



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer
607-274-5555, Office
607-227-2152, Cell
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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **May 17, 2016** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Calls for State Government Ethics Reform

Maintaining that “democratic, efficient, and effective government relies upon the citizens of New York State having trust in the officials elected to represent them,” the Tompkins County Legislature issued a Statement of the Legislature regarding New York State Government Ethics Reform. The statement, initiated by Legislator Rich John and recommended by the Legislature’s Government Operations Committee, was approved by unanimous vote. (Legislator Mike Sigler was excused.)

The resolution notes that the former leaders of the State Senate and Assembly have been criminally prosecuted and convicted for misuse of power and that over the past 15 years more than 30 State legislators and the Governor have left office because of criminal and/or ethics charges. “This systemic criminal misconduct provides the appearance of a pattern of corruption” within the State’s legislative branch, the measure states, creating cynicism and distrust in all legislators, with the presumption that “pay to play” is the normal method of Albany politics. The failure of the State Legislature to effectively address the root causes of actual and perceived corruption with comprehensive and rigorous ethics reform, the measure continues, both creates the appearance that the body tolerates such misuse of the powers of office and jeopardizes the foundation of trust necessary for government to operate and presents a fundamental challenge to the Legislature’s legitimacy.

Through its Statement, the Legislature implores the State Legislature “to legislate comprehensive and meaningful ethics reforms.” Recommendations include

- Amending the State Constitution to allow denial of pension benefits for legislative service to legislators convicted of official misconduct;
- Establishing a system of public matching funds for elections;
- Requiring disclosure of the names of individual campaign donors, even for donations made through an entity such as a corporation;
- Requiring disclosure of member-earmarked funds prior to action on the State Budget, and maintaining those member records for five years;
- Allowing proposed legislation in either house to come to the floor upon request of two-thirds of the membership, even if majority leadership opposes it;
- Term limits for the positions of Assembly Speaker and Senate Majority Leader;
- Limiting total contributions from any individual to a candidate or political action committee to a maximum of \$2,000 in any campaign cycle;
- Restructuring the Joint Commission on Public Ethics and the New York State Board of Elections;
- Restrictions on sources of Legislator’s outside income to reduce conflicts of interest;
- Adopting a redistricting process that uses an independent nonpartisan commission, and takes into account the factors of contiguity, compactness, municipal boundaries, and commonality of interests.

Contact: Legislator Richard John, 256-9794; Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 272-7582.

Supplemental Appropriation Approved for Translation Services

The Legislature, without dissent (Legislator Mike Sigler was excused), approved a budget adjustment and appropriation of \$16,000 from the Contingent Fund to support the centrally administered contract for language translation and interpretation services for county departments as part of the County's Limited English Proficiency Program. The allocation supports volatile program costs that exceed the \$4,000 appropriation in this year's budget. The action also increases the fiscal target of the Department of County Administration to fund the program at \$20,000, beginning in 2016.

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

Sale of Small Elmira Road Parcel Approved

The Legislature authorized the sale of an irregularly shaped 0.3 acre County-owned parcel on the Elmira Road in the City of Ithaca to Benderson Development Corporation for \$112,500. The vote was 11-2, with Legislator Carol Chock and Chair Mike Lane voting no, and Legislator Mike Sigler excused. The parcel in 2005 was declared by the Legislature to be unneeded for public use. Since then Benderson has leased the parcel, through a repeatedly extended six-month lease.

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

Among other business:

As the first step in what will be a new County tradition, the Legislature recognized four recently retired County employees—Marc Catone and Ceil Grier from the Solid Waste Division; Helen Beach, head of the Treasury Division of the Finance Department; and Carmen Hockett, of the Probation Department. Thanking the retired employees for their service, Legislature Chair Michael Lane called it a “sort of bittersweet type of presentation” for those who have been part of the County family for a long time. “Their services have been a great benefit to the people of Tompkins County,” Mr. Lane said.

County Administrator Joe Mareane reported that the County and City of Ithaca have received the State municipal restructuring grant for which they applied, \$50,000 as the first phase of a multi-step approach to study potential consolidation of police services, involving City and County, and potentially other law enforcement agencies. The next step will be to develop a Request for Proposals for a consultant to perform the study.

Administrator Mareane also reported that the County is examining the potential purchase of electric vehicles as part of the County's next vehicle replacement cycle. He reported that the State has initiated a demand-pooling initiative, aimed at reducing such vehicles' acquisition costs.

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