



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the April 18, 2017 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Takes Comment on Proposed Tobacco Law

The Legislature held a public hearing on a proposed Local Law that would raise the legal age for tobacco sale and purchase in Tompkins County. The proposed law mirrors existing public health law, but raises the legal age for sale and purchase from 18 to 21. The proposed law 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.

Thirteen people addressed the Legislature at the more than 45-minute hearing, while about half of the speakers urged passage of the law, others asked that more research be conducted, or expressed concern that the measure, despite good intentions may not produce the desired result. Some expressed concern about infringing upon the rights of choice of 18-to-20-year-olds, whom society considers at the age of adulthood; others said that data shows that typical tobacco use among teens starts much earlier, at around age 13, and suggested prohibition on use, or on the social factors that lead to youth smoking, might be more effective.

Health and Human Services Committee Chair Anna Kelles withdrew from the agenda consideration of the proposed law, to permit consideration of the hearing comments and requests for further information. It is likely that the measure will come back before the Legislature at its next meeting May 2nd.

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

Legislature Awards Spring 2018 Tourism Program Grants

The Legislature awarded nearly \$168,000 in County Room Occupancy funds (nearly 50 separate grants), through four grant programs, in the Spring 2017 round of Tompkins County Tourism Grants, as recommended by the County's Strategic Tourism Planning Board. The grants were awarded under the New Tourism Initiative, Tourism Project, Tourism Marketing and Advertising, and Community Celebrations grant categories.

Among the Community Celebrations grants approved was a \$1,700 award to support the 'Share Our Table' Dinner on June 3rd, sponsored by Islamic Community Outreach Services (ICOS). Legislator Mike Sigler earlier had dissented in recommending the Community Celebrations Grants in committee, expressing concern that the event, which had been called 'Community Iftar 2017' was a religious event that should not be a recipient of public money, due to the separation of church and state. Five people expressed support for the funding during Privilege of the Floor, stressing that the program was a cultural event to welcome community-wide sharing, and Legislator Sigler said he could...and did...support the event on that basis, though he said he felt "a little sad" that its religious significance might now be minimized.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206; Legislator Mike Sigler, 339-7978.

New Stream Restoration Project in Danby Approved

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Peter Stein was excused) amended the County's five-year Capital Program and approved funding for a new streams restoration project along Station Road in the Town of Danby. The project, which is eligible for New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

funding under the New York State Water Quality Improvement Program, will provide aquatic habitat restoration, including replacement of culverts and flood mitigation work. More than \$492,000 in up-front funding was allocated from the Highway Fund Balance to support total project cost, with the DEC expected to reimburse roughly 50% of the project cost.

Contact: Highway Director Jeffrey Smith, 274-0300; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206.

Foreclosed Parcels in Freeville and Ulysses Transferred to Their Municipalities

The Legislature, without dissent (Legislator Peter Stein was excused), authorized the sale to municipalities of two parcels previously withheld from auction during the foreclosure process. The Legislature authorized the County to execute an agreement with the Village of Freeville to purchase for \$634 a 0.98-acre vacant parcel on Brooklyn Road, on the northern bank of Fall Creek, adjacent to a 45-acre nature preserve owned by the Village. The Legislature, in a separate action, also authorized a similar agreement with the Town of Ulysses for transfer of a 4.2-acre Taughannock Boulevard Parcel bordering the Black Diamond Trail, for a purchase price of \$5,427, to be spread out over a two-year period.

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

Among other actions:

During Privilege of the Floor, Legislators heard comments of concern from nine community members regarding the County's Jail Population Study currently in progress, several of them citing what they see as a lack of transparency by the consulting group conducting the study, including deficiencies in what had been described as an interactive project website. Several said they oppose detox services within the jail, and local justice activist Phoebe Brown said it feels as if she and others have not been listened to as part of the study. Jail Study Committee Chair Rich John, and other Legislators, thanked those who addressed the Legislature for their comments, and urged people to attend his committee's meetings (the next on Thursday, April 20th), and to comment and listen to what is being discussed. He stressed that the study focus is on examining the County's alternatives-to-incarceration programs, what could be done or done better, and on Jail and County population trends, not on building additional jail beds.

County Administrator Joe Mareane told Legislators that it is now official that Social Services Commissioner Patricia Carey has announced her intention to retire sometime in August of this year. He noted that Commissioner Carey, who has worked for Tompkins County since 1990 and served as Commissioner since 2003, "has been a pillar of this government for a long time" and will be greatly missed. He said a search committee has been established and the search process for Commissioner Carey's replacement will begin quickly, with the intent of having a new appointee on board prior to Commissioner Carey's retirement.

Finance Director Rick Snyder delivered an encouraging report on first-quarter sales tax, with the County portion of sales tax receipts up 11.48% in March, compared to March of last year. Year-to-date receipts are running 10.23% above this time last year. He noted that the amount received, including the County-only share of \$8,129,510, represents the strongest first quarter for overall tax collections of record.

The Legislature scheduled a public hearing for its next meeting, May 2nd at 5:30 p.m., to hear public comment and input on administration of the Community Development Block Grant received through the New York State Office of Community Renewal, to continue the Tompkins County Homeownership Program through the end of 2017. The hearing will be held at Legislature Chambers, located in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building (second floor), 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

The Legislature authorized acceptance of two grants to provide technical support for two programs at the Tompkins County Mental Health Department—an \$18,000 grant from the Circare Behavioral Management Program and Health Homes of Upstate New York Services for the Department's Health Homes services, and \$12,000 in start-up funds from the Care Compass Network to support the Department's new Mobile Crisis Team. That Team serves those experiencing urgent concerns related to mental health and substance abuse issues. Both grants will be used for laptop computers and upgrades to field telephones.

The Legislature authorized application for 2017 Federal Transit Administration Section 5311 funds to support nearly \$8.7 million for rural transportation projects of Tompkins County and TCAT (Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit). TCAT is applying for replacement buses, facility rehabilitation, and rural bus shelters and signs. The County is applying for *Way2Go* program County and regional mobility management projects and operating assistance for Finger Lakes Rideshare.

Legislature Chair Michael Lane proclaimed April 2017 as Fair Housing Month in Tompkins County, beginning a year-long commemoration of the U.S. Fair Housing Law, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which enunciates a national policy of the right to Fair Housing without discrimination, and urges all citizens to wholeheartedly recognize this celebration throughout the year.

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