



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **March 5, 2019** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Contract Awarded for Phase 2 of Airport Project**

Streeter Associates, of Elmira, NY, has been awarded the construction contract for the second phase of the Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport terminal expansion project. Tompkins County Legislators, by unanimous vote, awarded Streeter the contract for its submitted bid of \$18,276,000. (Legislator Deborah Dawson was excused.) Phase 2 of the project involves elements including renovation and expansion of the passenger screening checkpoint of the departure lounge and the terminal's gate area. The award is made contingent upon the anticipated award of a \$10 million Federal Aviation Administration Airport Improvement Program grant, to supplement the \$14.4 million awarded to the Airport last year under the Governor's Upstate Airport Revitalization Initiative.

In a second, related vote, (also without dissent) Legislators authorized acceptance of the anticipated FAA grant, whose budget includes 5% shares from both the New York State Department of Transportation and Airport operational budget Passenger Facility Charges (more than \$550,000 each), bringing the total grant budget to over \$11 million.

*Contact: David McKenna, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 607-564-7243; Airport Director Mike Hall, 607-279-2662.*

#### **State Urged to Pass Drivers License Access and Privacy Act**

The Legislature, by a vote of 10-3 (Legislators Mike Sigler, Dave McKenna, and Glenn Morey voted no; Legislator Deborah Dawson was excused) urged New York State to pass the Drivers License Access and Privacy Act, to allow the issuance of driver's licenses to New York State residents regardless of immigration status. The Act, the measure notes, will amend the requirements to apply for a Standard Driver's License in New York so that the inability to obtain a social security number is not a barrier to driving in New York. The resolution, in part, states that the Act will improve public safety by ensuring drivers are properly licensed, educated on the traffic laws, and will help ensure that people are driving a vehicle that is properly insured, licensed, and inspected; and that it will improve trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities.

Legislator Sigler maintained that the approach is misdirected. "I don't understand this at all," he said, calling it "a lot of wasted energy (that will) hurt the people you really want to help...making it easier to live in the shadows." He said efforts should be focused on people who enter the U.S. legally at a port of entry, not to initiatives such as this that "turn a blind eye" to the immigration problem.

Asked to comment, Sheriff Derek Osborne said he supports this measure, as do other sheriffs within New York State: "I'm the conservator of the people, and that's a lot of weight...When I think about conserving the peace, I think about the people who have to call law enforcement" (and fear doing that). He said he wants people to have to have the identification needed "so we can move on and treat them like anyone else we would in Tompkins County."

The resolution states that the Legislature expresses the collective desire for safety and security for all residents and the commitment to pursuing the common good by ensuring shared resources such as roads and highways be

accessed and utilized responsibly and safely; and that it recognizes immigration law to be a federal concern, and local enforcement a drain on limited local resources.

*Contact: Richard John, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 607-256-9794; Legislator Mike Sigler, 607-339-7978; Legislator Anna Kelles, 607-342-2036.*

### **Tompkins County Calls for Increased Water Infrastructure Funding**

The Tompkins County Legislature is urging Governor Cuomo and State Legislators to double down on the State's current water infrastructure funding, through a resolution approved without dissent tonight.

Created in 2015, the state's Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA) has provided grants to municipalities across the state, enabling them to address their crumbling and outdated water mains, sewers, and wastewater treatment plants. Since 2017, WIIA has been funded through the Clean Water Infrastructure Act.

Legislator Deborah Dawson first introduced the resolution before the Legislature's Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, which she chairs. "Providing clean water to residents is one of the most critical challenges we face as elected officials. We commend Governor Cuomo and the state Legislature for coming together in 2015 and acknowledging that our water infrastructure is the core of every community," she said. "But much more is needed to ensure every municipality in New York gets the financial assistance it needs to bring its water infrastructure up to standard. When clean water flows, businesses and families thrive."

"The WIIA is a proven success. Here in Tompkins County alone, the program has helped villages like Trumansburg and Cayuga Heights as well as the town of Ulysses improve their water infrastructure. These upgrades simply wouldn't happen without state grants. With billions needed statewide, it's imperative that Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature secure a multi-year, multi-billion commitment in this year's budget to help communities like ours address our water infrastructure needs," states County Legislator Anna Kelles.

According to the resolution, "as an example of the prohibitive cost of local water and sewer infrastructure improvements, one of several wastewater treatment plants in Tompkins County currently needs an estimated \$11.5 million in repairs and upgrades just to accommodate current demand without exceeding the Department of Environmental Conservation's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) limit."

