



Inclusion Through Diversity

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **January 16, 2018** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Chair Robertson Delivers 2018 Annual Message, Announces 2018 Organizational Structure**

Legislature Chair Martha Robertson characterized the Legislature's year ahead as one of transition, preservation, and progress, as she delivered her annual message before the Tompkins County Legislature. The priority of "transition" is inevitable, she said—with five new Legislators, an incoming new County Administrator, and two new Deputy Administrators, all in a few months. As well as offering the opportunity to think creatively about new systems and structures, Robertson notes that the transitions will require special attention and time, while the Legislature also works to preserve what the County has—especially in light of potential program and funding changes at the state and federal level—as well as to make progress on ongoing initiatives. One worrisome "unfunded mandate" she identifies is local Medicaid spending, which currently amounts to about 24% of the County's property tax levy. Robertson cautions, "If the federal government cuts Medicaid, as seems very possible, we'll see even more of the program's costs passed on to us."

*2018 Organizational Structure and Leadership Appointments:* For 2018, the Legislature's six standing committees remain the same—Budget, Capital, and Personnel; Facilities and Infrastructure; Government Operations; Health and Human Services; Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality; and Public Safety. For leadership, past Legislature Chair Michael Lane will assume chairmanship of the budget committee, and Shawna Black will chair Health and Human Services, with former HHS chair Anna Kelles moving over to lead Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality. Dan Klein continues to chair Government Operations, Dave McKenna Facilities and Infrastructure, and Rich John Public Safety (which in 2018 will also assume the work of the past Jail Study Committee). Four of the new Legislators assume vice chair positions: Anne Koreman for F&I, Deborah Dawson for GO, Amanda Champion for PDEQ, and Henry Granison for Public Safety. The special Transportation Committee, chaired by Lane, will continue in 2018, the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee will continue to be chaired by Leslyn McBean-Clairborne. A new special Housing Committee, led by Legislature Chair Robertson, will address the problem of housing, where she hopes, in part, to more closely engage other municipalities, the local nonprofit community and employers.

Among the important committee priorities identified by the Chair—for Budget, Capital and Personnel, accelerating the County's progress toward achieving a diverse and inclusive workplace environment; for Public Safety, to ensure the jail population is kept low and budgeted and enhanced programs are implemented; and for Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality, addressing energy issues, such as implementing the County's Business Energy Navigator program. The new committee structure takes effect as of February 1.

Concluding her message, Chair Robertson paid tribute to past County Administrator Joe Mareane, and the example he set during nine years of leadership. "In my opinion, Joe's success teaches us to share credit widely for our successes, while we also accept responsibility directly for our mistakes. Be proud of what we're doing well but know that we can do better, and commit to it. Be humble, and always maintain a sense of humor. Respect experience but welcome the new. Embrace change and look for the opportunities it represents."

Chair Robertson's full message is posted on the Legislature website at  
<http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/legislature/2018%20Chairs%20Remarks%201-16-18.pdf>  
Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 592-3119

### **Legislature Urges State Law Change to Permit Counties to Appropriate Funds for Affordable Housing**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, urged the State Legislature to amend Section 224 of New York State County Law to permit counties to appropriate funds towards the development, maintenance, or management of affordable housing. Initial research by the Department of Planning and Sustainability regarding potential next steps to implement the County's Housing Strategy brought to light a potentially critical impediment—that New York State County Law does not expressly permit counties to appropriate funds for the purpose of affordable housing, although it identifies 28 other purposes whereby counties may appropriate funds and enter into contracts to promote public benefit services. Counties are permitted to spend federal and state funds for such purposes but have no mechanism under current County Law to assist in such development.

The resolution notes that “without the authority to spend local resources on affordable housing, counties in the state of New York are facing a crisis in affordable housing development, as Federal and State funding for this urgent and critical need may be significantly cut in the near future.”

