



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Highlights of the November 20, 2018 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature**

#### **Legislature Opposes Cayuga Power Plant Repowering Proposal**

After listening to two hours of public comment and engaging in close to another hour-and-a-half of thoughtful discussion, the Tompkins County Legislature went on record against the Cayuga Operating Company's current proposal to repower the Lansing coal-fired plant. The measure, approved by a 12-2 vote, with Legislators Mike Sigler and Glenn Morey voting no, opposes the Cayuga Operating Company's proposal to convert the Cayuga Power Plant to natural gas. Through amendments incorporated to what had been passed in committee, the resolution also urges the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to require a full Environmental Impact Statement with a full public scoping process that solicits input from all impacted communities; urges Governor Cuomo to support Cayuga's transition to renewable energy and energy storage; and to work with the State Legislature and State agencies to provide transition support to plant workers and support to the Lansing Town and School District to mitigate tax impacts of plant closure, under the State's program through the State's Urban Development Corporation.

More than 100 people packed Legislature Chambers and 50 spoke. As had happened earlier before the Legislature's Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee, virtually all expressed serious concern about continued dependence on fossil fuels, the dangers of an increase in greenhouse gas emissions including from methane, use of imported "fracked" gas (inconsistent with the County's past opposition to and the State's prohibition of fracking), and the increased truck traffic and potential dangers associated with trucks transporting compressed natural gas (CNG) to fuel the plant. A number of speakers voiced impassioned concerns about the need to protect the planet for their children and grandchildren.

The resolution states that the Legislature "finds that Cayuga's proposal to convert to a non-operating, inefficient, coal-burning steam-turbine unit to natural gas fuel, resulting in creased CO2 and methane emissions, is incompatible with the urgent global imperative to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, and will result in significant adverse environmental impact in Tompkins County and other Southern Tier communities with regard to traffic, public safety, and poses a direct and material conflict with Tompkins County's and New York State's energy policies and greenhouse gas reduction goals." Therefore, it states, the Legislature opposes Cayuga's request for a modification of its air emissions permit to allow conversion to burn natural gas, and calls for the full EIS. In one of a number of wording changes before passage, it also expresses full support of the portion of the proposal that would install solar and storage capacity.

Legislator Sigler cautioned that he doesn't see solar at the plant happening without the transition to natural gas, and he once again suggested that singling out an individual company on the natural gas issue is misdirected—that local building codes projects in other municipalities should be addressed to limit gas use, not just in Lansing, where there is a moratorium on new hook-ups. Both Legislators Rich John and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne said they were "struggling" with the resolution, both saying it should be re-crafted in a better way to send a clear, coherent message to the DEC. Others, however, spoke against delay, saying it's important to get the County's message before the DEC before the agency makes its initial declaration. A proposal to send it back to committee failed by a 6-8 vote. Legislator Michael Lane said that, while he is not convinced by arguments that the plant is no longer needed, and is most concerned about the people who work in Tompkins County and at the Cayuga Power Plant, he shares concerns about the dangers of trucked CNG, and supports the resolution.

Legislator Deborah Dawson, who was involved in helping to craft the amended resolution said that perhaps it's the County's role to set an example and to take the lead on this important issue.

*Contact: Anna Kelles, Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 342-2036*

### **Legislature Supports Marijuana Legalization in New York State**

Culminating weeks of discussion on the part of two of its committees, the Legislature took a stand in support of marijuana legalization in New York State. The resolution, which supports what the State is already doing, favors bringing an end to marijuana prohibition; creation of a diverse and inclusive marijuana industry; reinvestment of revenue from taxed and regulated marijuana in communities impacted by the war on drugs; and passage of the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA). The proposed MRTA, through pending bills in the New York State Senate and Assembly, would legalize the production, distribution, and use of marijuana by removing the substance from classification as an illicit drug under New York's Controlled Substances Act.

The vote was 13-1, with Legislator Michael Lane voting no. Mr. Lane said he is not convinced that this is a stand the County should be taking, suggesting the push for marijuana legalization is coming from big business that wants to make money. "If you want to support vice, go ahead and do this," he said. He pointed to concerns from the County Board of Health, maintaining certain aspects are serious enough to prompt concern. Legislator Deborah Dawson remarked she does not see marijuana as a vice any more than alcohol or tobacco, and Legislator Anna Kelles noted that, as a legal substance, marijuana will be regulated. Public Safety Chair Rich John called the issue a trade-off, which he would support despite some concerns—among them his uncertainty about the State's ability to implement legalization in the careful way that it should be. "The present system is not working," he said, and that overall he views legalization as a far superior approach. "We make decisions all the time that are not black and white," Legislator Kelles said. "There are risks as well as benefits...I believe the benefits outweigh the risks."

*Contact: Richard John, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 256-9794; Shawna Black, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 351-7855.*

Among other business,

The Legislature passed a resolution amending the debt service payback schedule for Tompkins Cortland Community College, extending the capital debt schedule and the debt service repayment schedule for Master Plan agreements by an additional five years, through 20135. The amount of the payments remains the same. The College requested the extension, which has also been approved by Cortland County, to accommodate the College's significant reduction in cash flow caused by reduced student enrollment.

The Legislature scheduled two upcoming public hearings. The Legislature scheduled for December 18, 5:30 p.m., a public hearing regarding issuance of up to \$7.5 million in Airport Bond Anticipation Notes for the Airport capital improvement project. The Legislature also scheduled for December 4, 5:30 p.m., a hearing on proposed repeal of the Local Law approved earlier this year, to permit override of the Tax Levy Limit for 2019. The 2019 Tompkins County Budget, as adopted by the Legislature did not require override of the levy limit. Both hearings will be held at County Legislature Chambers, located in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

The Legislature approved standard year-end resolutions implementing provisions of the 2019 Budget—including those pertaining to position changes, departmental fees and memberships, and also formally appropriated funds and adjusting the 2018 Budget related to salary and fringe benefit adjustments for the County's White Collar Unit, as well as Management and Confidential employees.

The Legislature authorized acceptance by the Tompkins County Sheriff's Office of a more than \$28,000 grant from the New York State Division of Homeland Security for 2018, the funding to be used to replace and acquire additional portable radios and chargers for the Road Division and other local agencies.

**- END -**