



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **Tuesday, December 1, 2015** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Backs Statewide Minimum Wage Increase

The Tompkins County Legislature has called upon Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature to raise the State's minimum wage to \$15 per hour, supporting a plan that would phase in the new rate by 2021. The vote was 13-1, with Legislator Mike Sigler voting no. Noting that wages paid by a variety of health and human services providers are often limited by State-established cost reimbursement formulas, the measure also asks the State to increase assistance to County governments to support a \$15 per hour wage floor in local human services contracts.

In introducing the resolution, Government Operations Committee Chair Dan Klein said that, while there has been one idea advanced to seek State permission to set a Tompkins County minimum wage at the local Living Wage level, this measure supports the phased-in minimum wage increase for all of New York State. Mr. Klein said he believes Tompkins County is the first municipality in New York State to have taken this position.

Before the vote, Legislator Sigler expressed concern that such an increase would have unintended negative consequences—that while large employers, such as big retail chains, could handle the increase, small business would find it difficult, jobs would be lost, and some firms would go out of business. He also said that low-wage workers, while boosted to the higher rate per hour, would find it next to impossible to pay for child care, whose providers would also be earning \$15 per hour. Both Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Carol Chock supported wording changes supporting achievement of the \$15 rate sooner than 2021, if possible. Kiefer's proposed amendment failed by a 6-8 margin.

Several legislators acknowledged the challenges involved in the minimum wage increase. Legislator Peter Stein said it's clear that economists cannot predict the results, but maintained that the minimum wage is a moral issue that says that every person who works is able to have a decent life. Legislator Rich John said he, too, has some concerns, including that the high percentage of students in his district, most not employed, will pay higher prices, but he said it seems as though such an increase is long overdue. Legislator Anna Kelles said that, should the increase be approved, there will be a responsibility to have an infrastructure in place to minimize the risks, and education and outreach will be critical. Legislator Jim Dennis said he has great reservations about the concept, but would support it. Legislature Chair Michael Lane said he had some concerns as the matter was first brought up, and said some structural changes would have to be addressed, but that there are people across the state who need help and a statewide approach in the right way to address it. Legislator Carol Chock said that, while some may say that raising the minimum wage is complicated, what is really complicated is living on \$8.75 an hour.

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

Funding Approved Toward Dryden Purchase of Pinckney Road Parcel

The Legislature, without dissent, appropriated \$6,500 from the Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic, and Recreational Resource Protection toward the Town of Dryden's purchase of a 15-acre parcel on Pinckney Road near Fall Creek, as has been recommended by the County's Planning Advisory Board. The Town of Dryden, which will purchase the land for \$62,700, will own and maintain it as public parkland.

The parcel is located in the Fall Creek Natural Features Focus Area, supports access to a future recreational trail corridor that crosses municipal borders; protects the stream buffer of Fall Creek and several tributaries; and provides connections between existing protected lands,. The land is located across Fall Creek from the Town's Campbell Meadows parcel, on which the Finger Lakes Land Trust holds a deed restriction. The parcels together protect several thousand feet of stream bank.

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

Among other business:

The Legislature approved transfer of more than \$104,000 from the Fund Balance to the Sheriff's Office medical and boarding unit to address an unforeseen deficit in the line covering inmate medical expenses, and \$32,000 to the mandated medical examiner program in the Health Department to cover an increased volume of Medical Examiner cases, including removals, autopsy, and laboratory tests.

Public hearings were held regarding grant administration of two State Community Development Block Grant Awards—for the second phase of the Tompkins County Health Homes Rehabilitation Program and the tenth round of the Tompkins County Homeownership Program. The only speaker at either hearing was Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services Director Paul Mazzarella, who reported on progress made in the Healthy Homes Rehabilitation Program, where 13 low-income homeowners so far have received assistance in fixing up their homes, and regarding the homeownership program, where the goal is to help 19 buy their first homes. He said 13 have been assisted so far, with another 7 or 8 pending. The biggest challenge, he said, is to find appropriately priced houses for those who want to buy them.

A public hearing was scheduled December 15 at 5:30 p.m. at Legislature Chambers, at the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca, regarding repeal of the Local Law overriding the tax levy limit for 2016, adopted July 7. The Legislature does not anticipate a budget exceeding the property tax levy as set by New York State.

January 5 was set as the date of the Legislature's 2016 organizational meeting. As part of his report, Chair Lane indicated he would be interested to serve as Chair again next year, subject to the will of the Legislature.

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