

Highlights of the September 21, 2021 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Resolution Passed Instituting Fund Balance Policy

A resolution moved by Legislator Deborah Dawson (D-Lansing) and seconded by Legislator Shawna Black (D-Ithaca) setting the policy for the Tompkins County unassigned fund balance passed 12-2, with Legislators Mike Lane (D-Dryden) and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne (D-Ithaca) opposed. The policy is now set at an 18% minimum of yearly operating expenses following an amendment proposed by Legislator Henry Granison (D-Ithaca) to remove a ceiling of 23% on the minimum balance, that amendment was approved 9-5 with Legislators Lane, Morrey (R-Groton), Champion (D-Ithaca), John (D-Ithaca), and McBean-Clairborne opposed. The previous policy required a 10% minimum.

Legislature Hears Presentation from the Food Policy Council on Community Food System Plan

Don Barber, Chair of the Tompkins County Food Policy Council presented an update on the Community Food System Plan. The development of the plan has been supported by the Legislature with financial and programmatic resources. A coordinator has been hired by the Council, also supported by Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Community Foundation of Tompkins County.

The presentation detailed the vision for a sustainable, equitable, healthy, and affordable food system for all members of the community. In light of the Legislature's charge that community be engaged in the plan, Barber outlined that there are 46 volunteers and 30+ working group members involved, and relationships with over a dozen community partners. The Council has completed surveys and interviews with community stakeholders and have engaged with the media to further publicize their work.

The planning process has identified the challenges, vulnerabilities, and assets in the local food system and includes next steps to articulate recommendations and policies, along with a request for resources to implement those recommendations and policies. Challenges and vulnerabilities outlined included systemic issues that impact farmers and access to nutritious local food, assets presented included local markets and food pantries, as well as the purchasing power of large local institutions.

On September 29th, a community update will be held at 5pm at the Ithaca Farmer's Market on Third Street in Ithaca, with additional ongoing events to be held throughout the winter. Following these events, the Council will collaboratively draft a set of local recommendations in the spring of 2022. For more information, visit: <https://tcfoodpolicy.wordpress.com/>

Historical Commission Presents Statue Program

County Historian Carol Kammen and Historical Commission Member and former County Administrator Joe Mareane shared a report from the Tompkins County Historical Commission. The report included an "Historical Monuments Opportunity" presentation, detailing plans from the commission to install monuments that represent the community's values, have been a part of our community, and / or have shaped our community, including those who have been overlooked or undervalued historically.

An anonymous donor has made a \$500,000 commitment to design and place two statues in the community that must be sculpted by a nationally recognized artist, reflect progressive values, honor those who have been marginalized, and have spent a portion of their lives in Tompkins County – the commission for these statues will be through a partnership with Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services and placed at Breckenridge Place Apartments and at the Henry St. John building in Downtown Ithaca. The first statue subject will be Frances Perkins, the chief architect of FDR’s social welfare programs and the first female U.S. Cabinet Secretary – Perkins spent the last years of her life at Cornell University teaching at the School of Industrial Labor Relations. The second statue will honor a community member of color, suggestions are being sought on potential subjects for the second statue.

Among Other Business

Tompkins County Public Health Director Frank Kruppa and Deputy County Administrator Amie Hendrix shared a COVID-19 response update. Updates were shared on how the Health Department has been working with K-12 schools and the continuation of local vaccination clinics. Tompkins County continues to be under a mask advisory urging residents to wear a mask while indoors and around others. Kruppa shared that TCHD has issued guidance to local schools intended to keep students in school as much as possible, the guidance effectively eliminates most people in a classroom from being a close contact of a positive case as long as students are masked effectively, and distancing is observed. Kruppa also shared data on the disease’s prevalence in the community and the local vaccination progress. Legislators inquired on vaccine booster information and Kruppa responded with details on planning underway and access to vaccines through primary care and pharmacy channels. Kruppa added that information is to come from federal and state officials on when third doses or booster shots are appropriate.

A proclamation was read acknowledging the 200th anniversary of the First Baptist Church of Ithaca, acknowledging its historical, social, and architectural significance.

Legislators observed a moment of silence in remembrance of former Legislator Peter Stein. Legislators shared stories about his interests and their time with Stein on the Legislature and remarked on Stein’s legacy and generosity.

A resolution appointing Tamara Scott as the Tompkins County Republican Election Commissioner was approved unanimously. The resolution was moved by Legislator Mike Sigler (R-Lansing), and seconded by Legislator Dave McKenna (R-Newfield). Scott had served as deputy commissioner and her appointment follows the retirement of Elizabeth Cree. Commissioners are nominated by local political committees, the Tompkins County Republican Committee nominated Scott at its most recent meeting for the remainder of Cree’s term and an additional two-year term starting January 2022 as the Commissioner.