



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

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Highlights of the **January 19, 2016** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Chair Lane Delivers Annual Message, Announces 2016 Organizational Structure

In his annual message before the Tompkins County Legislature, Legislature Chair Mike Lane said that Tompkins County, now in its 199th year, “has set a high bar as a leader among its county peers for policies and programs that are intelligent, innovative, compassionate, and essential for its residents and for the people who find employment here...working purposefully to improve our local economy, and in partnership with our city, towns and villages, striving to help make people’s lives a little better.” The work, he notes, is incomplete, with too many people still struggling with the high cost of living, and housing of all kinds in short supply. With considerable effort over the last 15 years to help revitalize the county seat of Ithaca, he said it is time to also begin to pay more attention to the potential for economic development in the county’s outlying areas. He cautioned that 2016 will be a challenging year, saying that while the Governor and State Legislature propose spending millions of dollars for their “pet projects”, the imposed tax cap on local governments and the ever-present high cost of state mandated programs “continues a multi-year thrust against genuine home rule for local governments, while feeding a top-down, personality-driven, autocracy at the state level.” He urged that, instead of shifting costs to counties and other municipalities, that New York reduce real property taxes by taking over all costs of its own mandated programs, such as Medicaid.

Against this backdrop, Chair Lane announced the 2016 organizational structure and leadership appointments. The number of Legislature standing committee will decrease from seven to six—Budget, Capital, and Personnel; Facilities and Infrastructure; Government Operations; Health and Human Services; and Public Safety continuing, with the former Economic Development, and Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committees replaced by a new combined committee—the Planning, Economic Development, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee. That new committee, to be chaired by Legislator Martha Robertson, will include seven members, larger than a typical committee, which Chair Lane says reflects not only its important work, but the level of interest of Legislators in the work it will do. For the remaining committees, there are a couple of leadership changes: Legislator Jim Dennis will continue as chair of Budget, Dave McKenna as chair of Facilities and Infrastructure, and Vice Chair Dan Klein as Chair of Government Operations. Leslyn McBean-Clairborne will assume the leadership of Health and Human Services, with former HHS chair Peter Stein moving over to Public Safety. Dave McKenna will continue to chair the Broadband Subcommittee, under Government Operations.

The Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee will continue, led again by Legislator McBean-Clairborne, and there will be three special committees this year. With much happening at the Federal and State level related to transportation funding, a new special Transportation Committee, led by Chair Lane, will examine the county’s transportation needs, and how to most effectively advocate for and secure funding for the airport, mass transit, and highway systems, and what changes and new directions should be considered in light of Federal and State actions. The Charter Review special committee will be looking to complete work this year, with Legislator Dooley Kiefer succeeding Lane as Chair. The Old Library special committee, chaired by Lane, will meet as needed for finalization of the sale of the Old Library property. Four Legislators will continue to sit on the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency—Legislator Jim Dennis continuing as Chair, with

Legislators Will Burbank and Martha Robertson also continuing, and Legislator Rich John assuming a seat on the IDA.

Chair Lane concluded, “The people expect we part-time Tompkins County Legislators to work hard, and we do that...We work as a team to get things done. We study issues seriously, strongly debate them, and then take action. We do know and recognize, however, that what is accomplished for the people of Tompkins County would not for a minute be possible but for the support, hard work and advice of our county employees...Each is a real hero for what is done for our people every day single day. To them we say thanks, and with their help we will do our very best for everyone.”

Mr. Lane’s full remarks are posted on the Legislature website at

<http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/legislature/Chairs%20Address%202016-1-19-16web.pdf>

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

Legislature Opposes Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement

The Legislature, by a vote of 11-3 (Legislators Peter Stein, Jim Dennis, and Mike Sigler voted no), called upon Congress to reject the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement. The measure calls upon the County’s federal elected officials (Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand and Congressman Tom Reed) to oppose the TPP, as well as any similar trade deals “if they fail to restructure the policies that have failed the American public in the past.” Last April, the Legislature also opposed fast-tracking of the TPP agreement. The measure notes that “U.S. trade deals for the past 25 years have been corporate-driven, incorporating rules that skew benefits to economic elites resulting in working families bearing the brunt of such policies,” with powerful U.S. and multinational global corporations in the formation of U.S. “free trade” agreements “advanc(ing) an agenda that undermines human rights, environmental protection, the public interest, and threatens democracy at all levels of government.”