Environmental Advocates of New York [released a report](#) that shows that while the state's WIIA is working, many shovel-ready clean water projects have still not received grant awards due to a lack of available funding. They also noted that the state is facing an \$80 billion need for drinking and wastewater infrastructure funding over the next 20 years.

*Contact: Anna Kelles, Vice Chair, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 607-342-2036.*

### **Legislature Renews Push for State Law Change to Permit Appropriation of Tompkins County Funds for Affordable Housing**

Renewing an issue first advanced early last year, the Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Deborah Dawson was excused), urged the State Legislature to amend Section 224 of New York State County Law to permit Tompkins County to appropriate County funds towards the development, maintenance, or management of affordable housing (as counties are already able to do through use of federal and state funds.) State 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 private benefit services. Last year, Senator O'Mara had introduced proposed legislation that would amend New York County Law to add that new subdivision under permitted uses, pertaining to Tompkins County.

*Contact: Anna Kelles, Chair, Housing and Economic Development Committee, 607-342-2036*

### **Legislature Awards 2019 Arts and Culture Arts and Culture Organization Development Grants**

The Legislature, with one dissent, awarded 2019 Arts and Culture Organization Development Grants to ten local organizations, in the second year of two-year funding approved last spring as part of the Tompkins County Tourism Program, funded through County hotel room occupancy tax. In recognition of the need for additional funding for the ACOD grant program (as requested by the Community Arts Partnership, which helps oversee the

ACOD program), the Strategic Tourism Planning Board approved an approximately \$20,000 increase in the 2019 program budget. Four of the organizations (The Cayuga Chamber Orchestra, Hangar Theatre, The History Center, and Paleontological Research Institution) have received increased awards, which returns the level of support to close to the 2015 level. Funding for program administration through CAP was also increased. Legislator Dan Klein, who had raised the issue of decreased ACOD funding last year, again objected, and voted no, maintaining that the level of support remains insufficient, with five of the organizations still below the 2015 level, and one eliminated, while hotel tax revenue has increased by 24%.

The Legislature also approved 2019 payments of multi-year Tourism Capital Grants; \$10,000 to Friends of Stewart Park (Phase 3 Building Improvements) and \$30,000 to The History Center (for the Tompkins Center for History and Culture.) Legislator Mike Sigler abstained in both votes, due to potential professional conflict of interest concerns.

*Contact: Anna Kelles, Chair, Housing and Economic Development Committee, 607-342-2036*

### **Legislature Recognizes Retiring Cornell Police Chief Kathy Zoner**

The Legislature presented a special proclamation recognizing and thanking retiring Cornell Police Chief Kathy Zoner for her 27 years of service to the Cornell University Community and Tompkins County residents. Chief Zoner began working at Cornell in 1991 as a dispatcher, and steadily rose through the ranks of the department, in 2009 becoming the first woman to serve as the Cornell Police Chief. The resolution recognizes Chief Zoner's many contributions to Cornell and the Tompkins County community, noting that Zoner "has dedicated her career to the safe of the Cornell Community and has developed an exceptional police force that is diverse and inclusive," serving as "a steady, clear-sighted leader." The resolution expresses the Legislature's deepest appreciation to Zoner for her 27 years of dedicated service to Cornell University and the residents of Tompkins County. Sheriff Derek Osborne also joined in recognizing and thanking Chief Zoner, and presenting her a recognition plaque. "You were truly a partner to the Sheriff's Office," Sheriff Osborne said.

*Contact: Legislator Anne Koreman, 607-319-3355; Legislator Shawna Black, 607-351-7855.*

### **Legislature Supports Proposed State Legislation to Block Proposed Romulus Incinerator**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Deborah Dawson was excused), urged passage of bills currently before the State Senate and Assembly, which would create The Finger Lakes Community Act of 2019, precluding construction of the proposed Circular energy garbage incinerator in Romulus, or any other such incinerator, in the Finger Lakes region. Last December the Legislature passed a similar opposition resolution, but proposed State legislation was not enacted before the end of the 2018 legislative session.

*Contact: Anna Kelles, Vice Chair, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 607-342-2036.*

Among other business,

The Legislature scheduled a public hearing March 19<sup>th</sup>, 5:30 p.m., regarding possible submission for NYS Community Development Block Grant housing assistance during the current application round. The hearing will be held at County Legislature Chambers, located at the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

**- END -**