



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

Highlights of the **July 18, 2017** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Approves Funding for Environmental Protection Projects

The Legislature, without dissent, approved funding for two projects, under the County's new Natural Infrastructure capital program, and for a third from the County's Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic, and Recreational Resource Protection. (Legislators Carol Chock and Martha Robertson were excused.)

The Legislature allocated \$15,000 in Natural Infrastructure capital funds to support the Six Mile Creek Water Protection Project, through acquisition of a perpetual conservation easement on the Lounsbury Tract in the Town of Caroline, held by the Finger Lakes Land Trust, to protect the forested buffer to Six Mile Creek and the entire farm property. The allocation is contingent upon award of \$15,000 from the City of Ithaca and \$250,000 in State Water Quality Improvement funds, both being sought by the Land Trust.

The Legislature also approved \$20,000 in Natural Infrastructure capital funding to protect the Etna Swamp – Brotherton Farm Protection Project in the Town of Dryden through a perpetual conservation easement, also held by the Finger Lakes Land Trust, to protect the wetland system and Unique Natural Area feeding Fall Creek. Both projects are focused on protections that will assist in reducing sediments from stormwater runoff.

In a presentation to the Legislature prior to the votes, Commissioner of Planning and Sustainability Ed Marx noted that the Natural Infrastructure Capital program, approved by the Legislature, allocates \$200,000 per year for the next five years to invest in our natural infrastructure, with a focus on protecting and enhancing natural systems that help mitigate the impacts of intensive rainfall events; protecting overall water quality in streams, aquifers, and Cayuga Lake; and helping to decrease sediment loads in streams and the lake.

The Legislature also appropriated \$25,000 from the Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic, and Recreational Resource Protection for the Finger Lakes Land Trust's Emerald Necklace/Charles Spencer Preserve: Ott Tract Protection Project, supporting acquisition and easement development related to a 157-acre property on Jackson Hollow Road in the Town of Newfield. The project will secure open space to serve as a habitat connection between two Natural Features Focus Areas. The land is located in the Emerald Necklace Greenbelt, and is in close proximity to a number of forest areas, including Cornell's Arnot Forest, the Newfield State Forest, and Tompkins County Forest Lands.

Contact: Commissioner Ed Marx or Associate Planner Scott Doyle, Department of Planning and Sustainability, 274-5560; Dooley Kiefer, Vice Chair, Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, 257-7453

Funding Approved to Support Transitional Housing Plan

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislators Carol Chock and Martha Robertson were excused), allocated \$50,000 in Contingent funding to support the transitional housing initiative, developed by the Ithaca/Tompkins Continuum of Care. The funds were allocated to the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County, as lead agency of the Continuum of Care. As part of the 2017 County Budget process, \$50,000 in contingent funding per year for three years was approved, to support transitional housing to serve the homeless or those reentering the community from incarceration or recovery.

The 2017 allocation will support three projects, as recommended by the Human Services Coalition:

- \$27,000 to Catholic Charities, in partnership with Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services (INHS) for a “bridging the gap” rental subsidy to assist individuals in meeting criteria for a rental unit through INHS;
- \$5,000 to the Advocacy Center to establish an Emergency Housing Fund for victims of domestic violence, with the intent of preventing homelessness through one-time financial support;
- \$18,000 to Opportunities, Alternatives, and Resources (OAR) to support renovations to its “Endeavor House” project, which will provide transitional housing for those returning to the community from the Tompkins County Jail.

Contact: Anna Kelles, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 342-2036

Legislature Approves Name for the Tompkins Trust Building

Reconsidering a decision from its last meeting, the Legislature, by a 10-2 vote, approved the recommended name for the Tompkins Trust building on the Ithaca Commons, being purchased by the County as a new home for the History Center and co-located non-profits. The building will be known as the “Tompkins Center for History and Culture.” (Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne and Chair Michael Lane voted no; Legislators Martha Robertson and Carol Chock were excused.)

At the July 6th Legislature meeting, the measure had failed by a 7-3 vote, short of the 8 votes needed for passage. Legislator Peter Stein, who had been excused from that meeting, asked for the reconsideration vote. History Center director Rod Howe said community outreach concerning the name performed since the last meeting, as legislators had requested, produced limited response which was highly favorable. Before the vote, Legislator McBean-Clairborne expressed concern that the word “county” was not included in the name, remarking that she would support it, had that been the case.

Contact: Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 272-7582

Legislature Accepts 2016 Financial Report

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, accepted the audited Tompkins County Financial Report for the 2016 fiscal year. Finance Director Rick Snyder delivered a detailed report to the Legislature, noting that the County received an “unmodified opinion” on the basic financial statements and Schedule of Expenditures of Federal Awards for the year ended December 31, 2016, and that the Report identified “no material instances of noncompliance and no material internal control weaknesses” at the financial statement level. The County’s Undesignated Fund Balance increased by \$5,630,000 during 2016.

The 2016 Financial Report will be posted on the County website at www.tompkinscountyny.gov/ctyadmin/Budget/Financialstatements.

Finance Director Snyder also reported on the latest 2017 County Sales Tax receipts, noting that the County portion of sales tax distributions for June was up by 8.46%, compared to June of last year, with second-quarter receipts up by 3.33%. For the year to date, Sales Tax receipts are up 6.57%, compared to this time in 2016.

Contact: Finance Director Rick Snyder, 274-5544; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206

Proposal for Use of Arts and Culture Organizational Professional Development Funds Prompts Discussion of 2016 Grants

The Legislature, without dissent (Legislators Carol Chock and Martha Robertson were excused) agreed to grant \$2,000 in County Tourism Program funds to the Community Arts Partnership, to help support a professional development workshop focused on capacity building to market arts assets in Tompkins County. What prompted considerable discussion prior to the vote was an amendment advanced by Legislator Dan Klein to restore to five arts organizations \$26,500 in program grants, funded through Room Occupancy Tax revenue, which had been reduced in 2016 as part of the Arts and Culture Organizational Development Grants program administered by the Strategic Tourism Planning Board.

Mr. Klein maintained restoration was justified since Room Tax revenues and reserves since have increased in excess of the amount involved. Discussion ensued that covered, in part, the issue of Tourism Program reserves and what Commissioner of Planning and Sustainability Ed Marx described as the “extremely thoughtful process” employed by the STPB to determine and support funding levels for the range of County tourism programs. After discussion, the proposed amendment failed to win support by a 5-7 margin, Legislators Klein, Will Burbank, Anna Kelles, Peter Stein, and Dooley Kiefer voting in favor. (Legislators Carol Chock and Martha Robertson were excused.) Budget committee chair Jim Dennis, to whose committee the Tourism Program reports, said it is his understanding that the 2018 program allocation is to return to the 2015 level. *Contact: Legislator Dan Klein, 272-7582; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 592-3206.*

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