



Administration

TOMPKINS COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Lisa Holmes

DEPUTY COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Amie Hendrix

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Highlights of the **April 5, 2022** meeting of the
Tompkins County Legislature

Tompkins County Legislature Hears Presentation on Property Tax Assessment

Tompkins County Assessment Director Jay Franklin presented to the Legislature on the 2022 Annual Equity Maintenance (AEM) program, which is the activity of the department to assess the values of all properties in Tompkins County which are then used to levy property taxes. Franklin clarified that the department's role is valuing properties at the most probable sales price for any given piece of property. The process of assessing each year leads to the most equitable assessment, taking into account the information available each year.

The presentation detailed the operations of the Assessment Department, outlining the cost savings to the community (over \$600,000 annually) by having a consolidated property tax assessment office at the County level. A vast majority of the property parcels in Tompkins County are residential parcels (24,747 parcels).

Regarding the increasing real estate market in Tompkins County, Franklin stated, "markets are increasing everywhere... now that we've moved on a bit from COVID-19, people are talking about how much housing costs... and the supply of for-sale housing has not kept pace with demand in our community." Franklin added that Tompkins County is at 1940's levels of for-sale housing built by decade, with an average of 91 houses built per year this decade. Legislator Mike Lane (D-Dryden) stated, "We've got to take a look at our comprehensive plans... builders are gun-shy of Tompkins County because we want the 'Cadillac' of development. We need to have Tompkins County open for development... I realize we don't do the zoning, but we need to figure out ways to get water and sewer to properties for example, so developments can be built." Legislator Deborah Dawson (D-Lansing) stated "I know what it costs to build something... costs are increasing, and a big piece of the problem currently is the cost of construction, which is exceptionally high because it's hard to get stuff here. We don't have a lot of local construction companies... I don't think changing the demands of our local zoning is going to improve the situation all by itself." Legislator Greg Mezey (D-Dryden) added, "We have a role to play in reducing the burden of infrastructure costs so you can build more housing. I do think there's a role for us to play at the County level."

Average and median sales prices of residential properties have increased, with the average sales price at \$329,468 in 2021, up significantly from recent years. Franklin also stated that there is likely to be a bidding war on nearly every property sold in Tompkins County, with the average sales price going far above the listed for-sale price, adding that realtors are considering how to price homes to deliver the most value for sellers. Legislator Greg Mezey inquired about whether when one house in a particular area sells for a high value over asking price it raises the

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assessment on neighboring properties – Franklin responded that the department looks at what it may have missed that led to that higher cost (i.e. renovation) and looks at other sales supporting the assessment value to reduce outliers' impact on the area's market. Assessments don't automatically adjust to a sales price, rather assessments are based upon a value of what other sales of similar properties will support.

The AEM program is required by law, including that property shall be assessed at a uniform percentage of value and that who owns a property has no bearing on the assessment of that property. Each July the department reviews the assessment-to-sales-price ratio for the previous years' worth of sales to determine how equitably assessments are performing. The department also reviews other measures as detailed in the presentation.

Regarding how assessments are performed, the department either does a parcel-by-parcel review or assesses using trends to set a uniform assessment for a class of properties with differentials based on variables.

In 2022 the department sent out Assessment Disclosure Notices, which detail the new assessments for each property owner, also estimating total property taxes. Franklin clarified that reassessments do not raise the amount of tax collected, that happens through the budget process and tax levy amount determined by the Legislature. Property owners who disagree with their assessment can [schedule a meeting](#) with an appraiser to discuss it, as of April 5, there has been a year-over-year decrease in the number of contested assessment changes by property owners (totaling 1,047 this year). Additionally, a list of property tax exemptions can be found on the [Assessment Department website](#).

Among Other Business

Legislator Dan Klein (D-Danby), who chairs the Health and Human Services Committee shared a statement on the importance of home health aid services. There are nearly 100 clients of the County Office for the Aging, with 15-20 individuals on the waiting list. This year the Office for the Aging is hiring aides through the organization, whereas these services are typically outsourced through contracts to other agencies. Klein spoke to the value of the County hiring these positions and thanked the Office for the Aging for getting the funding for these positions through non-county sources, thus not impacting taxpayers directly.

