



Inclusion Through Diversity

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FOUR PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **August 6, 2019** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Chair's Statement Decries Nation's Ongoing Mass Shootings**

The Tompkins County Legislature began its meeting mourning of the lives lost in this year's U.S. mass shootings, including the most recent, two that occurred only hours apart, in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio. Before asking that all observe a moment of silence, Legislature Chair Martha Robertson offered the following statement:

Today is the 218th day of 2019. So far there have been 253 mass shootings in our nation this year, more than one a day, according to Gun Violence Archive. This number does not count incidents with *fewer* than four people, including the murders of Chantel Grant and Andrea Stoudemire, who were part of a group called Mothers Against Senseless Killings. They were gunned down on Friday in Chicago on the corner where moms have been gathering for five years to try to curb gun violence.

There is almost nothing new to say, but nevertheless, we must stop business as usual and speak about these things. Words matter – the words that are said, and the words that are left unsaid.

Gun violence and hate affect every one of us. Just before this meeting we had an active shooter training. In a few minutes we will honor another American whose life was cut short way too soon, by the longest war in our history.

None of these shootings was inevitable, especially the one in El Paso. These did not have to happen. That means that the next one is not inevitable, nor the one after that or the one after that.

These assassins were not born hating. What in our society moved them to do this? In other countries people don't kill each other so easily and so often.

Tonight we will accept a grant to "prevent the cycle of abuse and violence in young families." And tomorrow there will be another naturalization ceremony here, welcoming 34 immigrants from 16 countries as they become full citizens. We are not powerless.

We need to hold our leaders accountable for this epidemic of hate, and for the tools of hate being so readily available. We need to hold ourselves accountable as well. Words matter, but they're not enough. This has to change.

*Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 607-274-5434 or 607-592-3119.*

#### **Legislature Honors Slain Army Sergeant James Johnston**

The Tompkins County Legislature paid tribute to Army Sergeant James G. Johnston, of Trumansburg, approving by unanimous vote (Legislator Mike Sigler was excused) a resolution of commemoration honoring Sgt. Johnston, who died while on active duty in Afghanistan on June 25, 2019, from injuries sustained in the service to his country. The resolution, advanced by Ulysses-Enfield Legislator Anne Koreman, recognizes the "honorable and vital service to the United States of America" he rendered as an explosive ordinance disposal specialist, and the many decorations for distinguished service he received, including for meritorious service, a bronze star, and a purple heart. The resolution states that the members of the Tompkins County Legislature, on behalf of all the people of Tompkins County express their heartfelt condolences to his widow, Krista Johnston,

and to all the members of his family for their terrible loss. Many Legislators were wearing Hawaiian shirts in honor of Sgt. Johnston, said to be his favorite type of attire.

*Contact: Legislator Anne Koreman, 607-319-3355*

### **Legislature Declines to Proceed with Study Examining Joint Public Safety Facility**

The Legislature considered, but failed to support, moving ahead with an in-depth feasibility study to gather more information on the potential to establish a joint City-County public safety facility. The proposed study would have delved deeper into findings of a preliminary study by Kingsbury Architecture on what could be involved if the County Sheriff's Office (Road Patrol and Civil Division, and possibly the Jail) were to be co-located with the Ithaca Police Department at a location within the City of Ithaca. The City's Common Council has already supported moving ahead—asking staff to develop a scope of work for a detailed architectural and engineering analysis to evaluate potential costs and benefits, as well as an operational analysis to analyze the potential use of shared facilities. But after considerable discussion, the Legislature declined to follow suit, with the proposal rejected by a 5-8 vote; Legislators Rich John, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Anna Kelles, Dan Klein, and Chair Martha Robertson voted in favor. (Legislator Mike Sigler was excused.)

As he has before, Public Safety Committee Chair John stressed that it was a generational decision the Legislature would be making if it didn't go forward with the study—that it is a rare opportunity to have the County and City looking to build law enforcement facilities at the same time. And he stressed that the only decision at this time would be to undertake a study, whose first step would be developing a defined scope of work. A more in-depth study, he and others said, would provide valuable information to inform a later decision on the issue. Centralized booking and arraignments, as recommended by the Municipal Courts Task Force, would be one area in which significant efficiencies could be achieved in the criminal justice system, he said. Attorney Ray Schlather, who chaired the Courts Task Force, and Judge Scott Miller, who served on it, both spoke to the Legislature supporting the co-location study.

Others, however, questioned seriously considering shared facilities—Legislator Michael Lane saying he began to question studying co-location when the option of building a new jail began to be mentioned as part of it. Legislators Deborah Dawson was one who expressed concern about moving the Sheriff farther from the County's Northeast population center and higher call volume, as well as melding two agencies with different cultures, pay scales, etc. Legislator Shawna Black also said it makes no sense to move the Sheriff from the Village of Lansing and property the County already owns.

Legislator Anna Kelles said her colleagues are not planners or architects and don't have the expertise needed to make a technical decision that would be the best for all in Tompkins County. Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne also maintained further study is needed to get more information and suggested that a failure to move forward would go against public input received as part of prior law enforcement studies.

