



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **June 6, 2017** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Approves Purchase of Trust Company Building for History Center Home**

Tompkins County will purchase the Tompkins Trust Company building on the Ithaca Commons to house the History Center, along with other non-profits co-located as a heritage education center. The Legislature, by unanimous vote, approved acquisition of the building, as recommended by its Facilities and Infrastructure and budget committees. The Trust Company will vacate the building in 2018 to move to its new downtown headquarters on Seneca Street—the same year that the History Center’s current County-paid lease expires. The goal is to have the building ready for History Center occupancy in January 2019.

The action authorizes the County Administrator to negotiate acquisition of the building for a cost not to exceed \$2 million (\$400,000 below market value) and to amend the County’s five-year Capital Improvement Plan to include Building acquisition and improvements, at a total cost of \$2.9 million—reflecting approximately \$900,000 in needed improvements needed to make it code-compliant and ready for tenant-funded renovations. The building and improvements will be paid for in cash, using unbudgeted revenue from the region’s two casinos, with potential cost reductions of \$450,000 from the project’s private Capital Campaign and as much as \$100,000 which could come from a Strategic Tourism Capital Grant.

Legislator Rich John, who has been involved in the review process over many months, said the proposal has been a long time coming, and represents a very good investment of public funds—taking money held in reserve and putting it into the building, “investing in a public-private partnership in the best sense.” Legislator Carol Chock noted that research has shown how investment in cultural and arts organization serves as an economic driver; and Legislator Anna Kelles observed that the investment fosters collaboration and consolidation of services. Many thanked Legislator John and County Administrator Joe Mareane for all their work to bring this to fruition, and Legislator Jim Dennis pointed out that it was Chair Michael Lane who had first suggested taking a look at the building for this purpose.

Chair Lane said the action is particularly fitting in this, the County’s Bicentennial year and the history the County is trying to celebrate through the Bicentennial. Part of the building complex was built in 1860 to house the County Clerk’s Office. What we are doing here can be looked at as something the County is doing in its Bicentennial year that will last a long time, he said, and represents an appropriate use of the one-time revenue from casino licensing fees. “We have this project for which our History Center will be a cornerstone,” Mr. Lane said, and he thanked the people of Tompkins Trust Company and Tompkins Financial Services for making a commitment to the county and the county seat by building their headquarters there, and for being willing to let the County acquire the building. “This is an important milestone for Tompkins County,” he said.

*Contact: David McKenna, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 564-7243; Legislator Rich John, 256-9794; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.*

#### **Legislature Voices Continued Support for Principles of Paris Climate Change Accords**

In the wake of President Trump’s announcement seeking to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the Legislature affirmed its support of United State participation in fighting global climate change, and continued local action. Acting on a member-filed resolution from Legislator Martha Robertson, the Legislature by unanimous vote passed the resolution of support, which reaffirms the County’s commitment to

taking action to reduce climate pollution in line with its goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050, and supports principles of the Paris Accords and participation of the U.S. as a party to that agreement. The measure also states that “Tompkins County will continue to stand with local and state governments and other public and private sector partners throughout the world to advance action in accordance with the goals outlined” in the Paris Accords and agrees to sign the “Open letter to the international community and parties to the Paris Agreement from U.S. state, local, and business leaders” (posted online at <http://WeAreStillIn.com>.)

Legislator Robertson maintained that taking this official stand is important, and Legislator Anna Kelles called it “a practical declaration of what we are doing in this community.” Legislator Mike Sigler said he and thought the pull-out was wrong for a number of reasons and supports the affirmation, but cautioned that local action is needed, not just talk.

