



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 15, 2019** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Chair Robertson Delivers 2019 Annual Message, Announces 2019 Organizational Structure**

Characterizing the year ahead as one of “Building On, Building Up,” Legislature Chair Martha Robertson delivered her annual message before the Tompkins County Legislature. “2019 will be a year for building – building on the foundations we set in 2018, building toward goals we should set for the next three years. And probably, building *up*, literally,” she said. Noting that the first year, or 25 percent, of the Legislature’s four-year term is completed, she asked, “What will we have to show for the next 75 percent?”

Among the elements of “building” Chair Robertson identifies are building on the work of the County’s staff: “Whatever we might accomplish as legislators is built on the work of our staff,” she states. “It may sound obvious, but we couldn’t do anything without them. The work we do together is a team sport, and we legislators owe a debt of gratitude to the people who serve our community every day.” The Chair also identifies building on relationships, such as those started with New York State, and with the Federal government, where she notes that five members of the New York delegation are committee chairs in Congress this session. “This year we will be all about building in a literal sense,” Robertson adds, for example, with renovations to the Old Jail; evaluating the Tioga Street property and overseeing that project if it moves forward; reaching a decision about the jail and about a possible shared law enforcement facility with the City of Ithaca; and supporting more local housing construction as well, helping to create a more sustainable and equitable community for all who want to live here.

Robertson also envisions a year on building on the Legislature’s 2018 committee work, calling for 2019 to be “a year for setting clear, achievable goals and keeping our focus there,” and asking each committee to establish three specific goals for the year ahead, as the three top priorities for the committee’s time and attention.

*2019 Organizational Structure and Leadership Appointments:* For 2019, the Legislature’s standing committees increase by one, to seven— Budget, Capital, and Personnel; Facilities and Infrastructure; Government Operations; Health and Human Services; Public Safety; and splitting planning-related issues between two committees, Planning, Energy and Environmental Quality; and Housing and Economic Development. The two new committees reconfigure and rebalance the sizable workload of the former Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, mimicking a structure last employed between 2013 and 2015, when economic development issues were handled in a separate committee, and incorporating matters related to housing, which over the past two years have been the focus of a special Housing Committee. The Legislature’s other former special committee, Transportation, is discontinued, now that its efforts have initiated the County’s Route 13 study, which is moving into a staff-driven phase, with its steering committee to include legislator involvement.

Regarding committee leadership, Anna Kelles will chair the new Housing and Economic Development Committee; Deborah Dawson will succeed her as chair of the renamed Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee. Michael Lane will chair two standing committees this year—leading Government Operations, as well as returning as chair of the Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee. (Former GO chair Dan Klein has requested no committee chairmanship this year.) Dave McKenna returns as chair of Facilities and Infrastructure, Rich John as chair of Public Safety, and Shawna Black as chair of Health and Human

Services. Leslyn McBean-Clairborne also will continue as chair of the County's Workforce, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which reports to Budget, Capital and Personnel.

Concluding her message, Chair Robertson said, "As we sit here tonight, the country is in unprecedented chaos. The federal government is in the longest shutdown in history, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day today. Polarization seems worse than ever, even more intractable than during the Vietnam War protests, for those of us old enough to remember. I could go on, but I'll spare us all.

"At least in our little corner of the country, we don't have to contribute to that. We each have a choice. Will this year of 'building' include building each other up? Let's remember that the foundations of trust and respect that have made this an exceptional organization have taken years to build up. Let's *listen to each other* and to our other partners in this work. The votes come and go. I've taken enough votes during my 17 years here to know that what lasts are NOT the votes won or lost, but the relationships I've been privileged to build.

"Let's commit to truly working together this year. We work for the people, and we do our best work when we listen and learn. Let's make the most of the next seventy-five percent."

