

# Highlights of the October 19, 2021 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

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Wednesday, October 20, 2021

## **Legislature Passes 2022 Tentative Tompkins County Budget**

Legislature Chairwoman Leslyn McBean-Clairborne (D-Ithaca) offered an amendment to the recommended 2022 County budget that would appropriate just over \$605,000 from unassigned fund balance to achieve a 0% tax levy increase resulting in a tax rate decrease of 1.81% and a \$1,250 County tax bill on a median priced home. This amendment had been previously discussed at Expanded Budget Committee meetings and followed a presentation on the unexpected significant increase in 2021 sales tax revenues. The amendment passed 10-4 with Legislators Lane (D-Dryden), Schill (D-Ithaca), Dawson (D-Lansing), and Granison (D-Ithaca) opposed.

The tentative 2022 Tompkins County Budget as amended passed 13-1 with Legislator Granison (D-Ithaca) opposed. The budget as approved in this meeting will go to a public hearing on November 9<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm. The budget may continue to be amended in the lead-up to the public hearing.

## **Presentation Given on Green Facilities**

Director of Facilities Arel LeMaro, Chief Sustainability Officer Terry Carroll, and representatives from Johnson Controls gave a presentation on the County's green facilities net zero carbon emission project. The presentation detailed greenhouse gas emissions from buildings, facilities, and vehicles and equipment as well as measures to be taken in the future to improve facilities and reduce emissions. Presenters outlined the history of green facilities improvements, stating that facilities improvements have guaranteed financial savings to the County and looked forward to the work to come as part of the Green Facilities Initiative adopted in 2020 set to reduce net carbon emissions for facilities to zero by 2027

Later in the meeting bonding toward the first phase of facilities improvements under this plan passed unanimously, 14-0.

## **Among Other Business**

Tompkins County Public Health Director Frank Kruppa and Deputy County Administrator Amie Hendrix shared an update on the County's ongoing COVID-19 response. The presentation highlighted information on COVID-19 hospitalizations in Tompkins County, describing that individuals who are unvaccinated are at significantly more risk of being hospitalized due to COVID-19, though hospitalizations remain very low in Tompkins County. Kruppa shared in charts that the average age of unvaccinated individuals who have been hospitalized since August 1 is 55.7, whereas the average age of hospitalized fully vaccinated individuals is 77.1. Data was also shared showing that since August 1, there have only been 5 vaccinated individuals below the age of 70 in the hospital, whereas there have been 32 unvaccinated. Kruppa also shared that the Health Department continues to plan around vaccine booster doses, clarifying that the Moderna and Johnson and Johnson boosters have not been fully

approved yet and that the Health Department's efforts and focus will be directed toward vaccinating 5–11-year-old children.

Bill Troy was unanimously appointed as Tompkins County's Attorney effective November 1, 2021. Troy is an internal promotion, having worked as Deputy County Attorney for several years. Current Attorney Jonathan Wood is retiring at the end of 2021.

A municipal bond for three phases of the creation of a backup 9-1-1 emergency dispatch center was approved unanimously, 14-0. Director of the Department of Emergency Response Michael Stitley joined the meeting to discuss the project, a partnership with Cornell University. The project addresses issues with redundancies and the procurement of additional hardware ensure continuity of operations and necessary renovations of the current space at 92 Brown Road. The debt would be paid via a New York State grant to support the project.

A resolution urging New York State to adopt a conservation easement exemption for Tompkins County passed 14-0. Legislator Dan Klein (D-Danby) shared that this would benefit the "land-rich but money-poor," and Legislator Leslie Schill (D-Ithaca) stated that this would "reduce development pressure" for some properties in the County. The proposed perpetual easement would result in a 50% reduction in taxable value for lands under the program.