



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer
607-274-5555, Office
607-227-2152, Cell
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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Additional Changes Recommended for 2017 Budget

Legislators acting as an Expanded Budget Committee supported eight more changes, as they completed their second night of acting on potential amendments to County Administrator Joe Mareane's Recommended 2017 County Budget

Much discussion, however, related to an item that was not on the agenda. During half-an-hour of public comment at the beginning of the meeting, nearly a dozen people spoke passionately in support of the Tompkins County Office of Human Rights, in response to a proposed amendment, which briefly had been advanced by Legislator Mike Sigler and then withdrawn, to defund the office. Those who spoke included a number of current and past members of the County Human Rights Commission, including current Chair Jamila Simon and two past Commission chairs, as well as a number of community leaders and those who have worked with the Office who spoke of how the Office has helped them and the community.

Among the comments, community leader Laura Branca called the Office of Human Rights and adequate funding to support it "a critical need for our communities." Marcia Baum, retired long-time director of the Greater Ithaca Activities Center, called for dramatic change regarding the Office of Human Rights, in the form of the Legislature's support of OHR in taking "vigorous and specific action" to get the Memorandum of Understanding with the New York State Division of Human Rights restored. "We need to expand the office, not dismantle it," she said, adding that Tompkins County's human rights program should be a model for others. Current Commission treasurer Amos Malone agreed, maintaining that such an aggressive human rights program and champion, through Director Karen Baer, is needed in this community, especially in today's political environment.

Legislator Sigler responded, saying that, as he sees it, the department "does not have a mission," and that he had intended that his proposal initiate a discussion. Director Baer said, "For a person who wants to have a discussion, I was never contacted. No one asked me what my office's mission is...I am glad to have discussions, too. The first discussion you should have had is who we are and what we do, and what our mission is."

Legislators tonight recommended the following changes to the budget. Tonight's decisions may be reconsidered at later expanded committee meetings and will require approval by the full Legislature to become final.

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION:

- By a vote of 9-5, Legislators approved \$7,524 to support salary adjustments for four positions to retain exempt status under new federal Fair Labor Standards Act regulations. Director Ken Schlather told legislators the job responsibilities for the four critical positions require highly flexible schedules, making the exempt status appropriate, while also leveraging outside funding.

- Legislators also, by a vote of 10-4, approved a \$4,000 increase (to \$20,000) in the Extension budget for the Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan, supporting a half-time Ag Educator.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT:

\$29,461 in funding for a half-time Sanitarian position in the Environmental Health Division was approved by a vote of 8-6. Legislator Carol Chock said she advanced the proposal because of emerging needs she sees related to environmental health and multiplying issues related to potential environmental hazards. Public Health Director Frank Kruppa said that the department is struggling to perform very specific mandate-required work with existing staff, as well as the need to deal with emerging issues, and spoke of the need to add resources to the line-level environmental health staff.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE:

- By a unanimous 14-0 vote, legislators approved a scaled-down proposal to increase staffing at the County Jail, funding one additional corrections officer, at a cost of \$57,686. The initial request was to add two officers, at a cost of \$115,272, which several legislators remarked that they could not approve because of the effect it would have on the tax levy. Jail Captain Ray Bunce said the additional position would help to produce some decrease in overtime cost, boost staff morale and, it is hoped, increase retention. Captain Bunce noted that seven members of the Corrections staff are currently out on disability, and that there has been a 26-person turnover over the past two years. Forcing the newest officers into overtime to meet operational needs, Bunce said, "use(s) these people up," and an additional position would help relieve the pressure.

- In a new addition to the budget, legislators, by a 10-4 vote, approved \$44,796 to hire a part-time Sheriff's Deputy to manage the body camera system for the County and, as a shared service, for the City of Ithaca, as well as potentially for villages which may purchase body cameras in the future. Undersheriff Brian Robison said the plan is to hire a retired officer, who is experienced in body cam administration and is expected to also be able to handle such needs for the City and any other municipalities, subject to a Memorandum of Agreement. He noted that actual cost would be expected to be \$30,000 (the maximum amount that can be earned by a retired officer, with no fringe expense), and that, with such a shared service arrangement, the City would be expected to waive its request for \$12,000 in support of City S.W.A.T. operations. A proposal, advanced by Legislator Rich John to make the position one-time for its first year failed to win support by a 6-8 margin.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:

In a new addition to the budget, by a 13-1 vote, \$10,000 in one-time funding was approved for the Child Development Council to further its mission. Funding needs identified by the Day Care Council relate to meeting needs of home-based providers through grants to support safety-related improvements to enable them to comply with regulations and meet the requirements to serve as childcare providers.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD:

By a 12-2 vote, \$14,668 was added to the budget to increase the Workforce contract with Tompkins County Youth Services to provide program monitoring and technical assistance. The increase adds 7.5 hours per week to a staff position to provide assistance in developing strategies for serving an older population of youth through targeted employment programs.

Other actions:

Legislators once again considered the Tompkins County Public Library's request for a Technology Librarian, but declined to upgrade the position to full-time status. Legislator Dan Klein had proposed

adding another \$41,207 to the amount recommended last week to fund the position at half-time, but that proposal failed to be supported by a 6-8 margin.

Legislators began to discuss a new proposal to set aside \$50,000 in multi-year contingent funding over three years for development and implementation of a plan, through the Human Services Coalition, for transitional housing, reentry, and recovery, but opted to delay consideration until the next budget meeting.

Potential Tax Impact of Recommendations to Date

In its actions to date, the committee increased target spending over that in the County Administrator's recommended budget by \$240,256 and the use of reserves by \$148,375. If the committee recommendations were approved, the county's total 2017 tax levy would increase by 3.51% (up by 0.51% from the 3% increase in the Administrator's budget), and the county tax rate would stand at \$6.66 per thousand dollars assessed property value, an increase of \$22.22 for the owner of a median-valued \$175,000 home.

The Expanded Budget Committee will meet Monday, October 17, for what is expected to be its final session to consider amendments, before recommending a revised Tentative Budget. All Expanded Budget sessions begin at 5:30 p.m., and are held at Legislature Chambers in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street (Second Floor), Ithaca.

The 2017 Recommended Budget, along with other budget-related information, is posted at the budget page of the County web site at www.TompkinsCountyNY.gov/ctyadmin/2017budget.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 592-3206; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

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