



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **May 3, 2016** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Adopts 2017 Financial Goal, Fiscal Guidelines for Departments and Agencies

In two resolutions approved tonight, the Tompkins County Legislature approved a 2017 tax levy goal and spending targets for 2017. The tax levy resolution directed County Administrator Joe Mareane to prepare a recommended operating and capital budget that can be supported with a tax levy increase of 3%. That vote was 9-4, with Legislators Mike Sigler, Glenn Morey, Dave McKenna, and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no. (Legislator Peter Stein was excused.) Based on the tax levy goal, spending targets for departments and County agencies to use in preparing their budgets were approved by a 10-3 vote (Legislators Sigler, Morey, and McKenna dissenting).

The greatest effect on the 2017 fiscal targets is the ongoing decline in sales tax revenue—down for four of the last five quarters, including the first quarter of this year. It's projected that 2017 sales tax revenue will drop by \$860,000 from the 2016 budgeted level, an amount equivalent to about 1.8% in the property tax levy. The levy increase would address several critical County needs, including negotiated wage growth for county employees and a modest cost of living increase for County-supported agencies.

The 3% increase is slightly above the County's estimated tax cap for 2017 of 2.49%. Administrator Mareane has advised the Legislature that, if the financial situation improves over the course of the summer, he will apply that money to reduce the levy. The \$1.4 million, increase in the levy would represent an estimated increase of \$34 for the owner of a median-valued \$170,000 county home.

Tonight's actions mark the beginning of the County's 2017 budget process. County Administrator Mareane must deliver his 2017 Recommended Budget to the Legislature on or about September 1.

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

Support Approved for Expanded City Gorge Ranger Program

The Legislature, by a vote of 10-3 (Legislators Mike Sigler, Glenn Morey, and Dave McKenna voted no; Legislator Peter Stein was excused) authorized an intermunicipal agreement with the City of Ithaca to provide financial assistance for the City of Ithaca's Gorge Ranger program this season at the Six Mile Creek Gorge, as a one-year pilot initiative. The County will contribute an amount not to exceed \$7,500, toward the hiring of two additional gorge rangers by the City of Ithaca. The Town of Ithaca has also been asked to contribute \$7,500.

Gorge rangers are civilians, seasonally employed by the City, who enforce rules and encourage appropriate behaviors in the Six Mile gorge area, including that around the Second and Third Dams. The Dams and surrounding land are owned by the City, but within the policing jurisdiction of the County Sheriff.

Legislator Sigler said he couldn't support the program, characterizing it as "going after victimless crimes...another touch of 'Big Brother-ism'" preventing people from doing something that has been done forever. Ithaca City Clerk Julie Holcomb said the problem is different now than in the past, often with huge crowds, drugs, and alcohol" and that the program looks to pool resources to better handle the situation, and collect data for the one-year program to assess the level of success. Legislature Chair Mike Lane said, "We

need to make sure we do what we can do to protect people...Our gorges are wonderful, but they're filled with dangers, many of which our young people may not understand...The fact that we are trying to work together is a good thing."

Contact: Martha Robertson, Vice Chair, Public Safety Committee, 272-0584; Legislator Mike Sigler, 339-7978; Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440

Legislature Takes a Stand on D.A.'s Salaries

The Legislature, without dissent, passed two resolutions related to District Attorney's salaries. (Legislator Peter Stein was excused.) The Legislature called upon New York State to fully reimburse counties for District Attorney salary increases set by the State. State Judiciary Law mandates that county district attorneys' salaries be equal or higher than a County Court or Supreme Court Judge in a county. While the State for over 50 years has funded such salary increases imposed on counties, that funding was not included in this year's State budget. An increase raising Supreme Court Judges' salaries to \$183,000 in 2016 and \$203,000 in 2018 was approved as part of the budget, but funding was not included to reimburse counties for the increase in D.A. salaries.

The County Legislature called upon the State to immediately pass legislation and pay for the increase retroactive to April 1 and not pass the unfunded mandate on to local taxpayers, or, in the alternative, to repeal the section of Judiciary Law requiring parity between judicial and D.A. salaries.

In a separate action, the Legislature appropriated more than \$29,000 from the Contingent Fund to cover the County's cost of the mandated salary increase for the remainder of 2016.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Vice Chair, Public Safety Committee, 272-0584

Among other business:

The Legislature observed a moment of silence in tribute to Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit General Manager Joe Turcotte, who died May 2 after a long battle against cancer. County Administrator Mareane said, "I think all of us who knew Joe knew how dedicated he was to public transit in this community, and how his creativity led to TCAT as we know it."

The Legislature approved an adjustment in the Highway Division budget reflecting a more than \$460,000 increase in funding from New York State under the Consolidated Highway Improvement (CHIPS) Program, which will enable the division to perform additional road repair/reconstruction projects in 2016.

The Legislature approved Tompkins County's 2016 Title VI program and policies for the Federal Transit Administration. Regulations of the US Department of Transportation and the FTA, pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin, and all recipients of federal transit funds must have an approved Title VI plan. The plan replaces the Title VI plan approved by the Legislature in 2015,

AllPro Parking, LLC was awarded a new five-year contract to continue to provide paid parking service at Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport.

The Legislature awarded more than \$120,000 in 2016 Tourism Capital Grants, funded through County Room Occupancy Tax revenue, as recommended by the Strategic Tourism Planning Board and Tompkins County Area Development, which administers the Tourism Capital Grants process.

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