

Highlights of the September 28, 2021 Meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Department of Planning & Sustainability Presents 2022 Recommended Budget

Department Director Katie Borgella presented her department's \$1.5 million recommended 2022 budget. Borgella indicated that there are 11 staff members who work on myriad programs and over-target requests each year. The Department's over-target requests for 2022 include the continuation of the county's Chief Sustainability Officer position and capacity building for the expansion of broadband service in Tompkins County. An over-target request was also proposed for a traffic calming and control study identified as part of the Reimagining Public Safety Collaborative plans, the cost of which would be shared with the City of Ithaca.

Borgella reported that the Chief Sustainability Officer, Terry Carroll, was hired this summer and has hit the ground running on green facilities and green vehicle fleet work. Carroll is the County's first Chief Sustainability Officer; the position was first supported in 2021.

Tourism Promotion Recommended Budget

Principal Planner and Tourism Program Director Nick Helmholdt presented the \$2.5 million tourism promotion budget, drafted in collaboration with Strategic Tourism Planning Board. The budget includes a \$655,000 over-target request that would derive from available American Rescue Plan Act funding and would bring support for the program up to pre-pandemic anticipated levels. The over-target request would be allocated proportionality to support the Convention and Visitors Bureau (Visit Ithaca / CVB), Cornell Cooperative Extension for Community Beautification Program work, the Downtown Ithaca Alliance for their festivals program, the Community Arts Partnership, and the Workforce Development Board. Helmholdt reported that the request would help return the CVB to pre-pandemic staffing levels.

Community grants given through the tourism program are slated to return for the 2022 budget. A new "Tompkins Outdoors" grant would be made available to organizations supporting outdoor activities, which according to Helmholdt would continue to play into the area's strengths attracting visitors.

Tompkins County Veterans Services Department Presents Budget

Department Director J.R. Clairborne presented his \$173,000 recommended budget. For the first two years of the department's existence in Tompkins County, J.R. has been the department's only employee. Two over-target requests were included, including one for support staff and one for a departmental vehicle. Clairborne stated that he hopes the support staff will be a Veteran so that they may be positioned for advancement at the County over time as they expand the department's work.

Tompkins County Department of Social Services Shares Recommended Budget

Department Director Kit Kephart presented her department's \$47.8 million budget. \$25 million of revenue come from state and federal funds. \$317,000 in local costs for over-target

requests were included, the over-target requests encompass several positions to support the work of the department including a third social services attorney to support child services. The total number of staff at the Department of Social Services total 181 full time equivalents.

Kephart detailed departmental challenges including whether the State will increase funding for foster care, how the end of the eviction moratorium and federal pandemic-related rental assistance funding will impact demand for local emergency housing services, and the future of state funding related to other programs including Medicaid.

Legislator Shawna Black (D-Ithaca) asked about planning for safety enhancements surrounding the Human Services Building in which the department operates. Kephart remarked that she is working with County Administration, to which Interim County Administrator Lisa Holmes added context that safety is a neighborhood-wide concern and as areas for improvement are identified, costs and recommendations will be brought forth to the Legislature.

Tompkins County Office of Human Rights Presents 2022 Recommended Budget

Director of the Office of Human Rights, Dr. Ken Clarke presented his \$312,000 recommended 2022 budget. The recommended budget includes a \$40,000 over-target request for additional education and promotion capacity, including support to bring more renowned speakers to [programs](#) hosted by the office.

Martha Robertson inquired about the office's current ability to make reports to the State office of Human Rights, to which Dr. Clarke responded that he continues to take inquiries and address problems directly and make connections to other agencies.

Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Presents Agency Budget

Cooperative Extension Director Ken Schlather presented his agency's recommended 2022 budget. Schlather expressed support to Legislators and indicated that there have been 20,000 participants so far in 2021 of CCE programs. The recommended support from Tompkins County totals just over \$658,000, and is allocated to administration of CCE and its programs.

Schlather broke down the organization's overall budget, showing the total County's \$658,862 appropriation proportionate to the whole \$8 million organization's budget. Schlather outlined three over-target requests including \$60,000 in additional operations budget funding, \$100,000 for agriculture / horticultural education center, and \$20,000 for implementation of the County's Food Systems Plan (more information on the Food Systems Plan can be found in a [previous highlights](#)). The request for the education center would support a meeting and classroom that would be flexible for CCE program and space needs – the OTR is recommended out of American Rescue Plan Act funding and the rest of the funding has already been approved by the CCE Board.

A fourth over-target request that would build on the work of the Childhood Nutrition Collaborative (program of CCE) to connect local individuals in need who are interfacing with the healthcare system with additional resources already available in the community through a navigator program was not recommended in the budget. The request would be \$50,000 /

year over three years and train students as resource navigators, support partnering organizations, and evaluate the program over time. Legislator Mike Lane (D-Dryden) inquired about how this would interface with the local 2-1-1 call line, to which CCE staff responded that they would interface closely as callers may need access to different services. Legislator Amanda Champion (D-Ithaca) indicated that she and Legislator Shawna Black (D-Ithaca) would be submitting an amendment to support the request.

Soil & Water Conservation District Budget

The district's recommended budget supported by Tompkins County is just over \$330,000. Director Jon Negley reported recent successes including water quality and land use planning, watershed management planning, invasive species management in Southern Cayuga Lake, and technical assistance throughout the county with stormwater planning.

For more information on the previous budget presentations, visit:

<https://www2.tompkinscountyny.gov/news/highlights-september-14-2021-meeting-expanded-budget-committee-tompkins-county-legislature>