After the vote, Chair Robertson expressed her thanks for all who have examined the co-location options over many months, including County Administrator Jason Molino, Deputy Administrator Lisa Holmes, and Public Safety Chair John, and their work in trying to present the Legislature with options.

*Contact: Richard John, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 607-256-9794*

### **Legislature Approves Adoption of TC3 Operating Budget**

After a public hearing, the Legislature, without dissent (Legislator Mike Sigler was excused), approved adoption of the 2019-2020 Tompkins Cortland Community College Operating Budget. The \$35.7 million budget contains total sponsor support of \$4,882,882, split between Tompkins and Cortland Counties based on proportional student enrollment, with Tompkins supporting nearly two-thirds of that. Both counties must agree on the level of sponsor support, and this year's operating budget, already approved by Cortland County, contains a 5% increase in sponsor support, the first increase in several years. Both Legislator Rich John and Chair Martha Robertson expressed thanks to Cortland County for supporting the increase in sponsor support.

"This is the culmination of a very long process by TC3 administration and the board of trustees," said budget committee chair Michael Lane, who also serves as the County's liaison to the TC3 board. "It's no secret that

they have had a tough time this year, but they're working their way through, and we know we will have a strong college at the end of it."

*Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 607-844-8440*

### **Updated Tompkins County Energy Strategy Strives for Net-Zero Emissions**

The Legislature adopted an updated Tompkins County Energy Strategy, one that is "intended to provide vision and leadership to move both county government operations and the overall community toward achieving net-zero emissions." Adoption came by unanimous vote of X-X, with Legislator Mike Sigler excused. In a presentation to the Legislature on the County's energy and sustainability efforts, Commissioner of Planning and Sustainability Katie Borgella reported that the County has done much over the past two decades (documented in a ten-page list of specific initiatives and activities), completing many energy and greenhouse gas emissions reductions plans and reports. The first 2020 Energy Strategy, which the Legislature adopted in 2010, had identified ten high priority local actions that, when taken together with other local, state, and federal actions, would lead the community to reduce its GHG emissions by at least 20% by 2020, as the first step toward achieving the goal of an 80% reduction from 2008 levels by 2050, and subsequent steps over the decade supported that approach.

While preparation of the updated Energy Strategy began with that incremental approach, Borgella said that in discussions with many groups and, with input from the Tompkins County Energy Task Force, the proposed new Energy Strategy was refocused toward achieving the net-zero goal. The new Tompkins County Energy Strategy identifies how the County can lead by example in its own operations, and how the County can provide leadership to the community by supporting and facilitating community actions, Commissioner Borgella said.

Review the updated Tompkins County Energy Strategy at

<http://tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/planning/Afforded%20Energy%20Strategy%208-6-2019.pdf>

For the comprehensive summary of County energy and sustainability-activities (2000-2018), see

[http://tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/planning/MASTER%20TC\\_chronological\\_sust\\_energy\\_effortsv2.pdf](http://tompkinscountyny.gov/files2/planning/MASTER%20TC_chronological_sust_energy_effortsv2.pdf)

*Contact: Katie Borgella, Commissioner of Planning and Sustainability, 607-274-5560; Deborah Dawson, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 607-351-8689*

### **Public Input Requested on Rifle Hunting Option**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Mike Sigler was excused) scheduled for its next meeting August 20<sup>th</sup>, 5:30 p.m., a public hearing on whether the County should seek State authorization to allow the use of rifles within Tompkins County for deer and bear hunting. The hearing will be held at County Legislature Chambers, located at the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court St., Ithaca.

*Contact: Richard John, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 607-256-9794*

### **Creation of Task Force Urged to Address Appraisal Challenges Related to "Dark Store Theory"**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Mike Sigler was excused) passed a resolution urging Governor Cuomo to convene a task force, involving assessors, real property appraisers, and real property tax attorneys, charged with reviewing what changes, if any, should be enacted to provide more clarity with respect to the appropriate value to be used in appraising big box stores and other commercial properties. Director of Assessment Jay Franklin has noted that big box retailers have successfully challenged real property tax appraisals arguing that their thriving commercial establishments are worth no more than an abandoned retail building of comparable size and location, the so-called "dark store theory", and that current vague statutory standards and conflicting judicial precedents have created confusion and uncertainty among local assessors, and threaten the tax bases and fiscal health of assessing municipalities and counties in New York State.

*Contact: Jay Franklin, Director of Assessment, 607-274-5517; Michael Lane, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 607-844-8440.*

Among other business

The Legislature authorized acceptance by the Department of Social Services of a five-year grant of \$560,842 from the NYS Office of Children and Family Services more than \$62,000 “Preventing the Cycle of Abuse and Violence in Young Families” grant, with the initial grant year beginning August 1, 2019, the grant to be executed through 100%-funded agreements with two local agencies, the Advocacy Center and the Learning Web.

County Finance Director Rick Snyder presented the latest County sales tax reports—second-quarter receipts showing a 6.19% increase compared to the second quarter of 2018, and year-to-date receipts up by 4.61% compared to a year ago.

The Legislature authorized disbursement of \$120,000 in County funds to the Community Housing Development Fund to Habitat for Humanity of Tompkins County to assist with development costs of three homes (one renovated and two new) at 1932 Slaterville Road in the Town of Dryden.

**- END -**