



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **November 15, 2016** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Tompkins County 2017 Budget Adopted

Ending two-and-a-half months of deliberation and review, the Tompkins County Legislature tonight adopted the County's 2017 budget and the capital program for the next five years. The budget was approved by a 13-1 vote, with Legislator Dooley Kiefer voting no.

The \$171 million budget represents an increase in local spending of 0.9% and increases the County tax levy by 2.93%. The tax rate of \$6.62 per thousand is down by 11 cents (1.53% from 2016, representing an increase of \$15.65 in the tax bill for the median-valued \$175,000 county home. The levy increase exceeds the County's adjusted tax cap of 2.22%, as defined by New York State.

Legislator Kiefer said she could not vote for the budget, since she is uncomfortable about the increase in sales tax revenue estimates for 2017, made late in the budget process.

There were no amendments advanced before the budget vote. Legislator Martha Robertson said she had planned to propose an additional corrections officer for the County Jail, but then decided to hold off pending findings from the jail study that will soon begin.

Reflecting on the budget process, Budget Chair Jim Dennis said the Legislature was able to support a number of valuable programs and services through the budget, while attempting to remain within the framework of the County Administrator's budget. Mr. Dennis praised Administrator Joe Mareane, Budget Coordinator Kevin McGuire, and his legislative colleagues for all their work.

Administrator Mareane called the County's nearly nine-month budget process "a really remarkable process that seems to work." He thanked Legislator Dennis for his leadership, and recognized legislators, departments, Finance Director Rick Snyder, and especially Budget Coordinator McGuire for his tremendous success in managing the process through the County's new budget system.

2017 Solid Waste Fee: Apart from, but related to the budget, the Legislature, by unanimous vote, also formally established the 2017 annual Solid Waste Fee, which remains at \$55.00 per household/billing unit.

The summary of the final amendments and the adopted budget will be posted on the budget page of the County website at www.TompkinsCountyNY.gov/ctyadmin/2017budget.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Capital Program Amended, Bonding Approved for Jet Bridge at the Airport

By two separate votes of 13-1 (Legislator Dooley Kiefer dissenting), the Legislature authorized an amendment to the five-year Capital Program to acquire and install a jet bridge at Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport, and also a bond resolution authorizing the issuance of up to \$1 million in serial bonds and notes to potentially fund the jet bridge expense, if that is needed. Briefing the Legislature, Airport Manager Mike Hall noted that, with the airlines' decision to consolidate southern tier service at ITH, and with the shift of American and United to jet

service beginning in February 2017, the purchase of a second, refurbished jet bridge, at an estimated cost of up to \$1 million is needed to respect and protect that service. While the Airport has applied for State grant funding for the jet bridge as part of a larger airport improvement project, and will seek other potential revenue sources should that award not come through, Hall said the County funding is requested to enable the acquisition process to move forward, assuring that the Airport remains committed to finding other sources of funds to support this essential development of air service at ITH. County Administrator Joe Mareane also told Legislators that the bonding is seen as last-resort funding, and is hoped not to be needed.

Legislator Martha Robertson, while applauding the achievements under Hall's leadership in making Ithaca rise above the competition in the southern tier, expressed concern about process, noting that the Airport is a county enterprise unit not supported by taxpayer funding. She said it needs to be made clear that this would be an exception to that rule. Legislator Kiefer also expressed concern with process, which she said was behind her dissent, saying a larger policy discussion is needed.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206; Airport Manager Mike Hall, 257-0456; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Proposed Charter Amendments Returned to Committee Following Public Hearing

The Legislature held a public hearing on the proposed Local Law to amend the County Charter, recommended amendments that are the result of exhaustive line-by-line review of the charter over the past two years. Only one person spoke at the hearing. Sheila McHenry, chair of the Community Mental Health Services Board, read a statement from the board asking that wording changes in the proposed draft revert to prior wording, which McHenry said, is consistent with language in state law. The Board also supports the continued authority under the Charter to recommend the Commissioner of Mental Health Services, as is provided under state law. McHenry stressed this stand reflects no dissatisfaction with current leadership, but noted that, especially in the current system where both Health and Mental Health report to one director, having the Board of Health able to recommend a director and the Mental Health Services Board not able to do so, would set up an unequal structure.

Legislators voted 13-1 (Chair Mike Lane dissenting) to send the proposed law back to the Charter Review Committee to consider the proposed wording changes, which Public Health Director Frank Kruppa said may have inadvertently changed the intent of the language. Any change at the committee level may require another public hearing.

Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Charter Review Committee, 257-7453; Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 844-8440.

Funding Approved for Building Assessment for Possible Heritage Education Center

The Legislature, by unanimous vote agreed to appropriate \$15,000 in contingent funds to support a structural, mechanical, and codes assessment of the Tompkins Trust building on the Ithaca Commons, an initial step in the County's exploration of possible acquisition and reuse of the building as a new home for The History Center in Tompkins County and a proposed heritage education center bringing together compatible non-profits. The study will assess the condition of the building's structural and mechanical systems, as well as any required code-related improvements. As part of its longstanding role in providing space for a museum that preserve the records and artifacts that document the county's history, the County allocates about \$100,000 annually to underwrite The History Center's occupancy costs. Administrator Joe Mareane said the study should take about 60 days, and that the matter will come back to the Legislature once the study is completed.

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

Contract Approved for Jail Population Study

The Legislature approved an agreement with the Center for Governmental Research (CGR), of Rochester, NY, to undertake a Criminal Justice/Jail Population Trend Analysis for the Tompkins County Jail, for an amount not to exceed \$63,000. The vote was 11-3, with Legislators Dooley Kiefer, Carol Chock and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no. CGR was the unanimous choice of the Jail Study Committee, with concurrence of the Probation Director, Jail Captain, and County Administrator, who were invited to participate in the search process. The analysis is the first of two studies focused on Jail capacity to be undertaken by the County,

following the New York State Commission of Correction announcement of its intent to revoke the Jail's long-standing 18-bed variance that has allowed operation above the facility's 82-bed capacity. Based on the County's appeal, the Commission agreed to extend the variance through year's end, but directed that the County was to report significant progress on the population study 45 days before the variance is set to expire. Legislator Kiefer, who had sat in on the remote presentations by the consultants said she had preferred the other respondent and did not agree with the committee's recommendation. Legislator Chock said her opposition related to process.

County Administrator Joe Mareane said Jail Captain Ray Bunce will now be filing with the COC, seeking a one-year extension of the variance, saying commitments to capacity-related programs as part of the 2017 budget will also be noted in the application.

Contact: Richard John, Chair, Jail Study Committee, 256-9794.

Agreement Approved for Stewart Park Governance Study

The Legislature authorized the County to enter into a contract with the City of Ithaca and to appropriate \$17,000 from the Contingent Fund to support a study of governance models for Stewart Park. The vote was 10-4, with Legislators Martha Robertson, Dooley Kiefer, Mike Sigler, and Glenn Morey voting no. The money will support a portion of the City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan study that will analyze Stewart Park's current management and governance structure and recommend alternatives ranging from modifications to the existing structure to a new governance structure and/or ownership of the Park by the County. During the 2016 budget process, the City had requested that the County provide a financial subsidy for Cass and Stewart Parks, and the Legislature, as an alternative, set aside one-time funding to support the Stewart Park governance element as part of the parks master plan study. Legislator Robertson said she favors inter-municipal cooperation, but not this initiative, that in terms of priorities, she does not support investigating possible County takeover of Stewart Park. Legislator Anna Kelles said the park has "incredible potential" and that evaluating through the study is worth the investment.

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

Tribute Paid to Donald Culligan, Longest-Serving County Legislator

The Legislature observed a moment of silence in tribute to Donald Culligan, Tompkins County's longest-serving legislator, who passed away November 9th. Mr. Culligan served on the Tompkins County Board of Supervisors and Board of Representatives (as the County Legislature was formerly known) for 35 years, from 1958 through 1993. He also served as the body's first Vice-Chair, a position created in 1983.

Legislator Jim Dennis, who knew Mr. Culligan for many years, called him "an interesting, hard-working guy, with a great family" and an impressive record of service, both in government and the community. Legislature Chair Michael Lane said Mr. Culligan left the board when he came on, so he never served with Culligan, but that he had a reputation as a great public servant.

Contact: Legislator James Dennis, 592-3206; Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 844-8440

Among other business

Legislature Chair Michael Lane proclaimed November 15, 2016 "America Recycles Day in Tompkins County," noting that the nationwide celebration of America Recycles Day focuses attention on the importance of recycling, raising awareness about the need to reduce waste by reusing, recycling and buying recycled products. The County Solid Waste Management Division, he said, works to spread the word about their excellent local programs, the growth or markets for recyclable materials, and the importance of buying recycled products.

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