



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **September 15, 2015** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Receives Resignation from Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera; Sets Special Meeting to Establish Special Election Date

Saying that he provides the information “with a heavy heart,” Legislature Chair Mike Lane relayed to his colleagues a message from Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera (D-District 2) regarding her resignation from the Legislature, effective September 16. Chair Lane said, “When we lose a member of our Legislature, it is as if there is an empty hole in our team.” He praised his departing colleague for representing her district to the best of her ability and added, “I know we are going to be sorry to lose her.”

In her message to her legislative colleagues, Ms. Luz Herrera said, “Many of you know that personal and family medical issues have taken their toll on me, and I think it best for the Legislature and community that I resign to spend time with my family. I will miss you all terribly. I will miss the camaraderie, the debates, the learning, the persuading, and the sincerity that you bring to every decision. Public service is certainly a calling, and I am proud to say that I served with a group so talented and so committed.”

Legislator Luz Herrera’s full public announcement of her resignation, made earlier today, is posted on the Tompkins County website at <http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/news/legislator-kathy-luz-herrera-resign-county-legislature>.

As required by the County Charter, since the resignation has occurred before September 20, the special election to fill the unexpired term must be held concurrent with the General Election November 3. Chair Lane has called a special meeting of the Legislature for Thursday, September 17 at 5:00 p.m. for the Legislature to formally set the special election date.

Contact: Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera, 273-8169; Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440.

Interim Supervising Attorney Appointed for Assigned Counsel Program

The Legislature, without dissent (Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera was excused), confirmed County Administrator Joe Mareane’s appointment of James Baker as Interim Supervising Attorney for the Tompkins County Assigned Counsel program. Mr. Baker’s appointment comes on the recommendation and request of the Advisory Board on Indigent Representation, to temporarily fill the vacancy left by the death of Supervising Attorney Wesley McDermott last month.

Administrator Mareane noted that Mr. Baker, a graduate of Cornell Law School, has practiced law in Tompkins County for 33 years, with a focus on criminal defense work, and is highly regarded within the legal community. James Baker will serve on an interim basis until a permanent appointment can be made. Administrator Mareane said the search for a permanent Supervising Attorney is underway, with applications being accepted through September 30. It is hope that a permanent appointment can be made within the next two to three months.

Legislator Martha Robertson noted that Mr. Baker cannot apply for the permanent position since does not reside in Tompkins County, and thanked him for stepping forward to serve in the interim position.

Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Expresses Official Appreciation to Retiring Health Planning Council Director Betty Falcao

The Legislature, without dissent, expressed its “sincere gratitude and appreciation” for dedicated service to Elizabeth “Betty” Falcao, who is retiring after two decades as Director of the Health Planning Council, a program of the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County. (Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera was excused.) In its resolution of appreciation, the Legislature recognizes Falcao’s “steadfast support of the health and well-being of Tompkins County residents;” her engagement of 250 volunteer members, both consumers and providers of health care, to promote comprehensive health planning for the greater community; her leadership in producing many analyses and informational resources on health-related issues; and leading, participating in, and securing funding for many major health-related projects that benefit the community. Praising her “collegiality, knowledge, and passion for the health and well-being of our community”, which will be sorely missed, the Legislature “recognizes the myriad and significant contributions Betty has made to strengthen and improve the overall health of our community.”

Health and Human Services Chair Peter Stein, who also serves as liaison to the Health Planning Council, praised Falcao’s leadership, saying he has been impressed on how the organization runs and how much he learns from her. Legislator Nate Shinagawa told the departing director, “You have made a meaningful difference in the lives of the people of Tompkins County.”

Saying she was “somewhat overwhelmed” by the praise, Director Falcao said she has “felt very blessed to be doing important work for the county...it has been an incredible journey (and) bittersweet to be ending it.” She thanked the Legislature for providing much of the Health Planning Council’s “baseline core support,” which has served as the cornerstone of the Council’s success.

Contact: Peter Stein, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 266-7579.

Application Authorized for Community Development Block Grant Funds

Following a public hearing, the Legislature authorized the County’s application for \$691,500 in Community Development Block Grant funds, through the New York State Homes and Community Renewal Housing Trust Fund. The grant funds, to be applied for in this year’s competitive fund for CDBG funds, would support and continue the Tompkins County Homeownership Program, assisting an additional 19 households through 0% interest loans. The Homeownership Program has been funded through ten separate CDBG grants since 1993. Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, now affiliated with Better Housing for Tompkins County, would provide housing counseling and other administrative services as part of the program. The approval vote was unanimous, with Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera excused and Legislator Carol Chock recusing herself from the vote due to family connections with INHS.

Contact: Ed Marx, Tompkins County Commissioner of Planning, 274-5560; Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 257-7453.

Among other business,

The Legislature formally approved Tompkins County’s 2015 Title VI program and policies for the Federal Transportation Administration. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and associated regulations prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. As a recipient of federal funds, Tompkins County is required to comply with requirements of the Act and applicable implementing regulations.

The Legislature approved a \$50,000 adjustment for medical expenses in the Mental Health Department budget, to be reimbursed through Medicaid revenue, to address what the department characterizes as a continued high volume and need for injectable drugs for very ill patients with schizophrenia.

Four people addressed the Legislature, to inform them of and ask for support regarding unionization efforts for registered nurses at Cayuga Medical Center.

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