



Inclusion Through Diversity

Geoff Dunn, Acting Public Information Officer  
607-266-2633, Office  
607-280-5953, Cell  
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TWO PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **January 21, 2020** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislators Remain Deadlocked Over Election of a New Chair for 2020**

At Tuesday night's meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature, legislators remained split between two Democrats seeking to lead the body in 2020. As was the case at the Legislature's organizational meeting two weeks ago, Mike Lane of Dryden and Anna Kelles of Ithaca were both nominated to be Chairperson, and each received seven votes.

Voting in favor of Legislator Lane were Legislators Shawna Black, Amanda Champion, Deborah Dawson, Henry Granison, Dan Klein, Anne Koreman and Mike Lane. Legislator Kelles received votes from Legislators Rich John, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Dave McKenna, Glenn Morey, Martha Robertson, Mike Sigler and Anna Kelles.

Legislator Sigler (R) has been serving as Temporary Chair of the Legislature since the beginning of the January 7<sup>th</sup> organizational meeting, and presided over Tuesday's meeting. Following the vote for the chair, Legislator Deborah Dawson (D) introduced a motion to reconsider Sigler as the temporary chair, citing concerns from constituents about a Republican leading the Democratic majority on the Legislature.

During the discussion that followed, Legislator Dan Klein (D) asked Sigler whether he would pledge not to make any appointments while Temporary Chair that could be permanent for the year. Sigler said he could wait until after the matter over who becomes Chair resolves itself. Additionally, the Clerk of the Legislature, Cathy Covert, reminded legislators that most appointments require their approval.

Legislator Sigler added he does not intend to "exacerbate any strife" as Temporary Chair. Legislator Martha Robertson (D) said she believes "Mike is doing a good job," noting that in her time on the Legislature, decisions have been based on common sense, not party lines.

The motion to reconsider the vote for Temporary Chair failed in a 7-7 vote. Voting in favor were Legislators Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Deborah Dawson, Henry Granison, Mike Lane, Shawna Black, Anne Koreman and Anna Kelles. Voting against were Legislators Rich John, Amanda Champion, Martha Robertson, Glenn Morey, Dan Klein, Dave McKenna and Mike Sigler.

*Contact: Jason Molino, County Administrator, 274-5551; Mike Sigler, Temporary Chair of the Legislature, 339-7978*

### **Kenneth Clarke Confirmed as Director of the Office of Human Rights**

Legislators, without dissent, confirmed the appointment by County Administrator Jason Molino of Dr. Kenneth Clarke to be the permanent director of the Tompkins County Office of Human Rights. Clarke has served as Interim Director since May 2018. Prior to that time, he was Special Advisor to the department. The permanent appointment is effective immediately.

*Contact: Kenneth Clarke, Director of the Office of Human Rights, 277-4080*

### **Legislators Briefed on Proposed Ithaca Conference Center**

Gary Ferguson of the Downtown Ithaca Alliance and Peggy Coleman of the Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau led a presentation on the proposed 49,000 square foot conference center as part of the redevelopment of the Green Street Garage site in downtown Ithaca. The project received a boost in December when the state Regional Economic Development Council awarded the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce Foundation \$5 million for its construction. Ferguson describes the conference center as a “once in a generation” opportunity.

Several community leaders spoke in favor of the project, including Ithaca Mayor Svante Myrick, who sees it as a way to help struggling small businesses by bolstering the tourism and hospitality industries, while at the same time creating a meeting space that does not exist currently. The Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency (IURA) will meet next month to in part determine whether the conference center is financially viable. Legislators were generally accepting of the project, but said they need to know more about the County’s role in how it will be financed.

*Contact: Jason Molino, County Administrator, 274-5551*

Among other business:

Legislators voted to support a proposed New York State ban on the use of takeout containers, coffee cups, and loose packing materials containing expanded polystyrene foam.

Legislators awarded a contract to Cayuga Compost in Trumansburg to continue to accept and process food scraps collected from residents and commercial entities in Tompkins County for a fee of \$53/ton.

Finance Director Rick Snyder reported on preliminary numbers indicating December 2019 sales tax revenue was higher than the previous December, and that it was a “very good year for sales tax.” Snyder also reported the County maintained its strong Aa1 credit rating with Moody’s Investors Service.

The Legislature celebrated the County’s nine Poets Laureate since 2002 by dedicating a plaque, now displayed in the Legislature Chambers, and presenting a proclamation recognizing the importance of having a Poet Laureate serve the community.

**- END -**