



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **February 4, 2016** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Passes Resolution of Support for Black Oak Wind Farm Project

The Legislature, after listening to more than an hour of thoughtful public comment, voiced its support for timely development of the Black Oak Wind Farm project in the Town of Enfield. The Legislature's vote was unanimous, with Legislator Dooley Kiefer abstaining because she is an investor in the wind farm project.

More than 60 people packed Legislature Chambers, and nearly half of them spoke—about two-thirds (some of them investors in the wind farm project) expressing support for the project and its role in addressing the critical issue of climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Others (among them, neighbors of the wind farm site) asked the Legislature to refrain from taking a stand at this time, since they believe matters such as setbacks and potential health and safety impacts should be addressed, with the Enfield Town Board still examining the issue, and some observed that the issue has created a rift within the Town. Some speakers said people also need to be mindful of the need to make personal changes in consumption to address the energy challenge.

Many legislators expressed their appreciation to the members of the public who communicated their views on the issue, among them Legislature Chair Mike Lane, who called it “a model of public participation for this Legislature, with people speaking quietly, clearly, and respectfully. “

The resolution notes that the Black Oak Wind Farm “constitutes a \$40 million investment in clean, renewable energy,” is consistent with the County's greenhouse gas emission goals contained in the 2015 Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan, and that “the Tompkins County Energy Roadmap documents that wind energy has the potential to provide a significant portion of electricity demand within Tompkins County while decreasing greenhouse gas emissions.” Through a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreement, the project is expected to generate more than \$133,000 in annual revenue to the Town of Enfield, Tompkins County, and the Odessa-Montour and Ithaca City School Districts for 15 years.

Legislator Jim Dennis, who along with Dave McKenna represents Enfield, said “the only thing the measure indicates is that the Legislature supports renewable energy, which happens to be renewable energy in Enfield” and he noted that the County has no other role in the issue. Also noting that the County has no land use jurisdiction, Legislator Carol Chock said the Legislature is weighing in as one of many parties, and is not directing the Town to act. Legislator Dan Klein said the Legislature, in its action, is trusting the Enfield Town Board to resolve the specific project details in question.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 272-0584.:

Labor Agreement Ratified with Deputy Sheriff's Association

The Tompkins County Legislature, by unanimous vote, ratified a new six-year collective bargaining agreement with the Tompkins County Deputy Sheriff's Association. The agreement spans the period from March 2010 through the end of 2016, and contains all terms and conditions of employment previously awarded or agreed upon through a series of previous interest arbitration awards and fact-finding recommendations agreed upon by the parties, going back to 2004—in part, incorporating all as part of a single up-to-date collective bargaining agreement. The new agreement provides some wage growth and health cost containment.

Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee Chair Jim Dennis recognized Association president Pete Walker and Undersheriff Brian Robison for all their work that led to achieving the contract. “Pete and Brian did a ton of work to get this contract where it is now,” he said. “I think the County is doing very well with this contract, and I hope the membership feels similarly.”

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206

Legislature Urges Real Property Tax Law Amendment to Support Local Affordable Housing

The Legislature urged the State Legislature to amend the Real Property Tax Law, creating a new section of law that would allow Tompkins County, by local law, to grant a partial exemption to residential properties subject to resale restrictions. The vote was unanimous, with Legislator Carol Chock abstaining due her family connection with Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services.

INHS Director Paul Mazzarella told Legislators that the Community Housing Trust program provides permanently affordable housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income homeowners, in part through limitations on future resale prices. Real property Tax Law, however, does not allow consideration of such limitations when determining the assessed valuation of such properties, resulting in assessed values that can far exceed the restricted resale value. This provision in State law, the measure states, deters the development and purchase of homes through the community land trust program, exacerbating the shortage of affordable housing in Tompkins County.

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

Assigned Counsel Services Agreement with Schuyler County Approved

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, approved an inter-municipal agreement between Tompkins and Schuyler Counties for the Tompkins County Assigned Counsel Office to extend assigned counsel services to Schuyler County. Such indigent defense counsel will be provided at times when the Schuyler County Public Defender’s Office is disqualified from providing counsel for any reason, including a conflict of interest. The agreement runs through the end of 2018, with three optional five-year renewal periods. Either party will be able to terminate the agreement upon 120 days notice.

Speaking earlier to the Public Safety Committee earlier, County Administrator Joe Mareane noted the significance of this inter-municipal agreement, since this is the first shared-services arrangement for indigent defense is the first of its type in New York State.

Contact: Peter Stein, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 266-7579; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Supports State Assumption of Indigent Defense Costs

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, called upon New York State to fully fund the cost of indigent legal defense, relieving counties of the burden the State has imposed upon them since 1965. The Legislature urges the New York State Legislature to approve, and for the Governor to enact, bills before the Senate and Assembly as a means to accomplish the State’s assumption of those costs. County Administrator Joe Mareane told Legislators he sees momentum building within the State Legislature for the phased takeover of indigent defense costs.

Contact: Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Requests Increase in Base Aid for TC3

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, asked the State Legislature and Governor Cuomo to support an increase in community college base aid of \$285/full-time equivalent student. The measure notes that recent base aid increases have not kept pace with ongoing increased costs of Tompkins Cortland Community College’s basic operations, despite substantial staff and operational reductions in recent years, and that the College’s current base aid level remains \$78/FTE lower than it was five years ago.

Contact: Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Among other actions:

The Legislature approved appointments to the Tompkins County Industrial Development agency—Legislators Jim Dennis (chair), Rich John, Will Burbank, and Martha Robertson; and Chamber of Commerce president Jennifer Tavares (TCAD representative), Grace Chiang (through the end of 2016, and Ithaca Mayor Svante Myrick (through the end of 2017). Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Anna Kelles dissented, Kiefer saying she would like to see some rotation of legislators serving on the IDA, and Kelles indicating she would like to see more transparency in the nomination process.

Legislators approved a \$35,000 budget adjustment to accept \$35,000 from the Tompkins County Development Corporation to support the cost of a feasibility study examining a potential Tompkins County Airport Industrial Park. The consulting firm of Clark Patterson Lee and Camoin Associates have been selected to perform the market analysis study. Legislator Carol Chock dissented, expressing concern about public perceptions due to past work by the consulting firm.

The Legislature, by a vote of 11-2 (Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Carol Chock voted no; Legislator Mike Sigler was excused) authorized a supplemental agreement with Barton and Loguidice engineers for design services related to the West Malloryville Road and Red Mill Road Bridges over Fall Creek in the Town of Dryden. The agreement adds to the project replacement of the Red Mill Road bridge, and increases the design services fee from the previously approved \$49,100 to \$85,500. Since the bridges are located on town roads, the Town of Dryden will fund 20% of the project.

County Finance Director Rick Snyder reported that year-end sales tax collections for 2015 were down 1.82% from 2014, although he noted that collections were greater than those collected in 2013. Fourth-quarter receipts were 3.73% below 2014's fourth-quarter receipts, which had been the highest of any quarter on record.

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