



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **October 18, 2016** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislators Adopt Amendments to 2017 Recommended Budget; Set Public Hearing

The Tompkins County Legislature formally adopted amendments to the County Administrator's 2017 Recommended Budget and the Capital Program for the next five years, as recommended by the Expanded Budget Committee. The vote was unanimous. There were no changes to the package recommended by the Expanded Budget Committee before the Legislature vote.

The amended budget would increase the County tax levy 2.93%. The recommended tax rate of \$6.62 per thousand is down by 11 cents (1.53%) from 2016 and is a penny less than the Administrator's budget, representing an increase of \$15.64 in the tax bill for the median-valued \$175,000 home. The amended budget's recommended levy increase of 2.93% compares to a 3% increase contained in the County Administrator's budget.

The amended package, now known as the legislative Tentative Budget, replaces Administrator Joe Mareane's recommended budget as the basis of budget deliberations and will be sent on to public hearing.

Public budget hearing November 1st The Legislature, in a separate unanimous vote, scheduled the public hearing on the budget. The hearing will take place during the Legislature's next meeting on Tuesday, November 1st, 7:00 p.m. at Legislature Chambers, located at the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building (Second Floor), 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca. The Legislature's final budget adoption vote is scheduled November 15th, and changes may still be made prior to final adoption.

Amendments to the Recommended Budget, as well as other information regarding the 2017 budget process, are available for review online at the County website at www.TompkinsCountyNY.gov/ctyadmin/2017budget.
Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206.

Bond Financing Approved for Capital Projects

Through six separate unanimous votes, Legislators authorized the issuance of up to nearly \$4.7 million in serial bonds and notes to finance County capital projects. The projects include several bridge repair/replacement projects, including the Ludlowville Road Bridge project in the Town of Lansing and the South George Road Bridge project in the Town of Dryden; road and highway system reconstruction and improvements; capital improvement projects at various County facilities; and a improvements to the existing bus stop, driveway, and parking area at the County Health Department building.

County Administrator Joe Mareane noted that all projects were approved last year, during the 2016 budget process, as part of the five-year capital plan, with the exception of the Ludlowville Road bridge project, which is recommended for the capital plan as part of the 2017 budget process. The authorization anticipates approval of that project by the Legislature next month. If that did not happen, he said, the borrowing would not proceed and the Legislature would be asked to rescind the resolution. Likewise, Mareane said bonding for the Health Department project would not proceed until details of that project, now being discussed with Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, are finalized.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; Finance Director Rick Snyder, 274-5544.

Municipal Courts Task Force Report Presented

The Legislature received a briefing on results of a more than year-long intensive study of the county's municipal court system by the Municipal Courts Task Force from Task Force Chair Ray Schlather. The Task Force was charged in 2015 by the Tompkins County Council of Governments (TCCOG) with reviewing "the current structure and operations of the municipal court system for the purpose of identifying potential ways and means to sustain and improve efficiency of operations and quality of justice provided by town and village courts."

The Task Force's most significant recommendation, as identified in its report, is the consolidation of all misdemeanor and violation level Driving While Intoxicated cases (including Driving While Impaired by Drugs) into a single countywide part of State Supreme Court, a recommendation that received consensus support from members of the Task Force. Mr. Schlather said that the change would help address a significant burden on the town and village courts, as well as some unevenness in the quality of justice. He advised Legislators, however, that it will require some "political muscle" to convince the State Office of Court Administration of the need for a third County Court Judge, in terms of current population, to enable such a system to go forward. Among the many other elements identified that could help shrink the demand and help improve the functioning of the local courts would be establishment of a Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program, a countywide Youth Court, and centralized after-hours arraignment. Mr. Schlather noted that both Senate and Assembly have passed enabling legislation to permit centralized arraignment, which is now awaiting the Governor's signature.

Regarding what's next, Legislature Chair Michael Lane said that the County would first need a request from TCCOG to move forward, on actions such as initiating the conversation with the Office of Court Administration. Legislative consideration would then proceed through the Legislature committee structure, most likely beginning with Public Safety. Both Chair Lane and County Administrator Joe Mareane commended the Task Force for its expert and dedicated work over many months, Chair. Lane saying to Mr. Schlather, "We would not have gotten this far without your leadership."

Read the full Municipal Courts Task Force report, posted on the County website at www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/tccog/Shared_Services/Municipal_Courts_Task_Force/Final%20Report%2014%20July%202016.pdf

Contact: Raymond Schlather, Chair, Municipal Courts Task Force, 273-2202; Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Public Hearing Scheduled on Charter Amendments

Taking up an item postponed at their last meeting, Legislators scheduled a public hearing on proposed amendments to the Tompkins County Charter, the product of two years of intensive line-by-line review. Legislators, however, delayed the hearing to November 15th, from the November 1st date that had been proposed. The vote was 13-1, with Legislator Carol Chock voting no. Legislator Chock, who had asked that Legislators have the chance to hear more about the recommended changes, had suggested delaying the hearing until the Legislature's next meeting, in December.

Legislator Dooley Kiefer, chair of the Legislature's special Charter Review Committee, provided her colleagues a brief presentation on the history of the County Charter, first adopted in 1968, and the committee's review process over the past two years. Among the significant recommended changes she identified (some recommended by split votes) were changing the County's four public works divisions—Highway, Facilities, Airport, and Solid Waste—to County departments; modifying the designation of the Planning Department and its Commissioner to the Department/Commissioner of Planning and Sustainability; changing the name of the Personnel Department to the Department of Human Resources; addressing the timing of special elections for vacancies; and codifying as part of the Charter an Independent Redistricting Committee, as was employed in redistricting following the 2010 Census. Consideration of any change to the position of Sheriff was postponed, and the position would retain its elected status under the Charter.

Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Charter Review Committee, 257-7453; Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-543, or 844-8440.

Hearing Scheduled on Housing Trust Exemption

The Legislature, without dissent or discussion, scheduled a November 1st hearing on a proposal to opt-in on a new Local Law that would provide a restricted sale price exemption on houses subject to a housing trust; the exemption covering the difference between the restricted resale price of the housing and the property's fair market value. The New York State Legislature, at the Legislature's request, passed a new section of the Real Property Tax Law to allow for the exemption. The Legislature requested the exemption option as a way for the County to encourage affordable housing.

Contact: Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 272-7582; Director of Assessment Jay Franklin, 274-5517.

Among other business,

Three people addressed the Legislature, expressing concern regarding equal protection for members of the gay and lesbian community, especially as is related to public safety and law enforcement. They urged that the County take a proactive stance to provide training, including in the area of de-escalation, to response personnel to better protect members of the LGBTQ community, as well as people of color, and those with disabilities and issues including post-traumatic stress and addiction. County Administrator Joe Mareane later told Legislators that such training is currently underway, with this month's County Department Head meeting fully devoted to a presentation by Luca Mauer and Brian Patchcoski entitled "Creating an Inclusive Workplace Culture for LGBTQ Employees, Customers, and Clients," intended to elevate the competence of department heads in this area, and to lay the groundwork for broader-based workforce training next year. The Department of Social Services, he said, will soon provide similar training for its employees, and tht Sheriff Ken Lansing has advised that Mauer and Patchcoski have volunteered their time and expertise to assist the Sheriff's Office with training and providing the necessary policies to aid the department in approaching and communicating with the LGBTQ community.

The Legislature awarded construction bids for upgrade of the County Recycling Facility, awarding Bouley Associates, Inc., of Auburn, the general construction contract for its bid of \$520,000 and Netcorp Electrical Contracting Corp., of Endwell, for its bid of \$31,154.

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