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*Inclusion Through
Diversity*

"Promoting excellence in County operations while respecting the needs of the people we serve."

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **October 27th, 2020 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature Expanded Budget Committee**

The expanded Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee of the Tompkins County Legislature approved amendments to the recommended 2021 County Budget, including a proposal to reduce the tax levy and leverage fund balance to address projected 2021 budget shortfalls.

Legislature Discusses Use of Fund Balance to Decrease Impact on Tax Levy, Approves Compromise

County Administrator Jason Molino gave a brief overview of the 2021 budget and impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on sales tax revenues, including projections for fourth quarter 2020 and 2021 sales tax. Molino shared variables for scenarios related to a proposal to leverage existing County fund balance to reduce the impact on the 2021 tax levy. Molino also detailed elements of the fund balance and expectations for reductions in State aid related to budget shortfalls due to the pandemic.

Legislator Dan Klein (D-Danby) moved an amendment to use \$2,817,712 from fund balance to zero out the proposed 2021 tax levy. Klein detailed the increases in fund balance over the past decade and asked that Legislators consider using fund balance to postpone hard choices until more information about the economic crisis are known. Legislator Klein stated, "The reason to have a healthy fund balance is to use it in an emergency." Following discussion, the movement was amended to increase the estimated sales tax to be collected amount by \$555,000 following Molino's earlier presentation. The motion failed 6-8 with Legislators Dawson, Granison, Kelles, Koreman, Lane, McBean-Clairborne, McKenna, and Robertson dissenting.

Legislator Mike Lane (D-Dryden) moved to amend the budget bringing the tax levy down to 3.3%, using \$550,000 from the fund balance and increasing the sales tax estimate by the same previously proposed amount of \$555,000. The motion failed 7-7 with Legislators Black, Champion, John, Klein, McKenna, Morey, and Sigler dissenting.

Legislators discussed other options to leverage fund balance to account for expected budget shortfalls before compromising unanimously (14-0) with a proposal from Legislator Anna Kelles (D-Ithaca) to use 50% of the balance proposed by Legislator Klein. Combined with the adjustment of expected sales tax, the proposal will use \$1,131,356, leaving a 2.21% tax levy increase, resulting in a tax rate of \$6.21, a decrease of 1.61%, resulting in a \$42.77 increase on the property tax bill for the owner of a median-value home (\$200,000). This will be the seventh consecutive year with a decreased tax rate in Tompkins County.

Legislators moved all approved amendments to be considered by the full Legislature on Thursday October 29 at 5:30pm for final budget approval with a vote of 13-1, Legislator Glenn Morey (R-Groton) dissenting.

Legislators thanked Committee Chair Martha Robertson for her leadership of the Expanded Budget, Capital, and Personnel committee meetings. Robertson extended praise to Administrator Molino and department leadership for their work in crafting the budget in a difficult time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Legislature Approves Addition of Chief Sustainability Officer to 2021 Budget

The Tompkins County Legislature unanimously approved an amendment (13-0, Legislator Anna Kelles (D-Ithaca) excused) to the 2021 budget adding a Chief Sustainability Officer. The position will lead the County's internal efforts to implement the Energy Strategy and work toward reducing carbon emissions from County vehicle fleets and facilities.

Past 2021 budget presentations and discussion can be viewed on the County's [YouTube page](#).
The County's budget process and documents can be found on the County Administration [Website](#).

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