Legislator Stein said he wished he did not have to vote on the matter since, despite considerable research, he finds the issue extremely complicated and very difficult. Legislator Sigler said that while he is against TPP and was also against “Fast Track”, it is within the President’s power to negotiate treaties. Legislator Dennis expressed hope that, moving forward, the Legislature can do the work of the county and do it well, and consider fewer resolutions of this type. Legislator Will Burbank countered that this measure sends a message to the county’s elected representatives and represents “democracy at the most basic level”, concerning a “huge disconnect” between what is happening in people’s lives and where decisions are being made, and which will have “significant impact on us in ways we cannot really comprehend,” Economic Development Committee Chair Martha Robertson said the issue is not that the President shouldn’t negotiate, but that the only other people in the room were corporate interests, with the most disturbing aspect the ability of an investor court to override whatever any other government decides to do.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair, Economic Development Committee, 272-0584

Legislature Amends Definition in County Hotel Room Occupancy Tax Law

The Legislature approved a new Local Law amending the County’s Home Occupancy Tax Law, to change the law’s definition of the term “hotel.” The vote was 12-2, with Legislators Carol Chock and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no. No one spoke at a public hearing preceding the vote. The amendment changes the hotel definition to refer to a “facility” rather than a “building”, and removes the “phrase “regularly used and kept open as such”, updating the law to respond to changes in the local lodging market since the room tax law was adopted in 1989. The wording changes incorporates such lodging operations as “glamping” (glamorous camping), and would also apply to cabins located in privately owned campgrounds. It also clarifies provisions regarding collection and payment of room tax by individuals renting out homes or rooms for short-term stays, such as through online lodging platforms like AirBnB. Calling passing of a Local Law for the amendment premature, Legislator Chock unsuccessfully proposed instead acting by resolution. She said probably the only time people would react to it was at the time of big college weekends, when people wouldn’t be prepared to register their properties as businesses.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair, Economic Development Committee, 272-0584

Devon DiMarco Recognized as Distinguished Youth

The Legislature recognized Trumansburg High School senior Devon DiMarco as the latest Tompkins County Distinguished Youth. Nominated by Trumansburg Fire Chief Jason Fulton, Devon is nominated for “his significant work as a young volunteer” since joining the fire department in October of 2014. As well as weekly training and participating in active calls, Devon has attended over 200 hours of classes through the New York State Fire Academy, and is trained in gorge rescue, vehicle extrication, swift water rescue, and is currently training in ice water rescue. He is Vice President of the National Honor Society, a member of the Trumansburg High School baseball team and a long-time hockey player with the Ithaca Youth Hockey Association, and a member of the Seneca South Yorkers Club. Community service projects have included Earth Day clean-up, ringing the Salvation Army bells, and organizing holiday gifts for disadvantaged families. Chief Fulton notes, “Devon’s effort is a great example of what a Distinguished Youth can do for our community.” The Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by Specialty Trophy & Awards, Bangs Ambulance Service, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.

Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.

Among other business:

County Administrator Joe Mareane, as well as several Legislators, thanked and recognized all who were involved in the Cargill Salt Mine rescue January 7. Administrator Mareane said he was very pleased with the way community agencies, including the County, assisted, calling it swift, precise, and effective. He thanked employees from across the County—in the Departments of Emergency Response and 911 Center, the Sheriff’s Office, the Departments of Mental Health, Health, Solid Waste, and County Administration—for their role in the successful response.

Administrator Mareane also provided some initial observations on the State budget, following the Governor’s budget message last week. Among potential concerns he identified: no growth in community college aid; early voting authorization, which could produce increased cost; and lifting of the “hard cap” in Medicaid costs in New York City, which could suggest that the cap may be situational, and might be lifted everywhere if the State needs the money. Among the positives: projected gaming revenue of \$543,000 to Tompkins from the Tioga Casino, and a \$20 billion, five-year investment in housing and homeless programs.

Deputy County Administrator Paula Younger reported receipt of written confirmation from the U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing (COPS) office that our request for an independent review of law enforcement actions taken during the 2014 Hornbrook Road incident has been approved. She said DOJ will be in contact to discuss details, but that she anticipates the initial site visit to take place within the next 60 days. “Although the wait was long (approximately eight months), this is indeed good news and an important opportunity for our local law enforcement agencies and our community,” Deputy Administrator Younger said.

The Legislature authorized acceptance of a nearly \$700,000 multi-year New York State grant to support the Mental Health Services Department’s open access program, and creation of three grant-funded positions to coordinate, support, and manage the open access/intake process. Legislators also allocated first-year program funding for 2016 of over \$300,000.

The Legislature authorized a contract with the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District to provide up to \$200,000 in up-front funding for the Hydrilla eradication project in an around Cayuga Lake, with the District obligated to repay the County as NYS Department of Environmental Conservation funding is received under the DEC’s required full reimbursement process.

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