

Highlights of the November 16, 2021 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Tompkins County 2022 Budget Passes Unanimously

The 2022 Tompkins County budget passed 13-0 (Legislator Leslie Schill (D-Ithaca) excused) following an amendment. For previous coverage on the 2022 budget, visit:

<https://www2.tompkinscountyny.gov/news-view/2021>

Legislator Shawna Black (D-Ithaca) thanked Legislator Deborah Dawson (D-Lansing, Chair of the Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee) for leading the process, stating that “we had some very productive conversations, thank you.” Legislature Chairwoman Leslyn McBean-Clairborne (D-Ithaca) added thanks for Interim County Administrator Lisa Holmes for stepping up into the role during the intensive budget season and added praise for Legislators representing their constituents in the process, “you represent, and you represent well – bringing priorities of constituents and the County to bear.”

An amendment to the 2022 Tompkins County Budget raised by Legislator Amanda Champion (D-Ithaca) and seconded by Legislator Deborah Dawson (D-Lansing) to add \$15,000 in one-time support of the Tompkins County Public Library (TCPL) passed 13-0 (Legislator Leslie Schill excused). Legislators cited the City of Ithaca’s decision to decline \$15,000 of proposed funding for TCPL to be open on Sundays. The funding is in support of the Sunday hours and access for the community. Legislator Amanda Champion, who also serves as a representative on the library’s board of directors stated, “I’ve seen nothing but dedication and hard work (from the library staff), devoted to the library itself, information and access and a place for teenagers and a warm place in the winter. I was quite shocked that they (City of Ithaca) decided to not fund this \$15,000 request.” Champion added clarification that the library did not ask her to submit this amendment, that the city does contribute to TCPL through what comes in as sales tax revenues, and that the \$15,000 is equivalent to nine Sundays of TCPL being open to patrons, adding that there are 13,000 city residents with library cards. Several additional Legislators spoke in support of the amendment, with Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne (D-Ithaca) stating “I hope we can get to a place where we see libraries as a shared service that we can all contribute to,” McBean-Clairborne further commented on the ongoing collaborations in other areas with the city and encouraged the Legislature to reach out to Common Council for further conversation. Legislator Mike Lane (D-Dryden) added context to the downtown location of TCPL stating that the Legislature previously supported the conversion of the old Woolworth’s Department Store Building (gifted to the County) to the current iteration of the library and that the Legislature has made a concerted effort to keep it in Downtown Ithaca.

Among Other Business

Appointments were made unanimously to the independent redistricting commission. Legislator Amanda Champion shared that this group will be tasked with drawing new district lines for the Legislature. The independent commission members include:

Henrik N. (Hank) Dullea

Elliot (Poppy) Immel

Charles Nocera

Vivek Iyer

Margaret Hobbie

Carolyn Chang

Jan Vink

Marcia E. Lynch

Jeffrey True

Commission Chair Hank Dullea stated, “When I met with the interview committee, I said we’d be committed to fairness in this process and also, importantly, the appearance of fairness. We’ll stress the importance of community interests as we look at the data.” Dullea added that feedback would be sought from the current Legislature on the size of the body (the size was previously moved from 15 to 14 members during the 2010 redistricting process).

The County’s internal Team JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) who convenes to support work in these areas at the County presented on their one-year anniversary of the group. The presentation included an explanation of the group’s formation and history, a video of young people in the community expressing their perspectives on what would make Tompkins County a more equitable place, and updates on the work the group has completed to-date. Team JEDI has created a vision statement, set committees to address equity in different areas, and has attended several trainings in the areas of equity and inclusion. Over 20 Tompkins County employees from myriad County departments are members of the group. Legislators thanked the team for the work that they’ve done and their dedication to equity. In reflection, Legislature Chairwoman Leslyn McBean-Clairborne shared that 20 years ago was her first meeting as a sitting Legislator and it was just a few years later that a committee that deals with diversity and inclusion (Workforce Development and Inclusion Committee) was founded, which is intentionally made up of Legislators, staff, and community members. McBean-Clairborne stated, “this is exciting, and I look forward to all of the other things that you intend to do. Thank you for leading the way.”

Tompkins County Public Health Director Frank Kruppa and Deputy County Administrator Amie Hendrix presented an update on the COVID-19 pandemic response and vaccination progress. The presentation updated hospitalization data, detailing that vaccines continue to be effective in preventing severe disease and hospitalization. The presentation also included information on recent 5-11-year-old vaccination clinics, with over 2,200 children having been vaccinated so far through the County’s clinics at the mall site. Kruppa commented on the number of positive cases and hospitalizations, “we know case numbers are going to fluctuate, and while we don’t want to see that we’re focused on our hospitalizations which have been steady at single digits. As we do begin to transition from pandemic to endemic, we have to acknowledge that we’re all likely to be touched by COVID, what we’re doing is trying to limit the impact of that.”

Roxan Noble was unanimously appointed as the Ithaca Tompkins International Airport Director. Noble has served previously as the Deputy Director of the Airport.

A resolution was approved authorizing the acquisition of the properties located at 300 North Tioga Street and 308 North Tioga Street for a new Downtown County Governmental Office Building (passed 12-1, Legislator Amanda Champion (D-Ithaca) opposed and Legislator Schill excused). The purchase will be made using unassigned general fund balance. Discussion was had on an amendment proposed by Legislator Dan Klein (D-Danby) to alter language resulting in a “potential” new building, the amendment failed 7-6 (Legislators Klein, Sigler (R-Lansing), Champion, Dawson, Granison (D-Ithaca), Koreman (D-Ulysses), and Lane in favor), with several Legislators stating that the purpose of the planning for these purchases was related directly to office space needs.

Legislator Dave McKenna (R-Newfield) shared that the Downtown Facilities Committee heard a special presentation from Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services on possible affordable housing opportunities for the County’s property on Sears Street in Downtown Ithaca.