



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **May 2, 2017** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Raises the Age for Tobacco Sale and Purchase in Tompkins County

The Tompkins County Legislature has adopted a new Local Law that raises to 21 the legal age for tobacco sale and purchase in Tompkins County. The vote was 9-5, with Legislators Dan Klein, Mike Sigler, Peter Stein, Will Burbank, and Carol Chock voting no.

The new “T-21” law mirrors existing public health law, but raises the legal age for sale and purchase from 18 to 21. The 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.

In public comment before the Legislature’s consideration, seven people spoke, nearly all urging passage of the law, many noting that a raise in the legal purchase age to 21 will help reduce exposure of people younger than age 18 to tobacco. In their comments in an hour of discussion before the vote, Legislators acknowledged the variety of views on the issue and thanked those who had voiced their views to the Legislature. Health and Human Services Chair Anna Kelles, whose committee brought forth the legislation, stressed that the law will not criminalize youth for using or purchasing, but levies a fine for those who are selling to those younger than 21. Several Legislators said they had struggled with the issue—Legislator Rich John, whose District 4 includes a lot of students and much of the downtown business district, called it one of the more difficult votes he’s had to consider as a legislator, balancing the issues of freedom and business impact with the health effects. Legislator Mike Sigler again stressed the rights of 18 to 20-year-olds, who are at the age that society considers an adult. Legislator Stein said he has strong feelings about not making decisions for adults, and expressed doubt about how much of an impact the law would have. While he expressed continued concern with the law, Legislator Burbank said, “This is one case where I will not be truly unhappy to lose...I believe the positive effects will be there.” Legislator Carol Chock once again unsuccessfully urged a change of wording on prohibitions regarding shisha, which she regards as “overreach.” Legislator Jim Dennis first said he really wasn’t sure how he would vote, but ultimately decided in favor, even though he still had doubts, saying he hoped that young people will listen to adults and think about this. Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne said she has issues with the law, but would support it, stressing that there must be an educational plan that addresses potential social factors that may arise for youth related to the age change.

Chair Michael Lane thanked the Health Department for bringing forward the proposed legislation and for all of its work on the complex issue, saying that he believes that New York State is examining the possibility of raising the age statewide is because New York City and several counties have passed local “T-21” laws.
Contact: Anna Kelles, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 607-342-2036.

Dorothy Cotton and Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers Honored as “Tompkins County Treasures”

Through a proclamation signed by Legislature Chair Michael Lane, the Legislature paid tribute to Civil Rights leader Dorothy Cotton and the Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers, proclaiming May 12, 2017 as “Dorothy Cotton and Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers Day” in Tompkins County.

The Ithaca-based Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers were founded as the Jubilee Singers in 2010 by the group's artistic director Dr. Baruch Whitehead to celebrate and preserve the first authentically American sacred music, the Negro Spiritual. The proclamation notes that the Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers, a welcoming group of diverse musicians of all ages and backgrounds, "promot[e] strength, resilience, peace, and social justice through compelling song that was born from the steadfast faith of an oppressed people." The group will reach a milestone on May 14, 2017, when they will debut on the national stage of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., also offering a free preview of their Kennedy Center concerts on May 12, 2017, at 7:30 p.m. at Ithaca College's Ford Hall.

The proclamation states that "the brave work of Civil Rights leader Dorothy Cotton and the reflective and talented work of the Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers make them 'Tompkins County Treasures'—which are timely and appropriate recognitions given 2017 the year of Tompkins County's Bicentennial and The Year of the Woman in Tompkins County." Chair Lane calls upon all members of the community to join in acknowledging the work and accomplishments of Dorothy Cotton and the Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers in support of peace and racial harmony. Chair Lane and many Legislators expressed appreciation of the group for its moving performance before the Legislature at the beginning of the meeting.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 607-274-5434 or 607-844-8440

Administrator Authorized to Establish Shared Services Panel

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, authorized County Administrator Joe Mareane to establish a Shared Services Panel and to undertake the tasks assigned to county chief executive officers under the State's shared services legislation. The law assigns tasks to the Chief Executive Officer that exceed those ordinarily delegated to an appointed official. They include organizing a Shared Services Panel consisting of all mayors and supervisors of municipalities within the county, soliciting input of all collective bargaining units of Panel members, presenting a tentative Plan to the County Legislature for its review, conducting at least three public hearings, securing final approval of the Plan by the Panel, certifying savings associated with the Plan, submitting the Plan to the State, and issuing the Plan to the public.

Administrator Mareane cautioned that it appears it will be very difficult to come up with a good plan within the timetable established in the law, which requires that the Panel submit a plan for the County Legislature's review by August 1st and finalized by mid-September.

Contact: Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 607-272-7582; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 607-274-5551.

Among other business:

Five people addressed the Legislature registering comments and concerns regarding the ongoing Jail study, asking for a focus on services rather than additional jail beds, as well as for more information.

Legislator Dan Klein acknowledged the 40th anniversary of the iconic Grateful Dead concert at Cornell's Barton Hall on May 8, 1977, and has signed a proclamation recognizing May 8, 2017 as "Grateful Dead Day" in Tompkins County. The Barton Hall concert is described as the most famous of the group's more than 2,300 concerts.

The Legislature conducted a public hearing concerning Tompkins County's current Community Development Block Grant project, to continue support for the Tompkins County Homeownership Program.

Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, who offered compelling observations regarding incarceration from family experience and her past experience in working in the Jail, commended those who organized "The New Jim Crow" Community Read. She reported that the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee has reviewed the first draft of an excellent education video prepared by the Office of Human Rights that explains posted "Safe Zone" cards, and what Safe Zones mean as a responsibility of county government. The draft video will be presented to the Health and Human Services and Budget Committees, and to the Legislature at its next meeting.

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