



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **October 20, 2015** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Amendments Adopted to 2016 Recommended Budget

The Tompkins County Legislature formally adopted amendments to the County Administrator's 2015 Recommended Budget and the Capital Program for the next five years, as recommended by the Expanded Budget Committee. The vote was 10-2, with Legislatorsvoting no. There were no changes to the package recommended by the Expanded Budget Committee before the Legislature vote.

The amended budget would increase the County tax levy by 1.12%, compared to the 1.3% included in the Administrator's budget, to meet the Legislature's 2016 levy goal. The recommended tax rate of \$6.73 per thousand is down by 1.77% from 2015 and is about a penny less than the Administrator's budget, representing an increase of \$13.62 in the tax bill for the median-valued \$170,000 home. As part of the amended budget, the County Solid Waste Fee would increase by \$3.00 from the 2015 level, to \$55.00 per household, a dollar less than was in the Recommended Budget.

Legislator Carol Chock said, "I think we have grappled with and come up with a good budget," even though in some cases she would have liked to do more. Legislator Kiefer said she cannot support the budget for a number of reasons since, as she sees it, "it omits too many things that we can afford to do," but did not because of concerns to keep the tax levy down. Legislator Martha Robertson called it "a solid budget to send to the public" and noted there will be an opportunity to make changes later in the process. Both Budget Chair Jim Dennis and Legislature Chair Mike Lane thanked Legislators for their work during nine meetings of the Expanded Budget Committee.

The amended package, now known as the legislative Tentative Budget, replaces Administrator Joe Mareane's recommended budget as the basis of budget deliberations and will be sent on to public hearing. The Legislature will hold the public budget hearing on Tuesday, November 10, beginning at 7 p.m. at Legislature Chambers, located at the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building (Second Floor), 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca. The Legislature's final budget adoption vote is scheduled November 17, and changes may still be made prior to final adoption.

Amendments to the Recommended Budget, as well as other information regarding the 2015 budget process, are available for review online at the County website at www.tompkinscountyny.gov/ctyadmin/2016budget.
Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206.

Contract Awarded for Mental Health Building Alterations

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, awarded Streeter Associates, of Elmira, the contract for the Tompkins County Mental Health Building Addition & Alterations Project, to construct improvements to the ground floor lobby and minor modifications on the 6th floor of the Mental Health Building, at 201 E. Green Street.

The project will resolve design features that make it difficult for clients and visitors to find their way staff offices, address workplace violence prevention objectives, and improve operating efficiency. The project, in part, will incorporate a centralized reception suite, in place of the currently unattended entrance, to improve customer service. Streeter Associates was awarded the contract for its bid of \$450,000.

Contact: David McKenna, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 564-7243; Arel LeMaro, Director of Facilities, 274-0355.

Legislators Hear Findings from Latest Survey on Homeless Youth

The Legislature heard a presentation on the summary of findings from the fourth Independent Living Survey Project, conducted by the Tompkins County Youth Services Department, Cornell University's Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, and the Learning Web, undertaken for the Tompkins County Continuum of Care Committee and the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County. The 2015 Independent Living Survey, begun 12 years ago, is a follow-up to three similar surveys completed in 2004, 2007, and 2011.

Jane Levine Powers, Director of the ACT for Youth Center of Excellence of the New York State Department of Health and Bronfenbrenner Center, noted that the study uses a unique methodology of engaging independent youth as research partners. Among the many findings, that the issue of housing is crucial, with a very unstable housing situation for young people. In the survey of 208 young people who met the definition of being homeless, one-third indicated that they don't feel safe; many left home due to conflict; most citing employment concerns, with transportation often being a factor in employment. While this study showed that more people were insured through Medicaid than four years ago, but few see a private physician. Substance abuse trends show a decline in use of such substances as marijuana and alcohol, but an increase in those including tobacco, cocaine, and heroin. Top current needs the youth identified included transportation, help finding and affording housing, and help finding a job.

Among the issues providers have learned, said Youth Services Director Amie Hendrix, is that Federal and State funding to provide services has decreased, and remained stagnant at the County level while costs have increased, making it difficult to serve all the young people needing support. Legislator Martha Robertson, who recalled when the initiative began 12 years ago, thanked all involved "for sticking with it and doing this important work," and said she hopes specific elements can be taken from the study that the County can tackle to work to make a difference.

Read the full study report, posted on the County's website at www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/ctyadmin/IndependentLivingSurvey_Summary2015.pdf

Contact: Director Amie Hendrix, Tompkins County Youth Services, 274-5310

Legislature Accepts USDA Grant for Agritourism Development

The Legislature, without dissent, authorized acceptance of a \$49,390 grant awarded by the United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service's Farmers Market Promotion Program. Tompkins County was the lead applicant for a Farmers Market Promotion Program grant, in partnership with the Ithaca Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County. The purpose of the project is to increase direct farm sales through agritourism development and promotion in Ithaca and Tompkins County.

Elements of the grant include evaluating farm establishments to assess their tourism readiness and support them in becoming more visitor-ready; training farm business to improve their capacity to host visitors; Building tourism packages including a new farm trail, a new open farm weekend, and other packaging opportunities; and promoting opportunities via the Ithaca Fork agricultural tourism website and associated marketing and advertising investments. Expected result will be a doubling of direct sales for participating farms during the project's two-year life, concluding in September 2017. Tompkins County Planning will provide overall management of the project and support of outreach and program development efforts by the other partners in the project.

Contact: Tom Knipe, Senior Planner, Tompkins County Planning, 274-5560; Martha Robertson, Chair, Economic Development Committee, 272-0584.

Among other business:

Carol Booth, a member of the County Community Mental Health Services Board addressed the Legislature on behalf of what she indicated was a majority of members of the board, to express concern over the proposal now under consideration to expand the responsibilities of the Public Health Commissioner to include the responsibilities formerly held by the Commissioner of Mental Health. She urged that the process be slowed, and that a careful look be taken at all the options that exist, in a reasonable, transparent process.

Reporting on third-quarter sales tax receipts, Finance Director Rick Snyder reported a 1.68% increase in County share, compared to the third quarter of 2014, which he characterized as “fairly robust” growth after the year’s first two negative quarters. He noted that the third quarter receipts of \$8,788,893 are “historically, the highest third quarter on record.” The total 2015 County share of receipts, however, of just under \$24.7 million, is still running 1.13% behind receipts at this time last year.

The Legislature authorized payment of the 2015 installment of multi-year Tourism Capital Grants, as recommended by Tompkins County Area Development, which administers the grant process, and the County’s Strategic Tourism Planning Board. Payment of just over \$100,000 in grant funds was authorized to support six projects—at the Cayuga Natural Center, State Theatre, Stewart Park (building rehabilitation), Cayuga Nature Center, Community School of Music and Art, and the Sciencenter.

Legislature Chair Michael Lane proclaimed October 24-30 as “Seal the Cracks Climate Offset Week in Tompkins County”, recognizing the Climate Fund of Tompkins County initiative that has awarded nearly \$28,000 in grants so far and offset over 1,400 tons of local greenhouse gas emissions.

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