A proclamation was read acknowledging Library Week in Tompkins County. Tompkins County Public Library Acting Director Teresa Vadakin and members of the Tompkins County Public Library Foundation staff and board of directors were on hand to receive the proclamation. Vadakin stated, "I see on a daily basis what libraries do for the community... libraries are used for many things, whether it be finding a job, homeschooling children... I see the effects we have on the community, and I want to thank all library staff for all they do for the community. Thanks to the Legislature for your support of libraries, especially the Sunday hours support, over 490 people visited last Sunday alone." The proclamation honored the diverse work of libraries, stating, "today's libraries and their services extend far beyond the four walls of a building and

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everyone is welcome to use their resources, and in times of crisis, libraries and library professionals play an invaluable role in supporting their communities both in person and virtually." The resolution continued, "libraries strive to develop and maintain programs and collections that are as diverse as the populations they serve and ensure equity of access for all, and adapt to our changing world. Libraries are expanding their resources and continuing to meet the needs of their patrons."

A proclamation was read recognizing this as Public Safety Telecommunications Week in Tompkins County. The resolution honors those who serve as 9-1-1 dispatchers as "the first, first responders and most critical contact our residents have with emergency services," adding that public safety telecommunicators are "the single vital link for our police officers, firefighters, EMT's, and paramedics by monitoring their activities by radio, providing them information and ensuring their safety." The resolution also clarifies that since 9-1-1 was instituted locally in 1997 over one million calls have been taken, with the millionth coming in February of 2022. Mike Stitley, Director of the Department of Emergency Response thanked Legislators, stating, "The staff at the 9-1-1 center are very proud of this acknowledgment."

A proclamation was offered recognizing April as Fair Housing Month in Tompkins County. It proclaims Fair Housing Month "in Tompkins County as an inclusive community committed to fair housing, promoting appropriate activities by private and public entities to provide and advocate for equal housing opportunities for all residents and prospective residents of Tompkins County." Officials from the Board of Realtors were on hand to accept the proclamation, with member Paul Rossi stating, "Thank you all for being the best County Legislature in New York State. Your caring and conversation is amazing and I'm so proud to cover you for the New York State Association of Realtors." Legislator Veronica Pillar (D-Ithaca) spoke about how communities continue to be segregated even with the Fair Housing Act enshrined in law, talking about how those who are marginalized, evicted, or not offered disability accommodations continue to face significant difficulties in the housing system.

In her Chair's Report, Legislature Chairwoman Shawna Black spoke about the new Tompkins County SIREN emergency notification system, stating "the new SIREN system uses updated technology and will be more user-friendly, and will allow us to keep an archive of alerts on our website." Black also spoke about recent resource allocations through the federal government including several funded projects in Tompkins County and thanked Legislators for their advocacy toward those allocations.

Monalita Smiley, Project Director of the Community Justice Center provided a monthly update on the Reimagining Public Safety Collaborative and ongoing plans being implemented. Smiley's update included details on the community healing, alternative response, officer wellness, and Sheriff's pilot program for certain unarmed responses plans. For the Sheriff's pilot program, types of calls for service are currently being analyzed to determine which would be included for an unarmed response. Smiley also detailed that a report proposing the Community Justice Center Advisory Board will be delivered to the Legislature and City Council pending legal review by both organizations.

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Legislator Deborah Dawson (D-Lansing) thanked the Tompkins County Office of Human Rights for a recent program on critical race theory, remarking that it was "...really informative and exceptionally well done, hats off to our Office of Human Rights." The recording can be [found on the Tompkins County YouTube Channel](#). Part two of the series can be viewed live on April 13 and will be archived at the [same link](#).

The Legislature passed a resolution reaffirming support in support of the New York Health Act 10-3, with Legislators Sigler (R-Lansing), Shurtleff (R-Groton), and Brown (R-Newfield) in opposition. The act would enshrine a single-payer approach to health care costs in New York State. Legislator Mike Sigler (R-Lansing) offered an amendment in the form of a substitute resolution to the original, the substitute resolution involves the state taxing residents to support costs for cancer treatment rather than a single-payer system – the amendment failed 1-12 with Legislator Sigler (R-Lansing) in support and Legislator Amanda Champion (D-Ithaca) excused. Regarding the proposed amendment, Legislator Veronica Pillar (D-Ithaca) spoke to the New York Health Act's goals in supporting more preventative care in addition to treatment costs. Chairwoman Black stated, "I feel like the amendment is a distraction from healthcare for all. Insurance is one of those things many of us take for granted, especially if you have insurance through your job, parents shouldn't worry about whether to take their kids to the doctors or not. I also feel like if we spotlight cancer we ignore the other issues impacting people." Legislator Lee Shurtleff (R-Groton) shared concerns opining on State issues from his seat as a County Legislator. Legislator Randy Brown (R-Newfield) spoke about the need to be more creative on a local level, including considering more access to free clinics.