



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **February 4th, 2020** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislators Try Again to Choose a Chair for 2020; County Clerk Will Now Make Appointment

For the third straight meeting, Tompkins County Legislators were unable to reach a consensus on who should lead the body in 2020. Neither Legislator Mike Lane of Dryden nor Anna Kelles of Ithaca, both Democrats, were able to secure the eight votes necessary to become Chair (Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne was excused).

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, Martha Robertson, Anna Kelles and the three Republicans on the Legislature - Dave McKenna, Glenn Morey, and Mike Sigler.

County Attorney Jonathan Wood explained that – as stipulated in the County Charter - County Clerk Maureen Reynolds will appoint – most likely Friday – a Chair. That individual would remain in that capacity unless or until the election of a Chair is added to a future agenda either by a member-filed resolution or a two-thirds vote of the Legislature. The election of a vice chair will be considered as unfinished business at the next scheduled meeting of the Legislature on February 18th.

Legislator Mike Sigler (R) of Lansing has been serving as Temporary Chair since the January 7th organizational meeting.

Contact: Jonathan Wood, County Attorney, 607-274-5546

Public Health Director Gives Update on 2019 Novel Coronavirus

The County's Public Health Director Frank Kruppa briefed the Legislature on the coronavirus outbreak. There have been 11 confirmed cases in the United States, but none in New York State to date. Kruppa emphasized there is a low risk of exposure for Tompkins County residents and visitors at this time. The Health Department has evaluated one individual who meets the person under investigation (PUI) criteria for the coronavirus. That individual – a Cornell student – is being isolated and monitored, and samples were sent to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for testing.

The Health Department will be notified of any travelers returning from China to Tompkins County.

Contact: Frank Kruppa, Public Health Director and Commissioner of Mental Health, 607-274-6674

Legislature Casts a Key Vote on Conference Center Project

The Legislature voted 9-4 (with Legislators Glenn Morey, Amanda Champion, Henry Granison and Dan Klein voting no; Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne was excused) to establish a conceptual fiscal commitment for the Proposed Downtown Ithaca Conference Center Project. Prior to the vote, more than a dozen community members addressed the Legislature, many of them voicing support of the project and the boost it would give to the local tourism and hospitality industries. They touted the increased foot traffic a conference center would produce, and how it would promote revenue across all sectors of the downtown economy, and generate more tax money.

Legislator Anna Kelles (D), who sponsored the resolution, reminded her colleagues that approving the measure does not bind the County to anything at this time, and that any financing commitments would need to be approved later as part of a yet-to-be-agreed upon Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Some legislators remained skeptical. Amanda Champion (D) said she isn't against the conference center, but doesn't feel the county should be involved as it won't benefit everyone, adding the process "feels rushed." Henry Granison (D) expressed concern that many conference centers run a deficit, but Martha Robertson (D) urged lawmakers not to lose sight of the "bigger picture," adding the city is part of the county and "we are one community."

Tuesday night's vote comes ahead of an Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency (IURA) decision on February 6th to determine whether the conference center project is financially viable.

Contact: Jason Molino, County Administrator, 607-274-5551

Among other business:

County Administrator Jason Molino offered an overview of the Governor's Executive Budget proposal, and its potential impact on Tompkins County. In order to help close a \$6.1 billion deficit, the Governor is proposing to cut aid to localities by \$1.8 billion...and redesign Medicaid to come up with another \$2.5 billion in savings. Molino says the County still needs some clarity on the Medicaid proposals, but the County could end up seeing a nearly \$1.8 million tax levy increase in 2021, which would require overriding the 2% tax cap and/or a cut in services.

Legislator Henry Granison (D) read a proclamation marking African American Month in Tompkins County. The Pan-African Flag will be flown on all County flagpoles throughout the month.

Legislators confirmed, without dissent (Leslyn McBean-Clairborne was excused), the appointment by County Administrator Molino of Natalie Branosky for the position of Workforce Development Director. She will begin her new duties on February 24th, overlapping with Julia Mattick prior to Mattick's retirement on March 27th after more than 15 years of service to the County.

The Legislature observed a moment of silence for Frank H.T. Rhodes, Cornell University's ninth president, who died at the age of 93 in Florida. Rhodes, whose tenure as president lasted 18 years (1977 to 1995), was a national figure in higher education.

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