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*Inclusion Through
Diversity*

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Photos for media use: <https://lightroom.adobe.com/gallery/1deb3bfb23204eabae30b726df14041a>

Highlights of the **September 14, 2021** meeting of the
Expanded Budget Committee of the Tompkins County Legislature

A recording of the meeting can be accessed here: <https://youtu.be/LkoB12EVnFw>

2022 Recommended Tompkins County Budget Presented

Interim Tompkins County Administrator Lisa Holmes presented her recommended 2022 Tompkins County budget, totaling \$194 million. The budget is recommended with a proposed 2.7% tax levy increase that would increase the property taxes for the owner of a median-priced home (\$205,000) by \$42. The Tompkins County budget covers the work of the county's government, including 27 departmental operating budgets and funding for several supported agencies. \$53.8 million is the local dollar budget, not reimbursed by the state or federal governments, nor offset by earned program income, which increased by \$4.23 million over 2021.

The Legislature previously passed a target tax levy amounting to 1.89% in April of this year which would reflect a maintenance of the County's current efforts. Subsequent approvals of critical staffing prior to the budget process increased the target needed for maintenance of effort to 2.7%.

Holmes presented on several local and national fiscal indicators impacting the recommended budget. Indicators included local data such as the local unemployment rate which is at 4.6% as of July 21 (compared to 5.4% in the Southern Tier Region and 7.4% across New York State) and local assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Safety Net data, showing caseloads generally declining over the past year. These indicators inform the County's anticipation of program needs and the health of the local economy. Holmes' sales tax projections continue a conservative approach for remainder of 2021 and through 2022, anticipating a continued slow economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The presentation showed 1.8% of growth in the local property tax base leading into 2022, which can be attributed to changes in assessment rolls. Holmes reported that the Assessment Department anticipates this changing significantly next year as the real estate market has shifted dramatically during the pandemic.

The total recommended over-target-request amount is \$7.7 million. The over-target requests would be funded by rollover, fund balance, and American Rescue Plan Act funds. Of the nearly \$20 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funding, \$3.875 million is to be directed at one-time requests from departments and agencies.

Several over-target-requests related to the Reimagining Public Safety plans are included in the recommended budget, totaling \$605,000. The numbers presented in the recommended budget represent the County's share, with the City of Ithaca anticipated to contribute funding as well.

Significant one-time requests from agencies included \$655,000 of support for the Tompkins County Tourism Program to support organizations reliant on room tax revenue, \$250,000 to support the Alcohol and Drug Council's open access detox and stabilization center (which would continue with a declining amount in 2023 and 2024), and \$220,000 for services rendered during COVID-19 by REACH Medical.

Risks presented included the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its ramifications, unknown outcomes of inflation, and recycling and materials management industry concerns and anticipated operating losses that draw from the solid waste fund balance.

Holmes shared that her approach to the recommended budget included meeting the financial goal set by the Legislature, restoring and supporting current County operations and sponsored agencies, supporting the Capital program, and preserving fund balance for anticipated community pandemic recovery uses being discussed by the Legislature.

Tuesday night's presentation included departmental budget presentations from Tompkins County Administration, the Finance Department, and the Human Resources Department. The recommended Administration budget includes the continued establishment of the Community Justice Center and other plans under the Reimagining Public Safety initiative, enhancements to language access programming for non-native English speakers, and the establishment of the Chief Equity and Diversity Officer position with target funding following its addition under one-time funding in 2020. The Human Resources Budget includes investments in organization-wide training, and support for Reimagining Public Safety plans on recruitment and training.

Presentation of 2022-2026 Tompkins County Capital Plan

Interim Tompkins County Administrator Lisa Holmes presented the proposed 2022-2026 capital plan, reflecting a robust investment in capital projects including a strategy to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2027. Holmes proposed that .5% of the new property tax levy (\$6.37m) be allocated to support capital investment.

The Legislature had previously determined that 75% of funds received through the federal American Rescue Plan Act, totaling \$14.89 million. The projects slated for use of the American Rescue Plan Act funds, which were selected via an analysis of the Act's framework and reporting guidelines, include:

<i>Project</i>	<i>Funding</i>
<i>Bridge NY 6 Culvert Projects</i>	\$1,723,175
<i>Facility Restoration Projects 2022 & 2024</i>	\$2,800,000
<i>Public Safety Building Improvements</i>	\$3,750,000
<i>Road Maintenance Program 2022-2024</i>	\$5,000,000
<i>Recycling Center Upgrades 2021-2025</i>	\$1,618,866
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$14,892,041</i>

Holmes outlined the green facilities plans designed to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2027. The new goal of achieving this feat over six years reflects a significant shift from the previous goal of 2035. The project's first phase includes changes and improvements to LED lighting, building envelope weatherization, water conservation, pipe and valve insulation, computer power management, controls optimization, window replacement, roof replacement, and geothermal installation. A \$1.75 million commitment to electrifying 60 passenger vehicles and construction of charging locations was presented as a key element in meeting net-zero targets.

The recommended capital plan includes the eventual construction of a Tompkins County Center of Government to be located in Downtown Ithaca which would house several County departments and eliminate the need for leased space and improve facilities for those departments. The building is estimated to cost just over \$30 million and would be funded through federal and state grants, county general funds, and bonds estimated at \$14.6 million.

The Public Safety Building that houses the Tompkins County Sheriff's Office and the Tompkins County Jail is slated for improvements under this plan, estimated at \$4 million. The recommendation to improve the current building rather than construct a new one follows bail and criminal justice reforms which have led to the local jail population (housed in the building) declining to unprecedented levels. The local jail's population hovers between 20-40 individuals reported monthly at the Legislature's Public Safety Committee meetings. The improvements to facilities would start in 2022. Legislator Amanda Champion (D-Ithaca) sought more information on the decision to improve the current building rather than construct a new building. Holmes responded that the change in the landscape with the aforementioned reforms and COVID-19 it would be very difficult to anticipate the size of the needed building, whereas this \$4 million represents essential improvements for the health and safety of building users and inhabitants. Holmes indicated that further discussion on the improvements and other building concerns would happen in the Legislature's Public Safety Committee.

Included in the plan is the continuation of the County's 10-year highway rehabilitation, reconstruction, and maintenance plan. The highway plan includes 8 bridge projects, 6 culvert replacements, facility improvements, and annual road maintenance program. The highway plan is funded by state, local, and American Rescue Plan Act funds.

Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT) Presents 2022 Budget

TCAT General Manager Scot Vanderpool presented the agency's 2022 budget. TCAT did not ask Tompkins County for an increase in funding over last year. TCAT indicated that thanks to CARES Act funding they ended 2020 \$6 million over budget. The presentation included a breakdown of revenues and expenditures, including significant pandemic-related impacts (ridership is still hovering at around 40% of 2019 levels).

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