



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **December 3, 2019** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Receives Report Recommending Merger of Public Health and Mental Health Departments

Scheduled to consider the future structure of the leadership structure of the County's Public Health and Mental Health Departments at its next meeting, the Legislature received a detailed presentation from the Task Force that for the past six months has conducted a comprehensive examination of the current shared-leadership structure of the two departments, in place since 2016. Since that time, department head Frank Kruppa has served as both Public Health Director and Commissioner of Mental Health. The Task Force calls for a full merger of the two departments, recommending that "the Tompkins County Mental Health Department and Public Health Department begin the process to become one integrated/merged department, creating a system of collaborative services under a single umbrella."

A proposed resolution, to be considered by the Legislature December 17, would authorize County Administrator Jason Molino "to implement a plan identifying the responsibilities of departmental leadership for the departments of Public Health and Mental Health to be provided in a merged model, beginning full operations as one merged department no later than July 1, 2021."

The presentation followed a similar one made to the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee November 14. The Task Force evaluated three options, considering the advantages and disadvantages of each: continuing that shared leadership model; separation of leadership and operations of the Mental Health and Public Health Departments; and a full merger of leadership and operations of the two departments.

Rejecting both the options of continuing the shared leadership model and returning to the former stand-alone department structure, the Task Force in its report concludes: "[I]t would be a disservice to the residents of Tompkins County to continue to treat health in the silos of physical and mental health. The synergies created by the two departments becoming one, which will serve all clients as whole persons, are vital in supporting our community. The Task Force states unequivocally its support for the value of both mental health and physical health services. Pursuit of an integrated/merged model should not diminish the focus or relative worth of one service over the other. They are both integral to the health and wellness of Tompkins County residents and should be treated as such."

Several Legislators praised the quality of the report and the extensive work that has been done over many months. Legislator Anna Kelles said she appreciates the focus on quality of service. Health and Human Services Chair Shawna Black, who served on the Task Force, said she is confident that the merger will put Mental Health "in the forefront." As he had in committee, Legislator Dan Klein, however, said he still needs more detail about what the merged arrangement would look like and that he would like to flesh out some of the "next steps" identified in the report before the County makes a decision.

The proposed resolution will be considered by the Health and Human Services Committee December 6 before coming to the Legislature December 17.

Contact: County Administrator Jason Molino, 607-274-5551; Shawna Black, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 607-351-7855.

Legislature Urges Changes in State Criminal Justice Reform

The Tompkins County Legislature is calling upon New York State to make needed changes to implement the State's sweeping new criminal justice reform measures, as of January 1st. While indicating general support of the principles behind the new measures, the detailed, four-page resolution, adopted by unanimous vote, also maintains that much needs to be done to implement the reforms effectively—including providing additional guidance to judges, and technical assistance and financial support to counties. (Legislators Deborah Dawson and Dave McKenna were excused.)

As part of the reforms amending the State's criminal procedure rules, people charged with misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies will in most cases be released without cash bail, pending trial; and with pre-trial discovery reform, prosecutors will be required to disclose evidence to the defense within 15 days of arraignment for an indictment or criminal charge, or issuance of an appearance ticket.

The resolution, in part, indicates that Tompkins County (subject to comments made in the document) supports the amendment to bail requirements and increased use of pretrial release to attempt to reduce the negative impacts of the bail system on people of limited financial resources, but it also describes judicial discretion as “an essential tool in allowing our judicial system to function.” The document recognizes the need for discovery reform and the County's long-time support of State efforts to do so, as also reflected in our District Attorney's local policies and practices. But it also indicates that much needs to be done regarding internal systems, improvements, and case management to effectively carry forth those reforms.

The measure cites ten specific improvements that should be implemented as soon as possible—such as providing additional comprehensive guidance to judges, providing technical assistance, as requested, to counties regarding alternatives to incarceration development, and repealing the discovery mandates for most Vehicle and Traffic Law infractions.

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

Hearing Held on One-Year Airport Bonding

The Legislature held a public hearing regarding the 2020 issuance of \$10 million in Airport Bond Anticipation Notes (the hearing held in accordance with Section 147(f) of the Internal Revenue Code to ensure that the bond issue is exempt from Alternative Minimum Tax.) One person spoke at the hearing, Barbara Regenspann urging that the Customs Facility be eliminated from the Airport project, that the project be renegotiated, and that no bonds be issued.

The one-year note issue will refund and supplement \$7.5 million in Airport BANs issued in 2019 to support the Airport improvement project. Finance Director Rick Snyder said the one-year BAN will give the County some time to determine what the ultimate financing options will be. County Administrator Jason Molino reported construction of the Customs Facility is underway and that the terminal expansion will be completed within the next couple of weeks.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 607-844-8440; Finance Director Rick Snyder, 607-274-5544.

Land Protection Funds Reorganized; Three Preservation Capital Projects Approved

In a series of resolutions, all approved without dissent, the Legislature approved the restructuring of the County's land protection funds and authorized funding for three projects under the revised capital structure. The balance of funds in the Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic, and Recreational Resource Protection (just over \$65,000) has been transferred to the Natural Infrastructure Capital Program, reorganizing and consolidating the funds into a single unified land acquisition program.

Approved were support for three permanent preservation acquisition projects through the Finger Lakes Land Trust: \$25,000 for the Summerland Farm and \$7,500 for the Shindagin Hollow—Brown Easement projects, both located in the Town of Caroline; and \$100,000 toward the Cayuga Cliffs Land and Water Protection Project in the Town of Lansing.

Contact: Katie Borgella, Commissioner of Planning and Sustainability, 607-274-5560.

Among other business,

The Legislature held a public hearing on a proposed Local Law that would amend Chapter 133 of the County Code to modify the residency requirement for public officers, as provided for under NYS Public Officers Law. No one commented at the hearing. The amendment would provide for waivers of the residency requirement in certain cases for non-elective public officer positions, such as department heads. Legislature consideration was delayed, Government Operations Chair Michael Lane indicating that more discussion is needed at the committee level before the proposal is considered by the Legislature.

The Legislature repealed 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.

Legislature Chair Martha Robertson announced that she will not be running for a leadership position in 2020. “To everything there is a season,” she said. “I have been honored and pleased to lead this group for six of the past ten years, and I think that’s enough. I will look forward to passing the baton.”

The Legislature authorized creation of two new advisory boards—the Tompkins County Climate and Sustainable Energy Advisory Board (to replace the County’s Energy Task Force, which ends its three-year term at year’s end) and the Tompkins County Affordable Housing and Landlord Support Task Force, which over a six-month term will research and recommend appropriate tools to support Tompkins County landlords to stabilize and expand the existing affordable housing market. Legislator Mike Sigler expressed concern that the boards were duplicative and unneeded. Each measure passed by a 10-2 vote, with Mr. Sigler dissenting on each, along with Legislator Glenn Morey on the Energy Advisory Board and Henry Granison on the Affordable Housing Task Force.

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