



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer
607-274-5555, Office
607-227-2152, Cell
November 9, 2017
THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **November 9, 2017** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Tompkins County 2018 Budget Adopted

Concluding a process that started at the beginning of September, the Tompkins County Legislature tonight adopted the County's 2018 budget and the capital program for the next five years. The budget was approved by unanimous vote.

The \$180 million budget increases the County tax levy by 2.32% and represents an increase in local spending of 2.87%. The tax rate of \$6.58 per thousand is down by 4 cents (0.60%) from 2017, representing an increase of \$11.42 in the tax bill for the median-valued \$178,000 county home. The levy increase falls below the County's tax cap of 3.53%, as calculated by New York State.

Before passage, one amendment was advanced by Legislator Dooley Kiefer, to approve \$35,667 in over-target funding to increase the Weights and Measures inspector position from its current half-time status to full-time at 35 hours per week—a measure that, after discussion, failed to win support by a 6-8 margin (Legislators Anna Kelles, Carol Chock, Will Burbank, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Dave McKenna, and Dooley Kiefer voting in favor.) Several Legislators indicated their support for leaving the position as is for now, and for the next Legislature to examine it again as part of the 2019 budget.

Reflecting on the budget process, Legislator Rich John remarked that he continues to be impressed by the County's thorough process and the amount of work it entails, that it represents a commitment of principles by the Legislature, showing that commitment with significant resources to housing and alternatives to incarceration.

Budget Chair Jim Dennis said the budget portrays the needs of the County very well and will satisfy the needs of county residents. Both he and County Administrator Mareane praised and recognized all involved—staff, departments, legislators—for their hard work and commitment throughout the budget process. “I remain pleased with the way this process works,” noted Administrator Mareane. “In the end, the result is worth it.”

See the overview of the 2018 adopted budget and all other budget documents on the budget page of the County website at www.TompkinsCountyNY.gov/ctyadmin/2018budget. The full 2018 Adopted Budget will be posted there soon.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislator Shawna Black Joins the Legislature

The Legislature welcomed its newest member, Legislator Shawna Black, representing District 11 (Town of Ithaca.) Legislator Black, sworn in at ceremonies just before the Legislature meeting, fills the unexpired term of Peter Stein, who resigned in September, and returns the Legislature to its full complement of 14 members. Legislator Black, who was elected this week to represent District 11 for the upcoming four-year term that begins in 2018, fills the current unexpired term in accordance with provisions of the County Charter. Legislature Chair Michael Lane said he was pleased to welcome Legislator Black to the Legislature. At her swearing-in,

Legislator Black thanked her family and all others who supported her during the campaign, and said she is eager to get to work.

Contact: Legislator Shawna Black, 351-7855; Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 844-8440

County Authorized to Pursue Opioid Lawsuit

The Legislature, by a vote of 12-2 (Legislators Shawna Black and Dooley Kiefer voted no), authorized County Attorney Jonathan Wood to commence civil litigation against opioid manufacturers and others who have harmed the County by promoting the abuse of opioids, and to retain counsel to represent the County in such litigation. Tompkins County will join many other New York Counties in pursuing legal action against opioid manufacturers and others that have promoted the abuse of opioids.

The resolution notes that opioid manufacturers, distributors and promoters have been responsible for an opioid epidemic that has harmed the citizens of Tompkins County and financially damaged the County and its taxpayers, and that it is appropriate that the County should recover damages from those parties that have contributed and continue to contribute to County costs in the form of increased social servicing, policing, treatment, incarceration, and other expenditures.

Government Operations Committee Chair Dan Klein stated that the measure authorizes the County to join the lawsuit and does not require the County to put out any money. County Attorney Jonathan Wood said there would be no cost, other than the possible cost of gathering data. Some stated that the data-gathering responsibility for departments could be significant; Legislator Anna Kelles said the data collection and collaboration among departments in documenting the impact of the opioid crisis will be an important benefit. Legislator Black said she had initially supported joining the lawsuit, but after further consideration and study has deep concern about the amount of time it would take for County employees to gather the data, and that's why she voted no.

