



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **October 17, 2017** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislators Adopt Amendments to 2018 Recommended Budget

The Tompkins County Legislature formally adopted amendments to the County Administrator's 2018 Recommended Budget and the Capital Program for the next five years, as recommended by the Expanded Budget Committee. The vote was unanimous. There were no additional changes to the package before the Legislature vote.

The amended budget would increase the County tax levy 2.32%. The recommended tax rate of \$6.57 per thousand is down by 5 cents (0.76%) from 2017 and is a penny less than the Administrator's budget, representing an increase of \$11.14 in the tax bill for the median-valued \$178,000 home. The amended budget's recommended levy increase of 2.32% compares to a 2.4% increase contained in the County Administrator's budget, and is below Tompkins County's State-calculated 2018 Tax Cap of 3.53%.

Budget chair Jim Dennis thanked his fellow legislators, department heads, and everyone else who has been involved in a successful process of putting together a tentative budget. He noted that this year's budget was a purposeful move by the Administrator to permit legislators to be much more involved in forming the budget than they have been in the past. Legislator Martha Robertson noted the effect of "new lumber" in spreading the tax levy across a larger base and enabling continued decrease in the tax rate. "People want to know how is development helping me... This is how it's helping up, this new value that's been built."

The amended package, now known as the Tentative Budget, replaces Administrator Joe Mareane's recommended budget as the basis of budget deliberations, and will be sent on to public hearing Monday, October 30, 7:00 p.m., at Legislature Chambers in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street (second floor), Ithaca. The Legislature's final budget adoption vote is scheduled November 9, and changes may still be made prior to final adoption.

The Recommended Budget, all amendments to the Recommended Budget, and other information regarding the 2018 budget process, are available for review online at the County website at www.TompkinsCountyNY.gov/ctyadmin/2018budget.

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

Legislature Authorizes Finance Department to Accept Credit and Debit Card Payments

The Legislature, by a vote of 11-2 (Legislators Carol Chock and Dooley Kiefer voted no) authorized the County Finance Department to enter into an arrangement with Systems East, Inc., of Cortland, NY, its current tax collection software provider, to provide the Department to accept online payments—the ability to accept payments via credit or debit card. There will be no cost for Tompkins County, and any transaction fees will be paid by the customer. The new "Xpress-pay" service will provide a means to accept credit and debit card payments in person and by computer or mobile device. Payments by credit or debit card will now be accepted for taxes, fees, and charges such as real estate taxes; retiree health insurance premiums; occupancy taxes; and tax searches and copies. The resolution also notes that information will be provided to taxpayers regarding service charges and fees associated with payment by credit card.

Legislator Chock called the option a bad idea, since she said it subjects people to extra fees and interest charges from credit card companies if they carry a balance. Legislator Anna Kelles noted the payment method is only a voluntary option, and said she sees it as a bit arrogant for the Legislature to assume that people are unable to balance their own finances or making their own intelligent decisions if they use credit cards. “It should not be up to us to dictate or limit options because we think we know the best way to handle their finances,” she said
Contact: Finance Director Rick Snyder, 274-5544; Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 272-7582.

Bond Financing Approved for Capital Projects

Through three separate unanimous votes, Legislators authorized the issuance of up to nearly \$1,525,000 in serial bonds and notes to finance County capital projects. The projects include reconstruction and resurfacing a portion of Eliis Hollow Road, reconstructing the South Danby Road Bridge, and road and highway system reconstruction at various locations throughout the county.

Contact: David McKenna, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 564-7243

Bonding Authorized for Ithaca College Bond Refinance

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, authorized the Tompkins County Development Corporation to issue up to \$26,500,000 in tax-exempt revenue bonds on behalf of Ithaca College, refinance bonds issued for a project in 2011. The Legislature’s action qualifies the interest payable on the bonds as tax-exempt under the federal Internal Revenue Code and does not involve any financial obligation on the part of Tompkins County.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 592-3119;

Among other business:

Legislature Chair Michael Lane read a statement from the Legislature regarding the status of County Director of Human Rights Karen Baer. Mr. Lane said:

“Karen Baer is on leave from the Director of Human Rights position. As this is a personnel matter, the County will not be commenting on the circumstances surrounding it. However, there are a couple of inaccuracies being reported that should be corrected. First, Ms. Baer was not escorted from the Office of Human Rights by a Tompkins County Sheriff. There certainly was no cause for such action. Second, this is not the result of an opinion piece she submitted to *The Ithaca Voice* on September 26, 2017. We find it regrettable that rumors like this have been circulated concerning Ms. Baer without any foundation.”

During Privilege of the Floor, Human Rights Paralegal Xavier Rusk addressed Legislators, pledging that the work of the Office of Human Rights will continue, and that the office ‘will continue to provide the highest possible level of service to the community’ and will continue to engage the community in positive dialogue.

Ithaca attorney Ray Schlather also spoke in strong support of the Office of Human Rights as “an enormously valuable and helpful tool in Tompkins County,” especially in this era of increasing intolerance, “where there is sexism, and racism, and misogyny, all trumpeted and extolled in the community,” and which he said we cannot ignore. He urged the Legislature to remain steadfast in its support of the Office and its work for this community.

Finance Director Rick Snyder reported a strong showing in third quarter sales tax receipts, with quarterly receipts up by 2.66% compared to the third quarter of 2016—the strongest third quarter on record. Year-to-date receipts of nearly \$25.9 million are up by 5.15% from a year ago. While cautioning that sales tax numbers are volatile, Administrator Mareane said he believes the County will comfortably meet its budgeted sales tax figure for 2017.

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