*Contact: Megan McDonald, Associate Planner, Department of Planning and Sustainability, 274-5560; Legislature Chair Martha Robertson (On behalf of the Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee), 274-5434 or 592-3119.*

### **Strategic Tourism Fund Actions Include \$100,000 Transfer for Tompkins Center for History and Culture**

The Legislature, by unanimous votes, approved three Strategic Tourism Implementation funding actions, as recommended by the County's Strategic Tourism Implementation Board. Among them, the Legislature approved a \$100,000 award to the Tompkins Center for History and Culture—directing that \$100,000 be transferred from the room tax-funded Strategic Tourism Implementation program budget to the County's capital project budget for the project, to support a portion of the County's expected \$450,000 contribution toward required code-related improvements. The County and the Tompkins Trust Company recently signed the formal agreement, whereby the County will purchase the current Main Office building of the Trust Company, on the Ithaca Commons, to house the Tompkins Center for History and Culture, which will be home to the History Center and other heritage-related nonprofits.

Also approved was a \$55,150 award to Historic Ithaca to support one-year funding of a joint Historic Ithaca/History Center Heritage Tourism program, and a \$268,000 Strategic Tourism Implementation program budget adjustment, reallocating unspent 2017 funds to the 2018 program budget (Legislator Mike Sigler recused himself from that vote).

*Contact: Tom Knipe, Principal Planner/Tourism Program Director, 274-5560; Mike Sigler, Vice Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 339-7978.*

### **Legislature Approves Memorandum of Understanding Regarding TCAT Site**

The Legislature, without dissent, authorized the County Administrator to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the City of Ithaca regarding the Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT) facility. At the time that the County entered into a Regional Transit Facility Construction and Operation Agreement with the City in 1991 that established terms for ownership, construction, and operation of the TCAT facility, the City had agreed to convey half of its right, title, and interest in the Facility and defined surrounding lands, in consideration of the County's financial contribution to the project, but such transfer has not taken place. The parties have agreed that the memorandum of understanding provides that the County will receive half of the proceeds of any future sale of income derived from the property.

*Contact: Legislature Chair Martha Robertson (On behalf of the Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee), 274-5434 or 592-3119.*

### **Legislature Accepts Clean Energy Communities Grant**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, accepted a three-year, \$250,000 Clean Energy Communities grant from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), and approved a related adjustment to the 2018 budget. The funds were awarded for two purposes: greening the County's fleet (through advancing conversion to plug-in electric vehicles) and developing the County's Business Energy Navigator program. The Business Energy Navigator program will work with businesses in their earliest stages of design and

conceptualization of new construction or major renovation projects to help set energy goals and understand energy options. Anticipating receipt of the grant, a portion of the grant funds, and related matching funds, were included in the 2018 adopted county budget.

*Contact: Megan McDonald, Associate Planner, Department of Planning and Sustainability, 274-5560; Legislature Chair Martha Robertson (On behalf of the Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee), 274-5434 or 592-3119.*

Among other business,

The Legislature heard a comprehensive presentation on the Tompkins County Tourism Program from departing Tourism Program Director Tom Knipe, assisted by Peggy Coleman, Chamber of Commerce Vice President of Tourism and Community Relations. With a community-based tourism development approach, Mr. Knipe noted, in part, that the tourism program is calculated to have an annual impact of \$673 per household, with average room tax growth of 5.5% per year. Legislature Chair Robertson expressed the County's deep thanks to Knipe, who will leave the County before month's end to become Deputy Director for Economic Development for the City of Ithaca. As the County's first Tourism Planner, she said Tom "really made it a professional program." Coleman said the Chamber will later this month will honor Knipe with the Howard Cogan Award, as someone who has made a significant contribution to tourism in the county.

Finance Director Rick Snyder reported a 5.32% increase in sales tax receipts during November, compared to a year ago—the highest November receipts on record—with preliminary year-to-date receipts appearing to be 5% above the first eleven months of 2016.

Several members of the public asked that a workers' representative, such as from the Tompkins County Workers Center, be added to the County Industrial Development Agency, and Legislators Deborah Dawson and Anne Koreman both commented on their support of that option.

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