Much discussion focused on a proposed wording change that would have changed language from "promoting abuse of opioids" to "over-prescription and mis-prescription of opioids," an amendment that failed by a 3-11 margin. Legislator Kiefer said that, while she supports joining the lawsuit, her vote against related to the wording involved.

Speaking in support, Legislator Rich John stated, "We are spending a significant amount of money to address the problems caused by these opioid manufacturers...It's important that this crisis not be hidden. Bringing a lawsuit may bring some attention to that, and sends a clear message that Tompkins County joins other counties in saying this is not acceptable."

Contact: Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 272-7582; Legislator Rich John, 256-9794; Legislator Shawna Black, 351-7855.

Legislature Supports "Tax Returns Uniformly Made Public Act"

By unanimous vote, Legislators approved a resolution expressing formal support of pending Senate and Assembly bills before the New York State Legislature known as the "Tax Returns Uniformly Made Public Act." The proposed legislation would require presidential candidates to disclose their personal finances before they could appear on the ballot. Legislator Mike Sigler proposed a substitute version, which the Legislature ultimately approved, that also urged that the measure go further and also include candidates for statewide office, such as for Governor, Assembly, Senate; Comptroller and Attorney General, and New York candidates for the U.S. Congress. In advancing his substitute proposal, Mr. Sigler said he didn't particularly like legislation that targets one person and that any such requirement should be extended to such other offices.

Contact: Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 272-7582; Legislator Mike Sigler, 339-7978

Bonding Authorized for Ithacare Bond Refinance

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, authorized the Tompkins County Development Corporation to issue up to \$13,500,000 in tax-exempt revenue bonds on behalf of the Ithacare Center Service Company, refinance bonds issued for the outstanding balance of bonding last refinanced in 2008, as well as funding of any debt service reserve fund and incidental costs. 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;

Legislature Marks Veterans Day with Special Recognition

The Legislature, through a special Recognition proclamation signed by Legislature Chair Michael Lane, provided formal special recognition at this Veterans Day, “with respect for, and in recognition of, the contributions our service members have made to the cause of peace and freedom around the world. The proclamation notes, “Veterans Day provides an opportunity to remember, honor, and recognize the courage, valor, and dedication of those who have served our country, as well as those who continue to serve, and to thank them for defending our rights, and protective the freedom of our country,” with those we honor representing a variety of diverse backgrounds, yet sharing the fundamental qualities of courage, pride, determination, selflessness, dedication to duty, and integrity—all essential for those called upon to support and defend a cause larger than oneself.

“Tompkins County recognizes that its vast workforce is comprised of many veterans as well as active and reserve military service members representing every branch of the United States Armed forces, and we wish to convey our deepest gratitude and pay tribute to all of those individuals by communicating our sincere appreciation for their extraordinary contributions through this action and other recognition efforts,” the proclamation notes.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313

Among other business:

The Legislature authorized the County to enter into an arrangement with JP Morgan Chase for a commercial card account to implement a Procurement Card (P-Card) program, approved by a 12-2 vote, Legislators Kelles and McBean-Clairborne voting no. In a briefing memo, County Finance Director Rick Snyder noted that he P-Card arrangement saves the County money through rebates to the County for P-Card purchases, reduces procurement and payment paperwork, and expedites payments to vendors, potentially reducing the need for manual checks.

Proclamations by Legislature Chair Michael Lane declared November 2017 as Home-Health Aide Appreciation Month in Tompkins County, and Hospice and Palliative Care Month in Tompkins County.

The Legislature affirmed the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council Recommendation to increase the salary of Staff Director Fernando De Aragon by 2.25%, to \$89,583 for 2018.

Legislators heard a presentation from Pros consultants regarding the Ithaca Parks Alternative Governance model, as part of the City of Ithaca Parks and Recreation Plan final report. Commission and conservancy models are two of the options discussed. The County contributed \$10,000 toward the study.

- END -