



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Highlights of the November 19, 2019 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature**

#### **Tompkins County Adopts \$.05 Fee on Paper Bags**

The Legislature passed a local law that will impose a \$.05 fee on paper carryout bags beginning March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. The local law will act in conjunction with New York State's Bag Waste Reduction Act, which bans the distribution of certain types of single-use plastic bags from retail establishments. The adoption vote, following a public hearing, was unanimous (Legislators Dan Klein and Glenn Morey were excused.)

According to the New York State Plastic Bag Task Force report from 2017, the use of paper carryout bags often increases in jurisdictions that have enacted a plastic bag ban. However, the best environmental outcomes are achieved when consumers switch to durable, reusable bags which they then use repeatedly. The \$.05 fee is intended to incentivize the use of reusable bags over single-use paper carryout bags.

Beginning March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, there will be a \$.05 fee applied to each paper carryout bag provided to customers of retail establishments in Tompkins County. Some types of paper bags are exempt from this fee such as paper bags used solely to package bulk food items or medicine. The fee will not apply to customers who are SNAP or WIC recipients.

Revenues collected from the \$.05 fee will be directed to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Sixty percent of the revenue will go into the Environmental Protection Fund, while the remaining forty percent will be returned to Tompkins County for the purpose of purchasing and distributing reusable bags, with priority given to low- and fixed-income communities.

*Contact: Barbara Eckstrom, Director of Recycling and Materials Management, 607-273-6632; Deborah Dawson, Chair, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 607-351-8689*

#### **Legislators Review Draft 2019 County Shared Services Plan**

County Administrator Jason Molino presented for Legislature review the draft Tompkins County 2019 Shared Services Plan, as prepared by the County's Shared Services Panel and County Administration. After receiving feedback from the Legislature, the plan will be returned to the Shared Services Panel for review and approval, prior to submission to the NYS Department of State by the end of the year.

Added to the draft plan is the new position of Flood Resiliency and Climate Conservation Engineer with the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District, funded by Tompkins County as part of the 2020 County Budget—a position estimated to produce \$130,000 in first-year savings, since municipalities would not have to individually contract for required engineering services for local soil and water conservation projects. Other elements included in the plan are study of a back-up Dispatch Center with Cortland County (estimated \$75,000 in savings); shared town/village recreation services (Town of Ulysses and Village of Trumansburg - \$23,720 in savings); expansion of the Greater Tompkins County Municipal Health Insurance Consortium by at least two municipal members - \$50,000 in savings); and a County-funded short-term rental data partnership: subscription to private data on short-term rentals, for the shared benefit of municipalities the County's Finance Department and Department of Planning and Sustainability, and the Strategic Tourism Planning Board – \$35,200 in estimated first-year savings and \$7,000 in estimated savings for bulk purchase of the data.

Administrator Jason Molino noted that while he believes the recommended initiatives are valuable and attainable, as in 2017 the Panel did not find any new initiatives that would produce significant, recurring new property tax savings, beyond Tompkins County's many large long-standing shared services initiatives.  
*Contact: County Administrator Jason Molino, 607-274-5551.*

### **Local Law Approved Amending Charter Language for the Office of Human Rights and Human Rights Commission**

The Legislature, after a public hearing, adopted a Local Law amending the County Charter, Chapter 26, regarding the Office of Human Rights and Human Rights Commission, incorporating various wording changes to the section, resulting from extensive review of the document involving members of the Human Rights Commission, legislators and County staff. Approval came by unanimous vote, with Legislators Glenn Morey and Dan Klein excused. Both Legislature Chair Martha Robertson and Health and Human Services Chair Shawna Black thanked everyone involved for their work. Said Legislator Black, "I thank everyone. I know the Commission worked very hard to review it...I think we have a really good product here."  
*Contact: Shawna Black, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 607-351-7855*

### **Hearing Scheduled Regarding Public Officer Residency Requirement**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, scheduled a public hearing for its next meeting December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5:30 p.m., at County Legislature Chambers, to take comment on proposed amendment to Chapter 133 of the County Code, regarding the residency requirement for public officers, as provided for under NYS Public Officers Law. (Legislators Dan Klein and Glenn Morey were excused.) The proposed amendment under study would provide for waivers of the residency requirement in certain cases for non-elective public officer positions (such as department heads). As proposed, such a waiver could be granted in instances where the County has difficulty in hiring or promoting the most qualified person due to the residency requirement or no qualified resident has applied; and also in the case of a current employee who moves outside the county for demonstrated good cause. The position of County Administrator would remain subject to the public officer residency requirement. Public officer positions of Probation Officer are exempt under the law, and positions of Deputy Sheriff, Assistant District Attorney and Corrections Officer in Tompkins County are exempt from by prior Legislature action.

While the vote to send the matter to public hearing was unanimous, there was much thoughtful discussion about the idea prior to the vote. Some Legislators had questions about the process and means, standards, and consistency in granting waivers; whether there could be unintended consequences that would affect employment in general; concern about expanding the number of people travelling from outside the county and effect on climate change; and whether those from outside the county might not be as in-touch with county issues. Chair Martha Robertson noted that 31% of the County's workforce lives outside the county, and said she hopes that legislators can look carefully and think carefully about the issue as discussion moves forward.

*Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 607-844-8440; County Administrator Jason Molino, 607-274-5551*

Among other business,

The Legislature, by a 10-2 vote, approved continued suspension of Local Advisory Boards of Assessment Review for a three-year trial period for the 2020, 2021, and 2022 assessment review periods. The Legislature first suspended the local boards of review for 2019 and, the resolution notes, there appeared to be no adverse effects on the public's ability to have their assessments reviewed. The local boards, created at the time that the assessment function was consolidated at the county level, are not mentioned in NYS Real Property Tax Law, and their use has decreased significantly in recent years. Legislators Mike Sigler and Shawna Black, both of which voted no, said they'd had positive experiences with the local Board of Assessment Review process.

A hearing was scheduled for the Legislature's next meeting on December 3<sup>rd</sup> (5:30 p.m. at Legislature Chambers) regarding repeal of the Local Law passed by the Legislature earlier this year overriding the tax levy limit for 2020. The 2020 Tompkins County Budget, adopted November 7, does not exceed the tax levy limit, requiring repeal of the override law.

**- END -**