

Highlights of the February 15, 2022 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Tompkins County Passes Green Fleet Policy

The updated Green Fleet policy passed unanimously, 13-0 (Legislator Mike Sigler (R-Lansing) excused).

Tompkins County Chief Sustainability Officer Terry Carroll was on hand to answer questions and shared that “The new policy aims to hit the County’s green goals and government efficiency. This policy implements a fleet manager to take a holistic view of the fleet, increasing buying power and efficiency through vehicle sharing. There is an emphasis on electrifying vehicles when we can.” Carroll continued, “We’ll be better tracking mileage and fuel usage of our fleet to report out to the community and the Legislature.”

Legislator Anne Koreman (D-Ulysses) remarked on the merits of the policy, “especially adding in the organizational efficiency aspect.” Legislator Amanda Champion (D-Ithaca) clarified that the fleet manager position is not a new position, but rather a responsibility that will fall under someone designated by the County Administrator, likely to be the Chief Sustainability Officer.

Among Other Business

In her Chair’s report, Chairwoman Shawna Black (D-Ithaca) shared her experience visiting a New York State Troopers recruiting event in Broome County with Tompkins County Sheriff Derek Osborne. Black stated, “I was most impressed with the focus in the recruiting presentation on equity, diversity, and inclusion,” adding, “It was a powerful message asking leaders to advocate for recruiting a diverse group of people into these positions.”

Tompkins County Poet Laureate Christine Kitano joined the meeting to read several poems in the spirit of Valentine’s Day.

Tompkins County Public Health Director Frank Kruppa and Deputy County Administrator Amie Hendrix shared an update on the COVID-19 pandemic response. Hospitalizations continue to be in the double digits and TCHD continues to monitor the number of new positive cases and the severity of disease. While New York State has not continued its indoor mask or vaccination mandate, Tompkins County’s mask advisory continues to be in effect. The County has distributed over 100,000 KN95 masks and will continue to do so at no cost to the community through community partners and other points of distribution. On the mask mandate, Kruppa stated, “We got a lot of questions about it from both directions, I wanted to point out that it was not a local mandate – locally we’ve been following the CDC guidance on masking from the outset. There is not a mandate, it’s not something we’re enforcing, but it is absolutely something we’re advising for our community. From our perspective the science hasn’t changed – masks are not perfect, but in a layered approach they will limit the spread of the disease.” On the question of when the advisory will go away Kruppa detailed the metrics made available by the CDC, and that the advisory is based on being above 50 cases or above for 100,000 residents over a seven-day rolling average.

Interim County Administrator Lisa Holmes updated the Legislature that Tompkins County closed on the purchases of properties at 300 and 308 North Tioga Street, and has instituted 6-month lease agreements for the current tenants of those buildings. The properties were purchased with the intention of constructing a center of government building to house County departments, several of which are currently in leased space. The closing on the Tioga Street properties enables the County to sell a portion of County-owned property on Sears Street to Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services to develop owner-occupied affordable for sale housing. The next step in the sale will be for INHS to go through the City of Ithaca's subdivision process.

A resolution moved by Legislator Dan Klein (D-Danby) urging New York State to support 2-1-1 programs statewide passed unanimously (14-0). Legislators spoke to the value provided to the community by the local 2-1-1 program and the Human Services Coalition. Chairwoman Black spoke to the 2-1-1 call line being particularly critical during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A resolution was moved by Legislator Veronica Pillar (D-Ithaca) advocating that New York State pass the Fair Pay for Home Care Act to establish fair wages for home health aides. Pillar spoke to the valuable resource that aides provide and the stress on the system due to the pandemic and more people needing assistance staying at home. The resolution passed 12-2 with Legislators Shurtleff (R-Groton) and Sigler (R-Lansing) in opposition.