



Inclusion Through Diversity

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

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **January 6, 2015** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **2014 Legislature Leadership Reelected for the Year Ahead**

The Tompkins County Legislature, at its 2015 organizational meeting, reelected Chair Michael Lane (D) and Vice Chair Jim Dennis (D) to continue to lead the Legislature in 2015. The positions of Chair and Vice Chair are filled each year by a majority vote of members of the Legislature.

Mr. Lane was the only candidate nominated for Chair, and Mr. Dennis the only nominee for Vice Chair, and the election votes for each were unanimous. Nominating Mr. Lane to continue as Chair, Legislator Dan Klein (the newest member of the Legislature) praised Lane for his “excellent job in steering the ship with a steady hand,” describing him as a very patient, thorough person who brings a great deal of institutional memory and experience to the position. Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, seconding the nomination, expressed appreciation for his consistent outreach and ability to connect to each of his fellow members of the Legislature.

Mr. Lane, first elected in 1993, is serving his fifth term on the Legislature, representing District 14 (Eastern part of the Town of Dryden, including the Villages of Dryden and Freeville). He served three consecutive terms, then after a one-term hiatus, was returned to the Legislature for two more.

In nominating Jim Dennis for Vice Chair, Legislator Nate Shinagawa praised him as a friend and mentor during the time both have served on the Legislature for the past nine years. Referring to his experience, both in City government and County service, Mr. Shinagawa said, “I have really seen Jim take his experience and passion to the job and...bring some serious results to the County,” and that Jim has clearly demonstrated to the Legislature his value, both as a Legislator and as Vice Chair.

Mr. Dennis, who represents District 5 (Town of Ulysses and part of the Town of Enfield), is in his third term on the Legislature, where, in part, he has served as Chair of the Legislature’s budget committee and led the annual budget review process. Mr. Dennis also chairs the County Industrial Development Agency.

Saying that the election was “very humbling,” Chair Lane told his colleagues, “I’ll try to do the work of this legislature with you, as one among equals, with all of our jobs to act jointly as a team.” He said he will deliver his annual Chair’s message and announce 2015 committee structure and appointments at the Legislature’s next meeting January 20.

*Contact: Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8440, or 844-8313; James Dennis, Vice Chair, 387-4058.*

#### **Funding Approved to Support Living Wage at Recycling and Solid Waste Center**

With considerable praise all around for all those who worked together to make it happen, the Legislature, by unanimous vote allocated \$20,000 to support payment of the living wage to contract employees at the County Recycling and Solid Waste Center. It was the issue wages for contract employees at the Recycling and Solid Waste Center that prompted the County in 2013 to perform an in-depth review of its decade-old Living Wage policy and its level of attainment, as applied to County contracts.

Casella Waste Systems, Inc., which operates the Recycling and Solid Waste Center under a ten-year contract with the County, has committed to pay the living wage to its employees, beginning this year. The Legislature allocated \$20,000 in supplemental funding to the 2015 Solid Waste Division budget, which will enable workers at the Center to be paid the living wage—funding drawn from the \$100,000 in contingent funding set aside to potentially support efforts to increase the level of attainment of the living wage goal by contractors providing services to the County.

The current living wage in Tompkins County, as established by Alternatives Federal Credit Union, is \$12.62 per hour if employees receive health insurance coverage and \$13.94 if they do not. Casella has estimated a cost of approximately \$105,000 per year to raise the pay of the employees to living wage. The contractor has agreed to provide additional services to the County, including support for expanded reuse activities.

Facilities and Infrastructure Chair Kathy Luz Herrera credited many members of the Legislature and staff for putting a lot of work into the issue—and many other Legislators echoed those sentiments, crediting Solid Waste Manager Barbara Eckstrom, County Administrator Joe Mareane, and County Attorney Jonathan Wood for pursuing the issue to make it happen. Eckstrom called the experience one of the most satisfying in her more than two decades of County service, saying she learned to listen and understand what could potentially happen, to achieve benefit for employees, the program, and the community. Legislator Nate Shinagawa called it a “wonderful moment,” pointing out that the steady work to make this happen shows the quality of leadership in this county to achieve social change. Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne thanked Milton Webb and Stanley McPherson in being “positively relentless” in bringing the living wage issue before the Legislature. As part of his remarks to the Legislature before the vote, Tompkins County Workers Center director Pete Meyers voiced his thanks to the Legislature and staff, and also shared recorded words of thanks from Mr. Webb.

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

### **Legislature Approves Capital Reserve Funds for Environmental Preservation Projects**

The Legislature, without dissent, voted to allocate \$20,000 from the Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic, and Recreational Resources Protection to support additions to two existing nature preserves in Tompkins County. The action provides funding toward acquisition by the Finger Lakes Land Trust of 30 acres to be added to the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in the Town of Danby and toward a 24-acre addition to the Roy H. Park Preserve in the Town of Dryden. The two acquisitions by the Land Trust will protect wetlands and undeveloped land in those areas and will serve as key links between protected lands within the Emerald Necklace greenbelt.

*Contact: Carol Chock, Chair, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-9007; Senior Planner Scott Doyle, 274-5530.*

Among other matters:

- The Legislature authorized acceptance of a \$91,000 grant from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to fund an Electric Vehicle Feasibility Analysis, to be led by the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council, to create a strategic plan for charging stations in the county to support widespread adoption of electric vehicles.
- Five people, most of them residents of Danby, addressed the Legislature to express deep concern about last week’s incident on Hornbrook Road in Danby, and said they would like more information about the actions of law enforcement and destruction of the home. Later in the meeting Legislator Dan Klein, who represents Danby, said funds to assist the widow and family of David Cady have been set up through Danby Federated Church and through the website GoFundMe.com. Public Safety Committee Vice Chair Jim Dennis also said he has asked the Sheriff’s Office to provide a recap of the Hornbrook Road incident at the January 12 Public Safety Committee meeting.
- Clarity Connect president Chuck Bartosch updated the Legislature on the status of expansion of broadband service, following the 2013 State grant award to expand service in Tompkins and Cayuga Counties. He said there have been delays in receiving the formal grant disbursement agreement, but that

about \$1.5 million in work has been done and needed to be audited by the State for reimbursement. He is hopeful that reimbursement will be received by early spring so that grant funds can be accessed and the build-out completed. He noted that almost 50% of those in uncovered areas have signed up for service, which he called an “incredible” response.

- Legislators authorized the County to apply for \$262,643 in Federal Transit Administration grant funds for Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT), under the Section 5307 Grant program, funds to be used for preventive maintenance. State and TCAT contributions bring the total project budget to \$328,304.

**- END -**