



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **May 19, 2015** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Fails to Affirm Support for Single-Payer Health-Care

Asked to reaffirm its earlier actions in 2006 and 2009, the Legislature failed to take a stand voicing continued support for a single-payer approach to health care coverage in New York State. Acting on a measure advanced by Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera that would have urged the State Assembly and Senate to pass legislation to enact the New York Health Act that would support universal health coverage, the Legislature voted 7-4 in favor which, while a majority, did not draw the 8 votes needed for passage. (Legislators Dave McKenna, Glenn Morey, Mike Sigler, and Peter Stein voted no; Legislators Jim Dennis, Will Burbank, and Carol Chock were excused.) The measure, however, could be brought up for reconsideration at a future meeting, and Legislator Luz Herrera said she would be speaking in favor of it again at the Legislature's next meeting June 2, when she hopes the Legislature can discuss the issue in more detail.

Before the vote, Luz Herrera said the time has come to move from the multi-payer approach to a "simple, one-stop single-payer system for all," that overall health care spending would be reduced and that 98% of New Yorkers would pay less for health care than they do today. Legislator Sigler said that there are too many uncertainties in the proposals and assumptions that he's not sure are true, saying the resolution indicates that the Affordable Care Act has failed and a new system should be adopted. While saying he's not necessarily for or against a single-payer system, Legislator Stein said the matter is complicated and he fears it is being "oversold", and termed it "madness" to leave the Affordable Care Act at this point. While he voted in favor, Legislator Nate Shinagawa, a health care administrator, noted that the current fee-for-service system for health care is not sustainable. "You need to have fundamental change to make single-payer work," he said.

Contact: Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera, 273-8169; Legislator Mike Sigler, 339-7978; Legislator Peter Stein, 266-7579.

Legislature Supports Tax Credit for Geothermal Energy Systems

Acting on a resolution advanced by Legislator Dooley Kiefer, the Legislature, by unanimous vote of those present (Legislators Will Burbank, Carol Chock, and Jim Dennis were excused), urged the State Legislature to adopt proposed Assembly legislation that would amend state tax law to establish a tax credit for purchase and installation of geothermal energy systems, similar to what is currently available for solar and photovoltaic systems. Legislator Kiefer reported that the Senate has already passed a companion bill. The measure notes that the availability of credits for such systems would support the greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals as specified in the county's Comprehensive Plan and would support Solar Tompkins' forthcoming initiative, *Heat Smart Tompkins*, focused on building efficiency upgrades combined with the installation of air-source and ground-source heat pumps. The County's Environmental Management Council has recommended expeditious action on the bill.

In a memo to the Legislature, County Planning Commissioner Ed Marx expressed support for the resolution, stating, "Heat pumps are emerging as a key technology for significantly reducing the energy used, and greenhouse gases emitted, for heating and cooling buildings in our region and a financial incentive structure from the State would greatly enhance the ability for heat pumps to more widely penetrate the market.

Transitioning to highly efficient energy technology is essential to allow us to achieve the County's goal of an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and interim goals of a 20% reduction by 2020."

Contact: Legislator Dooley Kiefer, 257-7453; Planning Commissioner Ed Marx, 274-5560.

County Sustainability Team Reports Progress

In an annual report to the Legislature, Megan McDonald of the County Planning Department, updated the Legislature on the work of the Tompkins County Sustainability Team, a working group of County employees established by the County Administrator to promote sustainable practices within county government. Guiding its work is the Tompkins County Sustainability Strategy, accepted by the Legislature in 2014, which provides a coordinated approach to integrating sustainable practices into county government operations. Read the full Sustainability Team report, posted on the County Administration page of the County website at <http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/ctyadmin/Sustainability%20Team%20report%20-%2005-19-15.pdf>.

Contact: Megan McDonald, County Planning Department, 274-5560.

Francesca Merrick Honored as Distinguished Youth

Francesca Merrick, a junior at Ithaca's Lehman Alternative Community School, was honored by the Legislature as the latest Tompkins County Distinguished Youth. Nominated by LACS Service Program coordinator Jon Raimon, Francesca was described as an exemplary "thoughtful, dynamic, and community-minded" student, one who not only provides service to the community through a wide range of volunteer opportunities, but also "works to make social change through long term projects and community organizing." As well as volunteering with such activities as The Floating Classroom, One World Market, Catholic Charities Clothing Drive, and the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, she also works with the West Hill community, in part helping to create community forums there, working on Native issues, and participating in the Youth Venture Program through the United Way, where she has won grants to help create a curriculum to educate teachers to help elementary school students learn about gender equality and related issues. Mr. Raimon said, Francesca "leads in many ways: through her intense work ethic; through modeling what it means to listen and compromise; through speaking her mind on matters of principle; through taking risks and accepting setbacks as part of all service work; through sharing her wit and powerful voice." The Tompkins County Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by Bangs Ambulance Service, Purity Ice Cream, Specialty Trophy and Awards, and Cayuga Radio Group.

Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.

Among other business,

The Legislature awarded more than \$80,000 in 2015 Tourism Capital grants, funded through County Room Occupancy Tax and administered by Tompkins County Area Development—supporting projects at the Ithaca Children's Garden, Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce Foundation Stewart Park Buildings plan, Ithaca Farmers Market, Smithsonian exhibits at PRI's Museum of the Earth, and expansion of the Sciencenter Sagan Walk.

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