Chair Robertson's full message is posted on the Legislature website at <http://tomkinscountyny.gov/files2/legislature/Chair%20Statement.pdf>

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 592-3119

### **New Bargaining Agreement Ratified with Blue Collar Employees Union**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Anne Koreman was excused), ratified a new six-year collective bargaining agreement with the County's Civil Service Employees' Association (CSEA) Blue Collar Unit, retroactive to January 1, 2018 and extending through December 31, 2023. Union membership ratified the new tentative agreement January 7. Among provisions of the new contract, annual salary increases ranging from 2-2.5% (2% for 2018 and 2019; an increase aligning Blue Collar pay grades with those of the White Collar union in 2019; a 2% increase in 2020; 2.5% in 2021; 2.25% in 2022; and 2% in 2023). Also included are enhancements in longevity payments for employees with at least 5 years of service; and in health insurance, moving all Blue Collar employees to the Health Consortium Platinum Plan as of the beginning of 2020, where participants will have the opportunity to participate in a voluntary wellness program which offers cash incentives for achieving annual wellness targets.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 844-8440; County Administrator Jason Molino, 274-5551

### **Administrator Briefs Legislators on Local Impact to Date from Federal Shutdown**

County Administrator Jason Molino relayed to Legislators information he has received from County departments regarding services that may be impacted from the ongoing Federal government shutdown. The Health Department reports that the Women Infants Children (WIC) program is funded through the end of February. Social Services Commissioner Kit Kephart indicates that the US Department of Agriculture will accelerate the February disbursement of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program (SNAP) benefits for anyone with an open case. DSS is continuing to take new applications for benefits, and has been instructed to continue to process them in the normal manner. At the Airport, TSA workers are furloughed.

Other than that Molino said there is not much to report at this time; however, he cautioned that the situation is fluid and conditions could change as the shutdown continues. Regarding transportation, Highway has reported no impacts at present, with a lot of operational funds for the year already committed, but there is word that the Federal Transit Administration is affected, to what extent is not yet clear. Administrator Molino promised to keep legislators informed regarding what could be an ever-changing situation.

Contact: County Administrator Jason Molino, 274-5551.

### **Update Presented on DOT Relocation Project**

The Legislature received a status update presentation regarding status of the Department of Transportation maintenance facility relocation project, which will move the facility from the Cayuga Inlet waterfront to

property currently owned by Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport. Kathleen Joy and Eric Buck of NYS Department of Transportation Syracuse Regional Office showed current site and project drawings, encouraging continued public input. Prior to the presentation, during public privilege of the floor, four Hillcrest Road residents addressed the Legislature expressing concern about the project and adverse effects it would produce for their properties and the residential character of the Town of Lansing.

The project's Draft Environmental Assessment will be presented and reviewed at an open house and public hearing Wednesday, January 16, 4-6 p.m. at Lansing Town Hall, 27 Auburn Road. Public comment will be received until February 2.

### **Melissa Tuckey Named Tompkins County Poet Laureate for 2019**

Melissa Tuckey is Tompkins County's Poet Laureate for 2019. The position of Tompkins County Poet Laureate was established by the Legislature to honor local outstanding poets, integrate poetry into the community, enrich the education of our young people, and enhance the County's position as a cultural center. The selection of the Poet Laureate is administered by the Community Arts Partnership (CAP.)

The new Poet Laureate is a poet, editor and literary activist. Among her achievements, Tuckey is author of *Tenuous Chapel*, an award-winning book of poems selected by Charles Simic for the ABZ Press first book prize (May 2013) and *Rope As Witness* (chapbook: Pudding House Press, 2007). *Tenuous Chapel* was a finalist for the Central New York Book Award, and the Eugene Paul Nassar Poetry Prize. She is a fellow at Black Earth Institute; co-founder of Split This Rock, a national poetry organization dedicated to poetry of provocation and witness; and editor of *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology*, University of Georgia Press. As part of that project, she edited a portfolio of poems at *Poetry Magazine*, January 2016.

Tuckey expressed her thanks to the Community Arts Partnership and to all for support of the arts. "I look forward to serving the community and serving poetry," she said.

Contact: Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 592-3119; John Spence, Executive Director, Community Arts Partnership, 273-5072, ext. 19, or [director@artspartner.org](mailto:director@artspartner.org).

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