



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **April 4, 2017** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Advances Toward Consideration of Proposed T-21 Law

The Legislature set a public hearing for its next meeting on April 18th regarding a proposed new Local Law that would raise the legal age for tobacco sale and purchase. The vote, following close to an hour-and-a-half of discussion, was 10-4, with Legislators Mike Sigler, Carol Chock, Will Burbank, and Peter Stein voting no. The hearing will take place at 5:30 p.m., at County Legislature Chambers, located at the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street (Second Floor), Ithaca.

The proposed law mirrors existing public health law, but raises the legal age for sale and purchase from 18 to 21. It notes that the County “has substantial interest in reducing the number of all individuals of all ages who use cigarettes and other tobacco products, and a particular interest in protecting adolescents from tobacco dependence and the illnesses and premature death associated with tobacco use,” and that it is the County’s intent “to implement effective measures through this Local Law to reduce youth access to tobacco products, e-cigarettes and similar aerosol devices, smoking paraphernalia, and shisha” (shisha defined as “any product made primarily of tobacco or other leaf or herbs, or any combination thereof, smoked or intended to be smoked in a hookah or water pipe.”)

Health and Human Services Committee Chair Anna Kelles stressed that law would cover sale and purchase, not possession, and maintained that delaying the age at which tobacco products can be legally purchased would carry significant benefit because of how the adolescent brain develops, making youth in that age range at significantly higher lifetime risk for becoming addicted and not being able to quit. Public Health Director Frank Kruppa said that the measure has also been recommended by the Board of Health, and that the issue comes down to weighing the individual rights of 18, 19, and 20-year-old individuals against the substance of tobacco, which creates illness and death. “From a public health perspective, this law is the only decision,” he said.

While Legislators expressed general support for the goal of limiting tobacco usage, several expressed concern about moving forward with this initiative. Both Legislators Will Burbank and Mike Sigler said they object to prohibiting tobacco use at age 18, the age at which New York State considers one to be an adult. Legislator Peter Stein said, “Somehow, I believe it is intrusive of the government to tell me there are things that I can’t do because it’s bad for me.” Legislator Carol Chock unsuccessfully proposed a substitute version, which failed to win support by a 3-11 margin, which included amendments to eliminate the inclusion of paraphernalia and shisha. Both Legislators Rich John and Jim Dennis said they support holding the public hearing, but are unsure of how they ultimately will vote on passage of the law.

Chair Michael Lane said that it’s important that the Legislature hear what constituents have to say about this. “We have always been at the forefront,” he said. ...“This is important...If we can defer young people from starting...what we can do is set an example.” Legislator Kelles agreed on the importance of public input, and said she hoped all would encourage people to share their views at the April 18th public hearing.

Contact: Anna Kelles, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 342-2036.

Public Health Director Frank Kruppa Reappointed

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Peter Stein was excused), confirmed County Administrator Joe Mareane's reappointment of Public Health Director Frank Kruppa for a second six-year term. Director Kruppa's current term expires as of April 11th. New York State requires the term reappointment, since the Public Health Director position holds the responsibility for direct administration of State law. Administrator Mareane said, "I think it's been clear that Frank has done a stand-out job," with achievements including developing a strategic plan for the department, automating major systems, putting the County at the forefront of preparedness, and developing employee reward and recognition programs that serve as a model for the rest of county government. The Legislature held a brief executive session prior to the vote.

Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Among other business,

The Legislature, in the second of three required actions, voted to endorse State legislation, currently before the Assembly and Senate, which would extend by two years the additional one percent sales tax, which has been in place in Tompkins County since December 1992. Current authority expires November 30, 2017. The Legislature requested sponsorship of such legislation earlier this year, and will need to act to extend the tax, once such State legislation is passed.

Noting that the 200th anniversary of Tompkins County's founding is coming up on April 7th, Legislature Chair Michael Lane announced that on Tuesday, April 18th at 5:00 p.m., at County Legislature Chambers, just before the next Legislature meeting, members of the Tompkins County Bicentennial Commission will present a dramatic reading of *Nine Towns and a City*, authored by County Historian Carol Kammen. *Nine Towns and a City* offers a lighthearted look at a representation of the first meeting of the County Board of Supervisors, and how the County developed over time. To mark the Legislature meeting closest to the 200th anniversary date, County Poet Laureate Zee Zahava was invited to begin tonight's Legislature meeting by reading one of her poems dealing with the concept of "Happiness," related to living in Tompkins County.

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