislature, by unanimous vote, is asking the State to consider the public benefit of such services. It requests that organizations including the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) advocate on behalf of Upstate counties and residents to work with the State to reform the current delivery of Medicaid transportation and adequately support community transportation services. The Legislature notes that since the Department of Health last year began centralized scheduling of non-emergency medical transportation trips (usually via taxi), providers, including GADABOUT, have experienced "an immediate and continuing decline in ridership and revenue," and that Tioga County's entire public transportation system ceased to operate as a result of this change.

*Contact: Peter Stein, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 266-7579; Legislator Dan Klein, 272-7582.*

#### **Legislature Pays Tribute to Departed Colleagues**

The Legislature observed a minute of silence for two long-time public servants through the Tompkins County Board of Representatives—now known as the Tompkins County Legislature—who passed away this month. Former County Representative John Marcham served nearly ten years on the Legislature—as 5<sup>th</sup> Ward rep from 1968-1973 and as 4<sup>th</sup> ward rep from May 1978 to the end of 1981. Phyllis Howell was, first, Clerk of the Tompkins County Board of Supervisors, then the Board of Representatives from its inception in 1970 to the end of May 1991, serving the County in those positions for 25 years. Legislature Chair Mike Lane described Clerk Howell as "legendary" and Mr. Marcham as "a really remarkable person," who continued to be heavily interested and involved in this community long after he left the Board of Representatives.

*Contact: Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440*

#### **Retiring County Clerk Aurora R. Valenti Bids Farewell...and Voices Her Thanks**

County Clerk Aurora Rubens Valenti, a native Ithacan and child of naturalized parents who at month's end will complete 24 years as Tompkins County Clerk, addressed the Legislature tonight to express her thanks, to the Legislature and to the people of Tompkins County. Clerk Valenti's said:

"I'm here tonight to thank you, the representatives of the people of the County of Tompkins, who made it possible for me to become Tompkins County Clerk on January 1, 1991, 24 years ago.

"I thank you and all the people of this wonderful county for permitting me to serve you as your County Clerk, the Clerk of the Courts, and as Director of the Department of Motor Vehicles. Congratulations to all of us for being residents of this great county as well as employees and representatives thereof.

"I am sure my parents are so proud that they become citizens of the United States upon their arrival from Italy to Ithaca, thereby permitting their daughter to be First Generation American. Aurora Rubens Valenti ran for office and won. TOMPKINS COUNTY: THE BEST PLACE ON EARTH TO WORK. Second only, perhaps, to Disney World.

“Thank you again for this fabulous opportunity. God Bless Us, Every One. Ciao! Arrivederci!!”

*Contact: Aurora R. Valenti, Tompkins County Clerk, 274-5433.*

### **Legislature Encourages the State Study Issues Related to Short-Term Online Rental Services**

After hearing a presentation from Tompkins County Tourism Coordinator Tom Knipe, the Legislature passed a resolution encouraging New York State to study and address issues related to the growth in short-term online rental services, such as Airbnb. The vote was 10-3, with Legislators Carol Chock, Kathy Luz Herrera, and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no.

The measure notes that such short-term online rental platforms, through which individual homeowners and renters host paying guests for short-term overnight stays, has grown significantly in the past several years, and that Tompkins County “wishes to help ensure a level playing field” for all legal lodging operators, and ensure public health and safety, support enforcement of local municipal building and zoning code. The County, it notes, has informed local hosts using the online platforms of the County room occupancy tax law and facilitated the registration process. The Legislature asks the State to explore the issue in depth and explore possible State legal and regulatory actions to support upstate governments in efforts to enforce existing law, collect hotel room occupancy taxes, and ensure compliance with existing health and safety regulations.

Both Legislators Chock and Luz Herrera called the action premature, since they said local efforts to work with hosts using such platforms have produced good results so far. But both Economic Development Committee Chair Will Burbank and Legislator Martha Robertson said the issue is greater than Tompkins County and that study is needed beyond the local level. The measure also encourages the New York State Association of Counties, the New York Association of Towns, and the New York Conference of Mayors to take up the issue in 2015.

*Contact: Will Burbank, Chair, Economic Development Committee 272-7555; Tourism Coordinator Tom Knipe, 273-5560.*

### **Legislature Authorizes Funding for Electronic Health Record Practice Management System**

By unanimous vote, the Legislature amended the Capital Program and appropriated revenue from Health Department and Mental Health Department budgets for a required electronic health record practice system, to be used by the two departments. As a result of response Requests for Proposals issued by each department, the departments agreed to select a common vendor to meet both departments’ documentation and practice management needs. The Capital Program is amended to reflect the centralized system, and \$192,500 is allocated from existing Mental Health Department and nearly \$142,000 from existing Health Department revenue.

*Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058.*

Among other actions:

The Legislature authorized the County Office for the Aging to contract with Doyle Medical Monitoring, of Rochester, for the Personal Emergency Response System (PERS) program, a program that serves County residents at risk of falling or other medical emergency. The program will be operated through a public-private partnership, with Doyle providing equipment, billing, and monitoring. The Office for the Aging will continue to install PERS equipment and work with clients, and a sliding fee scale will be maintained that will provide PERS units at low or no cost for individuals of modest means.

The Legislature, by a 12-1 vote (Legislator Mike Sigler opposed), approved a \$62,000 supplemental agreement with Barton and Loguidice engineers for the Pine Tree Road trails project, costs related to significant modifications not covered in the initial scope of work. Mr. Sigler opposed the payment in light of the Facilities and Infrastructure Committee decision to indefinitely suspend the project as the County explores ways to close a \$400,000 budget gap. County Administrator Joe Mareane noted that have been incurred and must be paid.

**- END -**