



Inclusion Through Diversity

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June 16, 2015
TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **June 16, 2015** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

No Decision Yet on Developer for Old Library Site

The Tompkins County Legislature has failed to yet reach a decision on selecting the preferred developer for the County's Old Library site. Considering the Old Library Committee's recommendation to award the Travis Hyde Properties team preferred developer status, after a number of votes on proposed word changes and amendments, the Legislature in the final vote tied 6-6 on the proposal to award to Travis Hyde (Legislators Nathan Shinagawa, Will Burbank, Carol Chock, Dooley Kiefer, Dan Klein, and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voted no; Legislators Peter Stein and Kathy Luz Herrera were excused.)

Travis Hyde would replace the current building with a new structure containing 60 market-rate "senior-focused" apartments. The proposed development would extend onto the current site of the senior services organization Lifelong, and is the only proposal among the three before the Legislature that would include space for Lifelong as part of its project.

The vote followed more than four hours of thoughtful deliberation, more than two hours of that devoted to listening to public comment. More than 70 people fill Legislature Chambers, and roughly half of them spoke, nearly all speaking in favor of the Franklin Properties team project as most appropriate for the site and for the community. The Franklin project would adapt the structure of the existing Old Library to accommodate 22 market-rate condominium units, as well as medical offices and a wellness center, a community meeting room, and a café. It was noted that more than 700 people have signed a petition urging selection of the Franklin project as the preferred development option.

Among Legislators' comments during discussion, Legislators Mike Sigler, Martha Robertson, Jim Dennis, and Chair Mike Lane all spoke in support of Travis Hyde, referencing the importance of the density issue on the site, Ms. Robertson noting that the project would provide 38 more badly-needed housing units than would Franklin, which she said is essential to begin to address the community's "desperate" housing crisis. And she maintained that condominium prices would be too high to serve middle-income residents. Robertson noted that HOLT Architects, a partner in the Travis Hyde project, has always been patient and responsive, in projects including design and development of the new Legislature Chambers. Chair Lane said the factor of ensuring the continuation of Lifelong, and keeping it in the downtown core, is among his concerns, that it would be "arrogant" to expect it to go with another project. "We need to listen to Lifelong," he said, "and make it continues in our county seat in downtown Ithaca."

Legislator Nate Shinagawa was among those who spoke in favor of the Franklin project, noting that while he sees the need for downtown density and agrees about the housing crisis, said, "We should be listening to what our community is saying," that condominiums would bring diversity and that the reuse project would be consistent with the character of the neighborhood and help define the character of what Ithaca is. Legislator Leslyn-McBean-Clairborne said she has considered the options carefully and has come to see the Franklin project as the one she can support. Expressing support for the Franklin Properties proposal, Legislator Dooley Kiefer sought to have language included that would indicate that, in negotiations, the County would attempt to secure a ground lease, an amendment that first failed 7-5, then on reconsideration was approved by an 8-3 vote. Both developer representatives present indicated they would be willing to discuss that option. Legislator Carol

Chock advanced an amendment to substitute Franklin Properties as the preferred developer, but that measure also failed by a tied 6-6 vote, Legislators Robertson, Sigler, Dennis, Dave McKenna, Glenn Morey, and Chair Lane voting no. Legislator Chock said the value of owner-occupied housing, consistency with the sense of place and historic character of the neighborhood, energy infrastructure, and the concerns of over 700 residents in a sustained effort are among her reasons for supporting that project.

The matter is expected to come up again. One of the Legislators excused could move for reconsideration at a future meeting.

Contact: Legislature Chair Michael Lane, Chair of the Old Library Committee, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440.

Legislature Hears Update on Health Benefits Consortium

Don Barber, executive director of the Greater Tompkins County Municipal Health Insurance Consortium, provided an update report to the Legislature on the Consortium, which began to operate in 2011 as the first Article 47 municipal health insurance consortium in New York State. Mr. Barber congratulated the County as “being owners of a very successful health insurance company, a self-funded community-rated health insurance program. Among operation highlights, the Consortium, a successful shared services program, received \$36 million in premiums and paid \$29.8 million in claims, resulting in \$3.85 million in net income and approved a premium rate increase of only 5% for 2015. He said the Consortium continues to operate very efficiently, with 92% of its expenses going to pay claims.

Read the Consortium’s 2014 Annual Report at

<http://tompkinscountyny.gov/files/healthconsortium/Resources/Annual%20Report-May%201%202015.pdf>.

Contact: Don Barber, Executive Director of the Greater Tompkins County Municipal Health Insurance Consortium, 274-5590 or by e-mail at EDConsortium@twcny.rr.com

Among other actions:

The Legislature authorized a contract with Shumaker Consulting and Land Surveying, of Binghamton, for design services of Pine Tree Road intersection improvements at Ellis Hollow Road and the East Hill Plaza Entrance in the Town of Ithaca, for an amount not to exceed \$69,000, funds to be provided from the Road Maintenance Program Capital Account.

The Legislature, by an 8-4 vote, awarded Economy Paving Company, of Cortland, the contract for the Waterburg Road Bridge replacement over Taughannock Creek in the Town of Ulysses, for its bid of \$729,919 received June 1.

The Legislature set July 7 as the date of public hearing on the Tompkins Cortland Community College 2015-2016 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 (second floor), Ithaca.

No one spoke at a public hearing regarding a proposed Local Law that would authorize the Legislature to override the tax levy limit for 2016, if needed as part of the 2016 County budget process.

Both Facilities and Infrastructure chair Dave McKenna and County Administrator Joe Mareane paid tribute to and thanked the highway employees and others who responded to Sunday’s flash floods in Southern Tompkins County. Highway Director Jeff Smith reported that, among the damage County facilities suffered is to Newfield’s Carter Creek bridge, which is closed until further notice.

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