*Contact: Legislator Martha Robertson, 272-0584 or 592-3119.*

### **Legislature Approves Infrastructure Exemption**

After a public hearing, the Legislature, by a vote of 8-5 (Legislators Will Burbank, Carol Chock, Rich John, Dooley Kiefer, and Jim Dennis voted no; Legislator Peter Stein was excused), approved a new Local Law adopting a permitted exemption under New York State Real Property Tax Law on infrastructure improvements made by a developer. The law provides 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. Several Legislators, who later voted against the exemption, expressed concern that the measure would address the issue of building affordable housing with too broad a brush—that it might have unintended consequences, such as encouraging sprawl. Legislator Martha Robertson characterized the exemption as “one small tool that could help.”

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

### **Legislature Urges Changes in Community Transition Funding Related to Power Plant Reductions**

The Legislature, by a vote of 12-1 (Legislator Dooley Kiefer voted no; Legislator Peter Stein was excused), went on record in support of proposed State legislation, advanced by Senator Pam Helming and Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton in response to the County’s initiative, which would revise the criteria for State Urban Development Corporation transition funding for communities impacted by closure or diminished production of electric generating facilities, such as the local coal-fired Cayuga Power Plant.

Acting on a member-filed resolution from Legislator Martha Robertson, the Legislature endorsed the proposed expansion of eligibility for such funding to communities where an electric generating facility is operating marginally, but has not completely closed. The Legislature’s action states that “the Tompkins County Legislature believes that the criteria to receive these funds should be updated to also allow communities to be eligible where an operational facility demonstrates that its actual electricity production in the prior year was less than 15% of its total generating capacity, and that such diminished electricity production has caused a reduction in the real property tax collections or [payment-in-lieu-of-tax] revenue of at least 20% owed by such electric generating facility.”

Legislator Carol Chock said she supports the concept of such transitional relief, but would have liked the opportunity to review the proposed legislation in detail before acting. Several Legislators thanked Legislator Robertson for taking the initiative on the issue. It is hoped that the proposed legislation might be acted upon before the end of the current State legislative session.

*Contact: Legislator Martha Robertson, 272-0584 or 592-3119.*

### **Legislature Supports TC3 Funding Requests**

In two separate unanimous votes, the Legislature approved two funding proposals from Tompkins Cortland Community College, approving a one-time discretionary supplemental appropriation of \$83,200 from the County’s Contingent Fund to implement a Service Management Modernization Program during the coming academic year. The allocation comes outside of the budget process, and does not require approval and matching

appropriation from joint College sponsor Cortland County. The Legislature also supported the College's request to appropriate \$100,000 of its surplus funds to replace lost tuition-based revenue for the current academic year.

Last week, the Legislature's budget committee recommended adoption of the College's 2017-2018 operating budget, which includes a 1% increase in sponsor support. The budget will not come up for Legislature consideration until after a public hearing June 20<sup>th</sup>.

*Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee. 592-3206*

Among other actions,

Legislature Chair Michael Lane proclaimed June 2017 as **LGBTQ+ Pride Month** in Tompkins County, calling upon all members of the community to join in "celebrating the contributions of the County's LGBTQ+ residents and renew[ing] our commitment and actions to eliminate prejudice everywhere where it exists." The proclamation notes, in part, that the County was one of the first in the State to pass a Local Law to protect against discrimination based on gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, and that the county's LGBTQ+ residents "have been and continue to be vital to our economic development, sustainability, and safety across all fields and professions." Representatives of the organization Finger Lakes PULSE presented the Legislature with the Pride/Rainbow Flag, which Chair Lane has directed be flown on the County's flagpole during Pride Month "as a symbol of the County's steadfast belief in the equal dignity of all Tompkins County citizens."

The Legislature appropriated \$5,200 from the Contingent Fund to support public WiFi Internet service at four county government locations—Legislature Chambers, the Old Jail Conference Room, the Rice Conference Room at the Public Health Department, and the first-floor waiting room of the Mental Health Building. Initial ongoing annual costs of the vendor-supplied system are expected to be approximately \$10,254, and the target budget of the Information Technology Services Department for 2018 is increased by that amount. The action notes that it is expected that access to these improved technological tools will also contribute to higher levels of public access to County data and services.

**- END -**