



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **September 1, 2015** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Administrator Releases 2016 Recommended Budget

Tompkins County Administrator Joe Mareane has delivered to the County Legislature a 2016 Recommended County Budget that maintains services, reinvests in infrastructure, addresses organizational pressure points, and remains within the County's projected property tax cap.

In his annual Budget Message to the Legislature, Administrator Mareane notes that the Budget reflects both the effects of the improving economy and a return on investment from what has been done to make the County stronger. "The Recommended Budget raises the County property tax levy by just 1.3%--well below the final State-imposed tax cap of 1.8%. Even at that restrained level of growth, the Budget supports current levels of service and provides additional funding for items or activities that improve productivity, customer service, the condition of our infrastructure, or the sustainability of the organization—the things that make us stronger, but not bigger.

"The Recommended Budget represents an assurance to the community that needed services will remain secure and affordable," Mareane continues. "The budget is balanced with a tax *rate* that will go *down* in 2016—from \$6.86 per \$1,000 to \$6.74 per \$1,000. Acknowledging that assessed values are also rising alongside the strengthening local economy, the average homeowner will pay an additional \$15.36 next year for County taxes and \$4 more in solid waste fees."

The Recommended Budget supports total expenditures of \$171 million (an increase of 0.8%, after an accounting adjustment in the way in which bond in which anticipation notes are calculated), and local dollar spending of \$85 million (an increase of 1.9%).

Reflecting effects to the Budget from the recovering economy, Mareane notes that the local cost of several state-mandated human service programs is falling for the first time in memory, commodities costs are constrained by near-zero inflation, and sales tax is projected to rebound modestly next year after the surprisingly poor performance in the first half of 2015. The Budget also benefits from the County's prior policy and fiscal decisions—among them, efforts to constrain the rapidly growing cost of health care reflected in stable fringe benefit costs; funding for technology and training to help sustain services with a smaller workforce; efficiency initiatives that have reduced energy costs; and Legislature fiscal policies that have led to high credit ratings and low interest on debt.

The 2016 Recommended Budget is posted on the County website at www.tompkinscountyny.gov (Click on "County Budget and Financial Information.") An expanded description of the Recommended Budget is also available at that page.

Contacts: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 592-3206 or 387-4058; Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440.

Legislature Requests State Study of Large-Scale Gas Pipeline Effects

The Legislature, by a vote of 10-3 (Legislators Jim Dennis, Mike Sigler, and Glenn Morey voted no; Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera was excused) requested that New York State assess the health and environmental risks associated with large-scale new natural gas pipelines and compressor stations. The measure, recommended by the Legislature's Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, supports a position taken in June by

the American Medical Association advocating legislation to require a comprehensive health impact assessment regarding what the AMA cites as the health risks of such natural gas infrastructure.

The recommendation states that “Tompkins County joins the AMA in recognizing the potential impact on human health and the environment associated with natural gas infrastructure and requests New York State to perform an assessment regarding the health and environmental risks that are associated with natural gas pipelines.” At committee, proposed language was struck that would have also called for a moratorium on such pipeline development while such risks were investigated.

Prior to the vote, four members of the public addressed the Legislature, speaking in favor of the proposed action, among them local physicians Dr. Rob McKenzie and Dr. Adam Law, who also noted that they would support stoppage, or a pause, in development of such pipelines until health risks are assessed. Legislator Carol Chock, as she did at committee, stressed that this measure focuses on large-scale interstate pipelines, not smaller local pipeline projects. Legislator Martha Robertson called this a “very good start” on developing needed information and said such a request is “certainly timely.” Legislator Sigler criticized the measure as vague and misdirected, questioning what its scope should be. Legislator Dennis said that, while he recognizes the need to check and better regulate aging pipelines, he called the action a real “feel good” resolution that is “too wide and varied” and will have no impact on those in a position of power.

Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 257-7453; Legislator Carol Chock, 273-9007; Legislator Mike Sigler, 339-7978; Legislator James Dennis, 592-3206 or 387-4058.

Legislature Approves Tax Forgiveness for Two Lake Street Parcels

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera was excused), approved an agreement for the County to forgo collection of County taxes, for the years 2014-2016, in an amount not to exceed \$5,400, on two parcels on Lake Street, now owned by the City of Ithaca, adjacent to the Ithaca Falls Natural Area, in support of the parcels’ addition to this public resource. The parcels were subject to foreclosure proceedings by the City this year, and withheld by the City through action of Common Council. The measure notes that its action will produce an annual loss of tax revenue of approximately \$1,200 to the County thereafter.

Contact: Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 272-7582

Additional One-Percent Sales Tax Extended for Two More Years

In the third of a series of necessary actions, the Legislature extended for two more years the added one-percent sales tax for the County, authorized as required by the New York State Legislature, as it has been in two-year increments since 1992. Approval came without dissent, with Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera excused. The tax, which must be renewed every two years under state law, is now extended through the end of November, 2017. Budget chair Jim Dennis remarked that, without this approval, the County would lose \$10 million in sales tax revenue. Legislature Chair Mike Lane said that “it’s sad that we have to do this every two years,” since the State has refused to modify the requirement for biennial re-authorizations.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 592-3206 or 387-4058.

Among other actions:

Legislators observed a moment of silence in memory of Wesley McDermott, Supervising Attorney of the County’s Assigned Counsel program who passed away August 22. Several spoke in tribute, including County Attorney Jonathan Wood who praised Mr. McDermott’s dedication and skill, saying he served as mentor for other less skilled attorneys, whom Wood characterized as essentially everyone else. Legislator Martha Robertson said Wes served “so that everyone would have a voice...there for people who might be unsympathetic characters...He knew everybody deserved justice and that was the cause of his life.” Legislator Jim Dennis spoke of his many community contributions, as well, as Lansing Town Supervisor in the 1970s.

The Legislature approved stream corridor and flood mitigation programs for 2015, funded with \$25,000 already approved by the Legislature for 2015. Projects include the Egypt Creek Flood Mapping Project, the Cayuga Inlet Sediment Assessment Project, and the West Miller Road Ditch Improvement.

A \$200,000 appropriation from the Contingent Fund was approved to support greater than anticipated expenses for mandated court-ordered forensic psychiatric hospitalization services BY the New York State Office of Mental Health.

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