



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **May 16, 2017** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Adopts 2018 Financial Goal, Fiscal Guidelines for Departments and Agencies**

In two resolutions approved tonight, the Tompkins County Legislature approved a 2018 tax levy guideline and spending targets for 2018. The tax levy resolution directed County Administrator Joe Mareane to prepare a recommended operating and capital budget that can be supported with a tax levy increase of 2.4%, an increase in line with the County's estimated tax cap for 2018. The vote on the tax levy guideline was 10-2, with Legislators Carol Chock and Dooley Kiefer voting no. Spending targets for departments and County agencies to use in preparing their budgets were approved by a 9-3 vote (Legislators Chock, Kiefer, and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne dissenting. Legislators Will Burbank and Peter Stein were excused for both votes.)

County Administrator Joe Mareane expects that the 2.4% increase in the County's property tax levy, which includes a 0.5% increase dedicated to capital improvements identified in the County's Capital program, will support a maintenance-of-effort budget for County departments, as well as addressing other critical needs and priorities. Departments and agencies will continue to have the ability to request funding in excess of their 2018 spending targets, allowing the Legislature to consider exceeding the Administrator's Recommended Budget.

The \$1.15 million increase in the levy would represent an estimated increase of \$24.62 for the owner of a median-valued \$178,000 county home. The approved fiscal targets hold targets steady for County departments and include a 2% increase in target for not-for-profit County agencies.

Legislator Chock said she firmly believes that the 2.4% levy guideline, and associated fiscal targets, will not equip the County to address emerging concerns and address uncertainties related to outside funding. Administrator Mareane stressed that this is just the starting point in the 2018 budget process, and that additional money will be allocated to the Contingent Fund to give the Legislature additional flexibility during its review. *Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.*

#### **Hearing Scheduled on Proposed Infrastructure Exemption**

The Legislature, by a vote of 10-2, scheduled a public hearing for its next meeting on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 5:31 p.m., to take comment on a possible new Local Law that would, if approved, adopt a permitted exemption under New York State Real Property Tax Law on infrastructure improvements made by a developer. (Legislators Carol Chock and Jim Dennis voted no; Legislators Will Burbank and Peter Stein were excused.) The proposed law would provide a three-year abatement of County tax on the increase in value due to improvements made to public infrastructure (utilities and road), as long as the developer retains ownership of the newly subdivided lots. Those holding costs are described as one of the many impediments to building for-sale housing.

Legislators Chock and Rich John were among those who expressed some concern during discussion before the vote—both suggesting that, since it cannot be focused on specific areas or types of development, it could support sprawl. Mr. John again characterized it as a “blunt instrument” to deal with the housing issue. Asked by Legislators to comment, Commissioner of Planning and Sustainability Ed Marx noted that an issue has been identified as part of the County's housing needs assessment that no new neighborhoods are being built. While there could be some sprawl, he believes the proposed exemption might provide marginal help.

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

### **Legislature Considers, But Does Not Approve Making Request for Local-Option Property Exemption**

Legislators discussed, but in a split vote failed to approve a proposal to request to New York State to amend the Real Property Tax Law to allow a local Tompkins County option to provide a partial exemption for multi-unit residential properties converted to owner-occupied residences, as has been authorized as a local option for several other cities. Proposed as a potential way to encourage owner-occupied housing, the exemption, if requested and approved by the State, then adopted by the Legislature, would have prevented any increase in assessment in the first year, then slowly add the increase to the tax base over the next seven years.

After considerable discussion, the vote was 7-6, with Legislators Jim Dennis, Glenn Morey, Dave McKenna, Mike Sigler, Peter Stein, and Chair Michael Lane voting no, with Legislator Will Burbank excused)—failing to muster the 8 votes required for passage. Several Legislators said they felt there were too many unanswered questions at this point, and that it might have the adverse consequence of reducing rental units. Legislator Martha Robertson, who maintained that the idea has promise, said the County would simply be asking the State to approve the option, and that there would be more time to consider it before any final decision, but Chair Lane said that if the Legislature would be making such a request from the State, it should be prepared to adopt the measure, if granted.

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

### **Legislature Authorizes Contract for Performance Measurement System**

The Legislature, without dissent (Legislator Will Burbank was excused), authorized the County to contract with the firm Clear Impact, LLC, of Rockville, MD, for software and related consulting services to implement a countywide performance measurement system, for a three-year contract amount not to exceed \$53,600. As part of the 2017 County Budget, the Legislature authorized multi-year funding to support a three-year project to acquire a performance measurement system and to implement that system in all County departments. The countywide performance measurement system, the resolution notes, will enable departments to measure their success in attaining intended program outcomes and to make and assess programmatic changes aimed at improving performance.

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

### **Legislature Approves New Health Insurance Option for County Retirees**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislators Peter Stein and Will Burbank were excused), approved a new post-retirement health insurance option to County employees who have retired from the County and are drawing a New York State pension. The action directs the Commissioner of Human Resources to make the Greater Tompkins County Municipal Health Insurance Consortium's Platinum Plan, which is the sole health insurance option available to nearly all County employees hired after 2016, available to existing and future retirees.

County Administrator Joe Mareane said the Platinum Plan option provides a more affordable option to retirees for their health insurance—the same as current coverage, with higher co-pays and deductibles, at a diminished cost from the current 50-50 premium cost-share, which for many years has been the only option for retirees. While the Platinum Plan is much less expensive for the County, the County will continue to contribute what it has, passing along the full savings to the retiree. Administrator Mareane said, “I think this is as good a way we can find to provide great coverage, without shifting the burden to the taxpayers. The County will also continue to reimburse retirees for their Medicare premiums.

*Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206*

Among other business,

The Legislature viewed the new Safe Space training video, prepared by the County Office of Human Rights. The brief eight-minute video explains to County employees the posted “Safe Zone” cards, and what Safe Zones mean as a responsibility of county government. Both Health and Human Services Chair Anna Kelles and

Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Chair of the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee, thanked both the Office of Human Rights for producing and updating the explanatory video, and members of the LGBT community for their ongoing productive comments and input on this project.

The Legislature heard a presentation regarding the annual Tompkins County Sustainability Update from Senior Planner Megan McDonald, on behalf of the County Sustainability Team. Read the Sustainability Update report, posted on the County Planning Department website at [www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/sustainability/Sust%20report%20to%20legislature-May2017.pdf](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/sustainability/Sust%20report%20to%20legislature-May2017.pdf)

The Legislature scheduled a public hearing on the Tompkins Cortland Community College 2017-2018 operating budget for June 20<sup>th</sup>, 5:30 p.m., to be conducted in Legislature Chambers of the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

The Legislature authorized expenditure of \$60,000 of its Program Income Funds to support OAR's Endeavor House project, as recommended by the Community Housing Development Fund Program Oversight Committee.

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