



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

#### **Legislature Endorses Tompkins County Housing Strategy**

The Tompkins County Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislators Martha Robertson, Mike Sigler, Peter Stein, Glenn Morey were excused), endorsed the Tompkins County Housing Strategy, a wide-ranging plan to address the County's housing needs through 2025. Prepared by the County's Department of Planning and Sustainability, the Strategy draws upon information from past studies on the critical issue of housing, the 2016 Housing Needs Assessment and 2016 Housing Summit, as well as additional input and feedback received from community partners, the County Planning Advisory Board, legislators, and the public.

Before the vote, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Vice Chair Dooley Kiefer read a statement from Committee Chair Martha Robertson, who has taken a lead role in helping to move forward the housing issue, but could not be at tonight's meeting. Robertson said, "In endorsing the 2017 Housing Strategy, the Legislature is making a very important statement of our values and priorities as a community when it comes to one of our most basic human needs. This Strategy charts an ambitious yet pragmatic path forward that balances the roles of the private and public sectors, of the different levels of government, of nonprofits, philanthropists, neighborhoods, and individuals. Many people have contributed to this document and even more of us, working together, will be needed to accomplish the many crucial goals that the County Legislature will hopefully be adopting."

The Strategy provides targets for housing units and their locations, approaches to achieve desired housing outcomes, and monitoring efforts that will be needed to track progress in meeting the county's housing needs. Among the targets cited: Construction of 580 workforce housing units per year (including 200 new rental units per year and 380 new ownership units per year), for a total of 5,800 new units through 2025, many located in the county's nodal Development Focus Areas. The report also calls for construction of market-rate and subsidized Senior Housing units, and at least one Medicaid Assisted Living program facility; and for construction of supportive housing for those with special needs. As well as new construction, to meet those targets the Strategy proposes a focus on preserving and rehabilitating existing housing stock and building upon existing Fair Housing efforts to address unlawful housing discrimination. It also recommends programs to enhance community collaboration to address housing issues—including a Housing Solutions Collaborative to enhance information-sharing and a "Virtual Housing Office"—a web-based inventory of existing housing resources and programs to connect anyone seeking housing-related information within Tompkins County with housing resources.

A number of Legislators praised the plan and recognized the Department of Planning and Sustainability, including Commissioner Ed Marx, Deputy Commissioner Katie Borgella, and Senior Planner Megan McDonald, for their excellent work in preparing the Housing Strategy—among them, Legislature Chair Michael Lane who said, "I applaud the Planning Department for the work that has been done to, and we need to continue."

Review the full Tompkins County Housing Strategy document at  
[www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/planning/housing\\_choices/documents/HousingStrategy\\_Final\\_6-29-17.pdf](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/planning/housing_choices/documents/HousingStrategy_Final_6-29-17.pdf)

*Contact: Commissioner Ed Marx or Associate Planner Megan McDonald, Department of Planning and Sustainability, 274-5560; Martha Robertson, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 592-3119, or Vice Chair Dooley Kiefer, 257-7453.*

### **Tax Cap Override Local Law Approved**

By unanimous vote, the Legislature adopted a Local Law permitting the Legislature to override the tax levy limit for 2018. (Legislators Martha Robertson, Mike Sigler, Peter Stein, and Glenn Morey were excused.) No one spoke at the public hearing preceding the vote. The law does not necessarily mean that the Legislature will override the cap, but provides the Legislature flexibility to exceed the cap if it is deemed necessary. The Legislature has routinely passed such laws since the State Property Tax law was passed, and the law can be rescinded later. The Legislature has already directed the County Administrator to prepare a Recommended 2018 Budget based on a maximum 2.4% tax levy increase, in line with the currently the projected cap for 2018.

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

### **Legislature Considers Name for the Tompkins Trust Building**

The Legislature considered, but did not yet approve, a recommended name for the Tompkins Trust building on The Commons, being purchased by the County as a new home for the History Center and co-located non-profits. The Project Advisory Committee, made up all partners that will be located in the building, recommended that the building be called the “Tompkins Center for History and Culture.” History Center executive director Rod Howe said that having a building identity is important as the organizations’ private capital campaign gets underway to support interior improvements.

Legislators Carol Chock and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne maintained that consideration now seemed rushed, McBean-Clairborne saying there should be time for the community to react to the name. The vote on the naming proposal was 7-3, short of the eight votes required for passage. (Legislators Chock, McBean-Clairborne and Chair Michael Lane voted no; Legislators Martha Robertson, Glenn Morey, Mike Sigler, and Peter Stein were excused.) The matter is likely to be brought up for reconsideration at the Legislature’s next meeting in two weeks, and Director Howe said that community reactions to the proposed name will be sought during that time.

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

Among other business,

The Legislature heard from several members of the public, who expressed deep concern regarding a matter of Legislature procedure, the so-called “blue cards” that must be completed and submitted to speak during public privilege of the floor. They urged that the requirement to identify oneself and indicate a municipality of residence be done away with and made optional, in the interests of open government and the safety and well-being of all residents, raising an issue presented previously to the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion and Government Operations Committees. Deborah Dawson, of Lansing, was one who said that community members, including those in the LGBTQ+ community and others, can be at risk of losing their jobs and their freedoms, and of being targeted by speaking out. She said an advisory opinion from the State Committee on Open Government finds that requiring a speaker’s identity or residence cannot be required. WDIC chair Leslyn McBean-Clairborne said she was proud to have had members of the public raise the issue at the committee’s June meeting, and said she expects some changes will need to be made, in the interest of building a safer and more inclusive environment. While a majority of the Government Operations Committee yesterday did not support moving the issue forward at that time, Chair Dan Klein, who had allotted 20 minutes for committee discussion, asked that Legislators submit any changes in writing via email before that committee’s next meeting August 2nd, and repeated that request to the full Legislature tonight.

County Finance Director Rick Snyder presented monthly sales tax reports for the months of April and May, which show year-to-date County sales tax receipts up by 6.06%, compared to a year ago; however, County Administrator Joe Mareane cautioned that a reconciled second-quarter report, which should be received in a few days, will provide a more reliable indicator of where receipts stand compared to budget. Mareane said he believes that the County will at least meet its budget target this year.

**- END -**