



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **November 7, 2013** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Legislature Schedules Hearing on Nursing Home Transfer**

The Legislature scheduled a public hearing on the transfer of Ithaca's Beechtree Care Center—a procedural step that would convey title of the facility to the Tompkins County Development Corporation, to facilitate sale of Beechtree to the private company that currently operates the nursing home under receivership. The hearing will take place at the beginning of the Legislature's next meeting, November 19 at 5:30 p.m., at Legislature Chambers, second floor of the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca. Scheduling of the hearing was approved by unanimous vote. The Legislature is scheduled to act on the proposal later that evening.

BTRNC, which operates Beechtree under receivership, is awaiting State approval to become the permanent operator. An affiliated entity, 318 South Albany Street, LLC, has negotiated purchase of the facility with Housing and Urban Development-guaranteed financing for that purchase. Although the County does not own the non-profit nursing home (formerly the Reconstruction Home), its involvement comes from an action nearly 30 years ago that enabled the facility to secure tax-exempt financing, which required the County to take title to the property when the financing was paid off. Since that debt will be fully repaid as part of the ownership transfer, title will transfer to the County. As recommended, the County would then transfer title to the Tompkins County Development Corporation, and TCDC, through its standard procedures, would convey it to the new owners.

While legislators unanimously agreed to proceed to public hearing, several indicated that, while the County does not want to be in the position of owning a nursing home, full discussion is needed before the Legislature acts, including on environmental and labor issues. Both company and union representatives indicated that negotiations are in process and in good faith, and that while all employees have been retained, the focus on work rules and benefit levels. Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera was one who said she would like the Legislature to send a strong message to the company that it would like to keep good jobs in this community. Legislator Will Burbank said he wants to ensure that profitability not be borne by the workers. Budget committee chair Jim Dennis said that, as a legislator and member of the County Industrial Development Agency, he wants to ensure that the facility remains open, and noted that, while the transfer from the County to the TCDC technically would be for \$1, the company would assume a \$4 million debt.

*Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058.*

#### **Jail Renovation Project Discussed**

A dozen residents addressed the Legislature, expressing concern about the County's plans to renovate the Public Safety Building to replace little used indoor exercise space at the Jail with a covered outdoor recreation area, and enable repurposing of that space to provide dormitory space for seven inmates and decrease the need to board out inmates at significant cost. Speakers voiced deep concern that the project is misdirected and supports the prison industrial complex, a system of racism, and incarcerating many who should not be in jail, and maintained the funds should be directed to support programs. Thanking those who spoke and agreeing with their societal concerns about the country's prison system and incarceration practices, a number of legislators

explained their support of the renovation and why it makes sense, in the context of the County's long-standing opposition to State demands for a major jail expansion. Public Safety Committee Chair Brian Robison said the project is simply better using existing space to enable inmates to remain here, rather than boarding them out, and housing people in what he called a "more moral way," enabling them to stay closer to their families and services, noting that the County has operated for many years on variances from the State Department of Corrections, with no control over the number of people remanded to the jail. He and others noted the County's long commitment to Alternatives to Incarceration programs and that the County has committed to expanding the Human Services Building to provide improved, permanent space for the Day Reporting Program. Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne said the County, for over a decade, has successfully fought State demands that it initiate a \$20 million dollar project that would have more than doubled jail size, to 196 beds, which the County refused to do. And she said this project will provide people decent recreation space, something missing for years. Legislature Chair Martha Robertson said it is clear that the community cares deeply about incarceration issues, and that the Legislature cares, too.

*Contact: Brian Robison, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 351-3601; Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, 277-5104; Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.*

Other items:

The Legislature scheduled a hearing on the County's 2013 application for the New York State Housing Trust Fund Office of Community Renewal Community Development Block Grant program application—that hearing, required before the County can apply for funding scheduled December 3, 5:30 p.m., at Legislature Chambers, second floor of the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca. The funding is intended to address community development objectives in the county, and often has been used to support the County's Homeownership Program, operated through Better Housing for Tompkins County.

Reflecting on Tuesday's elections, Chair Martha Robertson characterized it as "a real turning of the page," noting that it was with very deep regrets that three members will change and leave the Legislature at year's end—Pam Mackesey after eight years on the Legislature, Pat Pryor, after four years "when she packed in more work than any of us could do," and Frank Proto, the Legislature's longest-serving member, in his 29<sup>th</sup> year of service. While an appropriate celebration of service will come in December, Robertson remarked, "I don't think we can appropriately say how we will miss you."

**- END -**