



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **December 15, 2015** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Extends Arrangement for Shared Leadership of Health and Mental Health Departments**

The Tompkins County Legislature has voted to authorize continued shared leadership of the Health and Mental Health Departments, by County Public Health Director Frank Kruppa, extending the interim arrangement that has been in place for the past eight months. Considering four alternate proposed resolutions on the issue, Legislators, after nearly an hour of discussion, approved a modified version of a member-filed compromise resolution advanced by Legislator Carol Chock, which authorizes the plan to extend the Public Health Director's interim dual management through the end of 2018, plus such additional time in 2019 as is necessary to evaluate the performance of the combined department head model, determine whether it shall continue, consider other organizational alternatives, and accommodate any necessary organizational transition. It also calls for other necessary changes to facilitate the plan, including the hiring of a Deputy Commissioner of Mental Health and Administrative Assistant. Following a number of procedural votes and amendments, the final approval came by an 11-3 margin, with Legislators Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Dooley Kiefer, and Dan Klein voting no. Early on in the discussion, Mr. Klein said he believed the Legislature should be acting on the administrative structure that should be in place, apart from the individual providing that service.

As part of the series of votes, Legislator Will Burbank advanced the alternate approach he had initially proposed, and had been recommended by the Health and Human Services Committee, which would have called for renewing the search for a Commissioner of Mental Health, while also forming a task force to analyze the operational structure. That proposed substitution was not approved—the vote, 4-10, with Legislators Burbank, McBean-Clairborne, Kiefer, and Klein voting in favor.

As of early 2019, the measure approved commits the County to conducting a 360-degree-style performance review of the current arrangement to evaluate how well the interim administrative solution is working from the perspective of staff, boards, community members, and other stakeholders, and to forming a task force to examine the operations and consider the future directions of both the Health and Mental Health Departments. That effort will include consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of an administrative partial or full merger, identification of the various aspects of their operations and any functions that might be combined, and any lessons that can be learned from other counties that have merged these particular functions. By the end of 2019, majority approval of the Legislature would be required to reauthorize the combined department head model.

*Contact: Legislator Carol Chock, 273-9007.*

#### **Legislators Urged to Maintain Strong Action to Reduce Emissions and Combat Climate Change**

More than 50 people crowded Legislature Chambers and nearly half of them spoke, speaking out in the wake of the Paris Climate Conference to urge the County to keep up and step up local efforts to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. In comments that lasted more than an hour, speakers, many of them wearing red to communicate a sense of emergency, said the Paris Climate Conference has provided some hope, but that local action now will be necessary to make the Paris Climate Accord's 1.5-degree standard a working local benchmark. Many legislators thanked those who turned out for their input, their compassion, and their commitment.

*Contact: Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440.*

### **Bonding for William George Agency Approved**

The Legislature by a 12-2 vote (Legislators Leslyn McBean-Clairborne and Dooley Kiefer dissenting) approved the issuance of up to \$2 million in tax-exempt revenue bonds for the William George Agency for Children's Services, in the Village of Freeville. The bonds, issued by the Tompkins County Development Corporation, will support financing, refinancing, or reimbursing costs of improvements at the non-profit organization's campus, including renovation and equipping the Ewald Dining Hall on the campus. The Legislature's action has no effect on the indebtedness of Tompkins County; authorization by the Legislature as the County's governing body is required to exempt the non-profit from taxes on the bonds under the federal Internal Revenue Code. The action renewed Legislature approval more than a year ago, the approval sought again in light of a delay in project schedule. There was some concern expressed regarding the issue of payment of the Living Wage. Legislator Kiefer said her no vote reflects what she sees as deficiencies in completing the bonding application. *Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair, Economic Development Committee, 272-0584*

### **Hearing Scheduled on Proposed Amendment to County Room Tax Law**

The Legislature, by a vote of 13-1 (Legislator Carol Chock dissenting) scheduled a public hearing for January 19, 2016, 5:30 p.m. regarding a proposed Local Law that would amend the definition of "Hotel" in the Tompkins County Hotel Room Occupancy Law section of the County Code, updating the law to respond to changes in the local lodging market since the current room tax law was first adopted in 1989. There was considerable discussion on whether to modify the wording of the draft law itself, to change proposed wording that payment of room tax would be required for the lodging of paying guests for any night; Legislator Chock proposed that it be changed to apply for lodging for more than three nights a year, a proposal that failed to win support by a 3-9 margin, Legislators Chock, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and Dave McKenna voting in favor. *Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair, Economic Development Committee, 272-0584*

Among other business:

The Legislature observed a moment of silence in memory of former County Representative Don Lifton, who died unexpectedly on December 12. Mr. Lifton represented the City of Ithaca (fifth district) on the Tompkins County Board of Representatives (now the County Legislature) from March 1983 through the end of 1989. Chair Mike Lane praised Representative Lifton for "serving with aplomb" during his years of service.

The Legislature, as a follow-up to adoption of the 2016 County Budget, formally established the unit charge for the 2016 Solid Waste Fee, setting the fee at \$55 per unit (household), an increase of \$3 from 2015, but a dollar lower than the rate of two years ago.

Following a public hearing, the Legislature, by unanimous vote, adopted a new Local Law that repeals the Local Law, adopted earlier this year that authorizes the override of the Tax Levy Limit for 2016. The former Law was repealed since the Legislature did not adopt a 2016 budget that exceeds the State tax cap.

The contract for an automated budgeting system was awarded to the Monroe County firm Catalog & Commerce at a cost of \$80,000. The County Administrator is authorized to enter into the contract for development and installation of the new budgeting system. The target budget for the Department of Administration, Service Contracts is also increased by \$10,000 to reflect the ongoing cost of a service contract necessary to maintain the system. Catalog & Commerce developed and maintains the County's website, and County Personnel's online employment application program.

The Legislature approved a number of standard year-end resolutions, including authorization for the Finance Director to sell up to \$10 Million in Revenue Anticipation Notes, as needed, in anticipation of State Aid to be received by the County in 2016.

The Legislature awarded \$50,000 in Strategic Tourism Implementation Funding for the Ithaca Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau Tompkins County Visitor Profile Study. Strategic Tourism Implementation

funds come exclusively through County Room Occupancy Tax, with awards recommended by the County's Strategic Tourism Planning Board.

Chris Barrett, Craig Ryan, Anna Hammon, and the Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; and Diane Hicks-Hughes and the New York State Public High School Athletic Association were awarded 2015 Tourism Partner Awards. Through the awards, the Strategic Tourism Planning Board and the Legislature recognize individuals, organizations, and associations who, through their actions or activities, have impacted the local economy by attracting conventioners and visitors to Tompkins County.

**- END -**