



Inclusion Through Diversity

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November 17, 2015
THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the November 17, 2015 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Adopts 2016 Tompkins County Budget

The Tompkins County Legislature, after two-and-a-half months of deliberation and review, tonight adopted the County's 2016 budget and the capital program for the next five years. The budget was approved by a 13-1 vote, with Legislator Dooley Kiefer voting no.

Before adoption, Legislators approved one amendment to the budget, changing the additional \$50,000 allocated to Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT) from target to one-time funding, which supporters noted was consistent with the type of funding committed by TCAT's other two funding partners, the City of Ithaca and Cornell University, a change that reduced the tax levy increase to just over 1%.

The \$171 million budget, with \$84.9 million in local dollar spending, increases the County tax levy by 1.01%, an increase that is below the County's 1.8% State property tax cap. The tax rate of \$6.73 per thousand is down by 1.88% from 2015, representing an increase of \$12.39 in the tax bill for the median-valued county home, currently valued at \$170,000, compared to \$165,000 last year. The County Solid Waste Fee, after decreasing by \$4.00 for 2015, will increase by \$3.00, to \$55.00 per household.

The change in the source of the additional TCAT funding was approved by a margin of 8-6, with Legislators Dooley Kiefer, Carol Chock, Will Burbank, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Anna Kelles, and Dan Klein voting no. Budget Chair Jim Dennis proposed the amendment, saying that being consistent with the approach used by the City and Cornell will facilitate a larger funding discussion among the partners next summer, outside the budget process. While the partners are required to commit an equal amount of funding, Legislators Chock, Burbank, and Kiefer, however, all maintained that parity relates only to the amount, not the type of funding, and that including the additional funding as ongoing in the budget would provide an important message regarding TCAT's importance to the County.

Legislator Kiefer also advanced another proposed amendment, which failed to win support, which would have provided an additional staff member at the Department of Weights and Measures as of mid-year—as first proposed, more than \$32,000 for salary and fringe, and \$22,000 in one-time funds for a vehicle and computer. Kiefer said it is clear the sole Weights and Measures director has inadequate resources. While Budget Chair Dennis and Legislature Chair Michael Lane said they would support taking a look at Weights and Measures as part of discussions on the 2017 budget, they did not support taking the action at this time. Kiefer's proposed amendment failed by a 4-10 vote (Legislators Kiefer, Burbank, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and Anna Kelles voting in favor). An alternate proposal from Legislator Chock, to reduce the position to half-time, also failed by a vote of 4-10 (Legislators Chock, Kiefer, Burbank, and McBean-Clairborne voting in favor).

Reflecting on the budget process and outcomes over the past five years, Budget Chair Dennis said that the County has stayed within the tax cap for three out of those five years, has weathered the recession of 2008 and 2009, and reduced its workforce by about 9% while maintaining services at a fairly high level. "I think we have done a really fine job over the past five years doing what we're doing," he said. Legislature Chair Lane and County Administrator Joe Mareane both thanked all who have been involved in the budget process.

Administrator Mareane recognized department heads, agency directors, and his staff for all their work, and Legislators for “the patience and civility you’ve shown throughout this process.

The summary of the final amendments and the adopted budget will be posted on the budget page of the County website at www.tompkinscountyny.gov/ctyadmin/2016budget.

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

Legislature Adopts Microbeads Law

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, has adopted a new Local Law that will prohibit the sale in Tompkins County of personal care products containing microbeads. “Microbeads” are synthetic, plastic particles added to personal care products, such as facial cleansers, shampoos, and toothpastes. The new law notes that microbeads, which enter bodies of water through disposal down household drains following the use of such personal cosmetic products and collect harmful pollutants already present in the environment, pose a serious threat to Tompkins County’s environment.

At the public hearing preceding Legislature consideration, eight people spoke, including representatives of Citizens Campaign for the Environment and the Plastic Tides program, including junior interns who did research and collected samples this summer, finding microbeads locally in both Cayuga and Beebe Lakes. Among those speaking about the dangers and urging passage of the law were Ithaca Town Supervisor Herb Engman and former long-time County Legislator Frank Proto, chairman of the County Water Resources Council. Engman, who sits on the governing board of the Ithaca Area Waste Water Treatment Facility, said our filtration systems cannot keep microbeads out of Cayuga Lake.

The law will take effect 180 days after its filing with the Secretary of State—the long lead time to enable public and retailer awareness of the provisions and to permit the adjustment of store inventories to comply without undue hardship. Legislator Jim Dennis proposed delay in implementation from the six months to one year, which ultimately failed by a 6-8 margin (Legislators Mike Sigler, Dave McKenna, Dan Klein, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and Chair Mike Lane joining Mr. Dennis voting in favor.) Dennis said that, while the measure is good legislation and is needed, there is very little awareness now among the public and retailers, which needs to happen. Legislator Kiefer reported that the education committee of the Water Resources Council has offered to take the lead in an outreach campaign.

Enforcement will come through the Department of Weights and Measures, which it was noted will be able to use discretion in working with store owners, the majority of Legislators ultimately concluding that the six-month implementation delay is sufficient. The Local Law will become null and void, if statewide or federal legislation goes into effect to supersede it.

Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 257-7453.

Among other business,

Legislature Chair Mike Lane welcomed new Legislators Richard John and Anna Kelles to their first meeting, saying both have entered service in a very serious way, and that he looks forward to working together with them on the team of the Legislature.

The Legislature authorized acceptance of four grants by the Tompkins County Sheriff’s Office—a \$20,000 grant from New York State to replace the Livescan inkless electronic fingerprinting machine; nearly \$29,000 in federal Homeland Security funding for program supplies; a \$5,000 NYS Crime Prevention grant for law enforcement equipment; and a \$5,000 in State Passenger Safety grant to reimburse the cost of new car seats for the child passenger seat program.

The Legislature awarded \$35,000 in New Tourism Initiative grants and more than \$7,200 in the Fall 2015 round of Community Celebrations grants, as recommended by the County’s Strategic Tourism Planning Board and funded through Tompkins County Room Tax revenue.

Chair Lane proclaimed November as Home Care Month in Tompkins County, encouraging the support and participation of all citizens in learning more about the important work of home care and hospice for older adults and people with disabilities.

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