



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **August 16, 2016** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Authorizes Jail Study. Jail Study Committee Formed.

The Legislature authorized and appropriated funding to support study of the inmate population and population trends at the Tompkins County Jail and of potential design options to accommodate the Jail's population. The action follows notice from the New York State Commission of Correction (COC) that the jail's 18-bed variance beyond its 82-bed capacity, which has been in effect since 2009, will be revoked as of September 1st. The Commission has advised the County that it seeks immediate progress in reducing the jail population to a level that can be housed in an 82-bed facility, or to increase jail size to accommodate the incarcerated population.

By unanimous vote, the Legislature authorized and directed the County Administrator to procure consultant services for two studies—to analyze the current and projected population of the Jail, incorporating current and pending activities intended to reduce the jail population; and to develop cost-effective design concepts that would accommodate the projected population. The Legislature allocated \$85,000 from the Contingent Fund to underwrite the studies.

Along with its commitment to undertake the studies, the Legislature also calls upon the Commission to restore the 18-bed variance for the period of time necessary to procure criminal justice and architectural consultants to undertake the studies, and for the consultants to complete their work. Representatives of the County will discuss the County's plans and commitment to the analyses when they meet with the Commission of Correction August 30th. Estimated annual cost to board-out 18 additional inmates to out-of-county jails is \$558,000.

Jail Study Committee: Legislature Chair Michael Lane also appointed a five-member Jail Study Committee, chaired by Legislator Rich John, charged with reviewing and recommending to the full Legislature how the County should address overcrowding at the Jail and bring the facility into compliance with COC regulations. Also assigned to the Jail Study Committee are Legislators Martha Robertson, David McKenna, Anna Kelles, and Jim Dennis, with other key County and agency staff also expected to participate. An interim report from the committee would be expected in three months, with a final report in six months.

Tasks cited in the committee's charge include educating itself regarding current condition of the jail and policies, and how to meet COC regulations; reviewing the prior jail study report; supervising and reviewing the reports of the two new studies; investigating costs and recommending alternative methods to meet overcrowding at the jail, including both programming and building; and the financial implications of those alternatives for county taxpayers.

Concluding his charge, Chair Lane stated, "County Legislators are well aware that jail issues are sensitive in our community. Members of the Legislature may have preconceived views on how to address jail issues, but I am asking that all members of the special committee put any of that aside and enter into this study with open minds so as to be able to gather and send on to their colleagues the best possible information and recommendations."

Chair Lane's full charge regarding the Jail Study Committee is posted at www.tompkinscountyny.gov/legislature.
Contact: Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 844-8440; Peter Stein, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 266-7579.

Action Delayed on Proposed Hearing on Sheriff's Position

The Legislature tabled a proposal to schedule a public hearing to take comment on a proposed Charter change and Local Law that, if approved by the voters, would change the position of Tompkins County Sheriff from an elected to an appointed position. Because of time requirements related to the General Election ballot, the action means that any consideration of the issue will not be put before the voters this year.

Government Operations Committee Chair Dan Klein, as well as several other Legislators, stressed that the issue was whether to schedule the hearing to permit the residents of Tompkins County to vote on whether the position of Sheriff should be appointed or elected, not that there was any foregone conclusion to make such a change. A September 6th hearing, with legislative action the same night, would have been the last opportunity to act to put the matter to referendum on the November ballot. Nine people addressed the Legislature at the beginning of the meeting—all but one voicing support for keeping the position elected.

While a number of legislators again expressed the view that serious consideration of the form of the Sheriff's position is worthwhile, many indicated that more time is needed to solicit and receive public input, to consider views expressed by the public, and as the complex aspects of the position, including to whom any appointed official should report—the Legislature or the County Administrator. Public Safety Committee chair Peter Stein remarked that, while he would support an appointed sheriff, more discussion is needed before moving forward. Legislator Rich John also said more time is needed, especially as could be related to the pending law enforcement shared services study. Legislator Jim Dennis observed that “the time has not yet quite come, even though the county has been talking about this for many, many years.” While scheduling a public hearing would have set things in motion, Legislator Martha Robertson said this is the wrong time to do that, and advanced the motion to table, which was approved by a 9-5 vote, Legislators Dooley Kiefer, Anna Kelles, Will Burbank, Government Operations chair Klein, and Legislature Chair Mike Lane voting no. Mr. Lane said, “Change never happens unless there is a mechanism to make change happen...I think what we have been talking about since 1996 is a better way of doing this...I think that the public ought to have a chance to weigh in on this.”

Contact: Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 272-7582; Peter Stein, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 266-7579

DSS Commissioner Patricia Carey Recognized

Legislature Chair Lane recognized Tompkins County Social Services Commissioner Patricia Carey, who was awarded The Children and Family Futures 2016 National Collaborative Excellence Award. The award was presented earlier this month at the Child Welfare League of America's 2016 National Conference in Orange County, California.

The award recognized the work Commissioner Carey has done to create and constantly improve Tompkins County's Family Treatment Court, by working collaboratively with Tompkins County Judge John Rowley (also recognized as a fellow nominee), along with other multiple community leaders. Commissioner Carey was recognized for her success in improving collaboration among the child welfare, substance-use treatment, and judicial systems; demonstrating leadership to improve outcomes for families affected by substance-use disorders; and improving the delivery of services to families, groups, or communities.

Chair Lane told Commissioner Carey, “We are very proud of you for receiving this national honor, bestowed by your peers. We are grateful for the service you and your dedicated staff provide to those in our community most in need of a helping hand.”

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

Among other business—related to development of the 2017 County Budget, County Administrator Joe Mareane told Legislators that the County's State-mandated tax cap for 2017 will be lower than the preliminary figure projected earlier – 2.2%, rather than the 2.9% earlier estimated, which reflects effects of the current downturn in sales tax receipts. The administrator stressed that the County remains sensitive about raising the levy, but noted that the State's sales tax rebate program related to the tax cap will not apply in 2017.

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