



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **December 6, 2016** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Sets Next-Term Legislator Salaries

The Legislature approved legislator salaries for the next four-year legislative term, which begins in 2018. The Legislature traditionally sets the level of legislator compensation well in advance of elections for the new term. Annual Legislator salaries are currently set at \$19,075 for each year of the current term, with the Chair of the Legislature earning 50% above the base salary.

After nearly an hour-and-a-half of discussion, the Legislature voted to accept the recommendation of the Government Operations Committee and increase legislator salaries to \$21,400 for each of the next term's four years, 2018 through 2021, with the Chair continuing to earn 50% more than the base salary. The vote was 8-6, with Legislators Glenn Morey, Martha Robertson, Mike Sigler, Jim Dennis, Rich John, and Chair Michael Lane voting no.

The recommended salary amount incorporates the County's support of the concept of a living wage, currently calculated by Alternatives Federal Credit Union, at \$13.77 per hour for someone whose job includes health benefits. With legislative service generally recognized as similar to a part-time job, proponents maintained that recognizing the issue of the living wage for the work of a legislator will enable and encourage a greater diversity of representation on the Legislature and will allow more working-class people to serve. It was noted that Legislators have received only a single raise of \$375 over the past seven years.

Legislator Jim Dennis advanced an alternate proposal, which would have increased salaries by \$400 each year, increasing the base salary to \$20,675 by the fourth year of the new term. That failed, however, to win support by a vote of 6-8, Legislators Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Dave McKenna, Peter Stein, Will Burbank, Anna Kelles, Dooley Kiefer, and Dan voting no. Mr. Dennis said the nature of the position of legislator lacks specific qualifications and is not really akin to a job requiring a living wage. Legislature Chair Michael Lane said he viewed the recommendation coming out of committee as too great an increase. "When people are running for the Legislature, they are thinking about community service...They are not running for a job," he said. Recounting her own experience, Legislator McBean-Clairborne remarked, "When I first ran for office, I ran to serve, but I also needed a job...I think there are people out there who are interested in doing this...Let's not sell this in a way that is disrespectful for those interested in running for office."

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

Legislature Moves Forward with Law Enforcement Shared Services Study

The Legislature approved the steps necessary to proceed with a Law Enforcement Shared Services Study. By a vote of 11-3, Legislators approved a resolution formally accepting a \$50,000 grant award through the New York State Municipal Restructuring Fund and selected the Center for Governmental Research (CGR), of Rochester, NY, to undertake the study. The measure also allocates \$10,000 from the Contingent Fund and incorporates an expected \$10,000 contribution from the City of Ithaca to underwrite an expected total study cost of \$70,000. (Legislators Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Carol Chock, and Mike Sigler voted no.)

CGR was the recommended choice of a 14-member intermunicipal Steering Committee made up of County, City, and village officials. CGR is the same consulting firm as was recently selected by the Legislature to conduct a criminal justice and jail population trend analysis for the Tompkins County Jail.

Contact: Peter Stein, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 266-7579; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Supports Carbon Fee and Dividend Legislation

The Legislature urged the United States Congress to pass Carbon Fee and Dividend legislation, an initiative designed to support and stimulate the transition away from fossil fuel energy and respond to climate change. The vote was 13-1, with Legislator Dooley Kiefer voting no (Legislator Kiefer said there was language in the resolution she couldn't support). The carbon fee and dividend legislation would place a fee on the emissions from burning fossil fuels that would be levied at the point of fuel production. The legislation is being advanced by the national Citizens' Climate Lobby, whose local chapter is seeking support from local legislative bodies. To date, the City of Ithaca Common Council and the Town of Danby have also passed resolutions of support.

Before considering the measure, Legislators heard a presentation from local Citizens Climate Lobby chapter representatives Miranda Phillips and Nancy Jacobson, who noted that the carbon fee and dividend program would be revenue-neutral, protect moderate income and low-income households, and have the potential for longevity. They assessed it as likely to have bipartisan appeal.

The measure calls a prompt and major shift away from fossil fuels as "a necessary cornerstone to any meaningful response to climate change," and notes that "a steadily increasing fee on fossil fuels at the point of their entry into the economy would be straightforward and make effective use of free-market mechanisms to promote the transition to greater energy conservation and renewable sources of energy." With all fee revenue rebated to households, the measure notes that the dividend component of the program would allow more than 70% of households to benefit financially, break even, or have only minimal increase costs.

Before legislative discussion, a number of residents addressed the Legislature asking the Legislature to support the carbon fee and dividend legislation.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 272-0584

Second Public Hearing Scheduled on Proposed Charter Amendments

The Legislature, by a vote of 12-2 (Legislators Mike Sigler and Jim Dennis voted no), scheduled a second public hearing on a Local Law to amend the County Charter. The proposed amendments result from more than two years of review by the special Charter Review Committee, and the latest revisions respond to wording changes recommended at the initial public hearing November 15th. The new hearing will be held at the Legislature's next meeting on December 20th at 5:30 p.m. Charter Review Committee Chair Dooley Kiefer said changes made to the Department of Mental Health section revert to prior wording, which is consistent with the language in state law. A definition of "enterprise activity" (which applies to the self-supporting Airport and Solid Waste operations) was also added.

By a vote of 9-5, Legislators first approved a change in the recommended Charter language advanced by Legislator Will Burbank, which would maintain the parity of the Community Mental Health Services Board with the Board of Health regarding powers to appoint a commissioner. (Legislators Martha Robertson, Sigler, Dennis, Peter Stein, and Chair Michael Lane voted no.) Legislator Burbank said he believes such common powers are important in the current structure, where the Departments of Health and Mental Health report to one administrator.

Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Charter Review Committee, 257-7453

Among other business,

The Legislature, without dissent, authorized implementation of three stream corridor restoration and flood hazard mitigation program projects, funded through an annual budget allocation of \$25,000. This year's projects include the Brown Road feasibility study in the Town of Danby; the Cayuga Inlet Sediment

Assessment Project in the City and Town of Ithaca, and the Towns of Enfield and Newfield; and the Freeville-Fall Creek Stream Buffer Revegetation Project in the Village of Freeville.

The Legislature, by a 13-2 vote (Legislators Kiefer and Chock dissenting) awarded Silverline Construction, Inc., of Burdett, NY, the contract to replace the Red Mill Road bridge and rehabilitate the West Malloryville Road bridge in the Town of Dryden, for its bid in the amount of \$1,393,145.

The Legislature approved a number of standard year-end resolutions, including setting the date of the Legislature's 2017 organizational meeting for January 3, 2017, implementing various actions related to the 2017 County Budget, and empowering the Finance Director the power to authorize issuance and sale of up to \$10 million in Revenue Anticipation notes in anticipation of the receipt of state aid in 2017, a action that Finance Director Rick Snyder noted had not been necessary in a number of years.

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