



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

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Highlights of the **February 21, 2017** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Adopts “Public Safety for All” Resolution

The Legislature, by a vote of 11-2, adopted a resolution declaring the Legislature’s commitment to preserve public safety for all in Tompkins County, following President Trump’s issuance of an the executive order month regarding enforcement of federal immigration law. (Legislators Dave McKenna and Glenn Morey voted no; Legislator Mike Sigler was excused.) The resolution’s stated purpose is “to maintain a safe, inclusive government and protection, order, conduct, safety, health, and well-being of all persons in Tompkins County.”

Health and Human Services Committee Chair Anna Kelles, who drafted the detailed, five-page resolution, again stressed that the measure is not termed a “sanctuary” resolution—that “Sanctuary,” is not a legal definition but a political definition. “It felt important to me...to leave that word out and focus on the essence of what this is—which is to ensure public safety for all,” she said, with the focus on protections that maximize public safety for all residents, while aligning with existing federal laws and the US Constitution.

The resolution states that “the Tompkins County Legislature affirms its support for the current practices of our Sheriff and our departments...as they pertain to the County’s aim to maintain a safe, inclusive government and the protection, order, conduct, safety, health, and well-being of all persons in Tompkins County, and urges continued adherence to constitutional, federal, and state laws.” Ms. Kelles said the measure recognizes the responsibilities of local law enforcement to preserve public safety, and the responsibility of the federal government to protect the entire country and its borders.

The measure, in part, affirms that County departments, officers, personnel, and agents should not engage in certain activities solely for the purpose of enforcing federal immigration law; that they should honor detainer requests from federal agents only in limited specified circumstances, such as those accompanied by a judicial warrant; and that, absent a judicial warrant, they will not disclose certain non-public, sensitive information about an individual.

More than 50 people packed Legislature Chambers, and more than 20 addressed the Legislature before the voting, nearly all urging passage of the resolution, as a positive way to assure all in this community and preserve fundamental human rights. Among them was City of Ithaca Common Council member Cynthia Brock, who said it addresses principles, laws, and budgets, and “sends a clear message to the community that all individuals will get the protections and services of Tompkins County.” Speaker Randy Brown, however, dissented, maintaining that Legislators, by considering the resolution, were distracted from their true purpose and should focus on serving the people of this county.

Legislator Rich John said there are good reasons why the Legislature should consider this—that what’s going on in this country does affect us, and that, with people here from all over the world, it matters economically, as our community’s “lifeblood.” Several Legislators reflected on the experiences of their ancestors, as immigrants, and Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, a naturalized US citizen, talked about her own experiences, and those of friends and family members.

Legislature Chair Michael Lane said to restate what he has said before, that “we are the best county in what I think is the best state. We look at the people who come to us from other countries as a resource—they are so much a part of what we have here... We don’t build walls in Tompkins County; we open our hearts... We want people to know that they are safe here.” He observed that he didn’t “recall this country in disarray before (the new administration came in on) January 20th.” Recounting the area’s long history in welcoming refugees over the years, Chair Lane said, “This does not do anything different, except it puts Tompkins County on the map that we will continue to be a welcoming law-abiding county, and we will do that for our people.”

Contact: Anna Kelles, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 607-342-2036; Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 844-8440.

Legislature Increases Funding for OAR to Support Transitional Reentry Housing

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Mike Sigler was excused), approved a one-time \$100,000 funding increase for the agency Opportunities, Alternatives, and Resources (OAR) to provide start-up funding enabling it to expand its range of services to provide transitional reentry housing for those returning to the community following incarceration at the Tompkins County Jail. The funding will enable the agency to acquire and begin to rehabilitate a four-bedroom house at 626 West Buffalo Street in Ithaca to become a transitional reentry housing facility, with a projected capacity to house as many as five OAR clients. An additional \$60,000 to support rehabilitation will be covered through outside grants and donations. Once rehabilitation is complete, OAR director Deborah Dietrich has indicated that the agency will obtain a mortgage on the property, and may have capacity in the future to offset the County’s supplemental funding through adjustments in future budgeted appropriations. County Administrator Joe Mareane has stressed that the County will have no ownership stake in the building.

Former Legislature Chair Mike Koplinka-Loehr spoke in support of the appropriation prior to the vote, noting that 20 years ago leaders of the faith community came to the Legislature seeking funding for transitional housing, which was not granted at that time. He said he hoped funding could be granted this time.

Rich John, who chairs the Legislature’s Special Jail Study Committee, as well as Public Safety, called the project a key element of reentry and what the County is trying to do to reduce the jail population. “This one house won’t do it all, but it is certainly a step in the right direction,” he said.

Contact: Richard John, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 256-9794; Deborah Dietrich, Executive Director, OAR, 272-7885.

Legislature Urged to Assume Full Costs Associated with Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility

The Legislature, without dissent (Legislators Mike Sigler and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne were excused), called upon New York State to fully fund impacted county departments and agencies for costs associated with raising the age of criminal responsibility to age 18. The measure expresses support for a plan to increase the age of criminal responsibility, development of such a plan directed by the Governor by executive order. But it also calls upon the State Legislature to fully and permanently obligate the State to pay for 100% of all new costs incurred by Probation Departments and other county departments and agencies affected. Past proposed state legislation has committed full funding by the State to cover the costs associated with raising the age; the current proposal ties funding to those counties that meet the tax cap and who can demonstrate to the Office of Budget that paying the additional costs would cause fiscal hardship.

Contact: Richard John, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 256-9794; Patricia Buechel, Director of Probation and Community Justice, 274-5380.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Authorized appropriation of funding, through the Community Housing Development Fund, to support development costs for two real estate development projects primarily benefiting low- and moderate-income households, as recommended by the Fund’s Program Oversight Committee--\$18,750 to support Second Wind Cottages Expansion project and \$50,000 to support the Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services Scattered Site Preservation project. (Legislator Carol Chock abstained in the vote because of her family connection with INHS.)

- Authorized acceptance of a revised, \$250,000 Statewide Opportunities for Airport Revitalization (SOARs) grant from the New York State Department of Transportation to assist with marketing and promotion of Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport.
- Authorized a right-of-way acquisition funding agreement with the State Department of Transportation for Coddington Road highway safety improvements at the Burns Road and East King Road intersections in the Town of Ithaca.
- Awarded Clean Harbors Environmental Services, Inc., of Norwell, MA, the contract to operate the Household Hazardous Waste Management Facility for the County Department of Recycling and Materials Management. The contract was awarded for a five-year term, with one two-year extension option.
- Continuing past practice, authorized a contract with the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District to provide up to \$200,000 to the District for conservation project activities in 2017, and obligating the District to repay the County as reimbursements for conservation project activities are received.
- Awarded the first round of 2017 Strategic Tourism Implementation Funding, as recommended by the Strategic Tourism Planning Board—to the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce/Ithaca Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau, \$30,000 for Agriculinary Tourism Implementation; and The History Center in Tompkins County, \$35,500 toward the Tompkins County Heritage Center.

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