



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **October 1, 2019** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Approves Rifle Hunting Resolution, But Reserves the Right to Review in Two Years

Culminating months of thoughtful discussion and weighing much community sentiment on the issue, the Tompkins County Legislature, by a split vote of 8-6, tonight decided to seek State authorization to allow rifle hunting for deer and bear in Tompkins County, but leaves open the opportunity to review the matter in two years.

The resolution asks the County's legislative delegation to support an amendment to State environmental conservation law to add Tompkins County to the 58 other counties in New York State in which such use of rifles for that type of hunting is authorized during the three-week season period. Rifle hunting is already authorized in the county for other types of game. Voting no were Legislators Henry Granison, Dan Klein, Amanda Champion, Anne Koreman, Shawna Black, and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne.

Several Legislators said the decision was a difficult one for them, since they could see arguments on both sides of the issue. One of them, Legislator Michael Lane, said he heard from a lot of people who voiced varying opinions. "I respect the arguments that the use of a rifle is not going to be more dangerous," he said. "I hear the argument that says responsible hunters are not going to do the wrong thing...I'm not worried about the responsible hunters; I'm worried about the irresponsible hunters," he said. On balance, though, Lane said he concluded that the County ought to try this and moved the amendment to give the Tompkins County Legislature the right to revisit the authorization after a two-year period.

Legislator Anna Kelles said the issue was one of the most difficult for her personally which she has encountered, and that she conducted considerable research on the matter. Although Kelles remarked that she is anti-gun in general, she said she has concluded that allowing rifle hunting during that three-week period will not increase the number of guns in the county, that it would not increase hunting-related accidents, and that it relates to the practices of hunters not to mass shootings.

Legislator Black said she did not want to be a part of loosening the gun control in our county, and both Legislators Koreman and Champion said they would need a compelling reason to support such legislation, and that they could find no such reason to do that. Legislator Deborah Dawson, however, said she doesn't think the County needs a compelling reason to go along with the rest of the state.

The measure notes, in part, that the use of rifles, which usually entails the use of a scope, provides a clearer view and appears to be a safer hunting alternative; that the number of hunting related accidents in New York State does not appear to correlate with whether the hunter was using a rifle as opposed to another type of allowed weapon; and that counties within New York State that have changed their rules to allow deer and bear rifle hunting have experienced no corresponding increase in hunting related accidents. Control of the county's large deer population provides a useful public service, the resolution states.

Public Safety Committee Chair Rich John said the Legislature was fortunate to have a great deal of public participation on the issue, both pro and con, with a fair amount of education taking place. A similar authorization resolution had been considered in 2013, but at that time failed to win support.

Contact: Richard John, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 607-256-9794

Contingent Funding Approved for District Attorney Staffing, Human Services Building Assessment

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, approved additional funding for the District Attorney's Office, as part of the 2019 budget, to prepare for increased staffing needs created by new discovery requirements that will take effect in 2020 under New York State Criminal Justice Reform. The Recommended 2020 Budget, now before the Legislature, includes funding requested by District Attorney Matt Van Houten to support an additional Paralegal Aide position (more than \$78,000) and an additional part-time Confidential Investigator position (more than \$83,000) to enable the office to meet stringent new discovery requirements under the law. The Legislature' action allocates \$41,219 from the Contingent Fund to begin to fund these two positions in the current fiscal year to provide the District Attorney's office with the additional resources and sufficient lead time to fill the positions before the new rules under Criminal Justice Reform take effect.

Also approved by Legislators in a separate action was another Contingent Fund request for an item requested as part of the 2020 Budget. The Legislature, by unanimous vote, appropriated \$8,300 in contingent funding to support a professional security assessment of the County's Human Services Building, a one-time funding request from the Department of Social Services contained in the Recommended Budget. Legislators thought it best to approve the funding now to enable the assessment to be conducted this year.

Contact: Richard John, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 607-256-9794; Shawna Black, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 607-351-7855.

Public Budget Hearing Scheduled for October 29th

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, scheduled Tuesday, October 29 at 7:00 p.m., as the date for the public hearing on the 2020 Tentative Tompkins County Budget and the 2020-2024 Tompkins County Capital Program. The hearing will be held at County Legislature Chambers, located in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca. The Tentative Budget is scheduled for adoption by the Legislature October 15.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 607-844-8440

Among other business,

The Legislature approved a ten-year extension of an intermunicipal public transportation agreement between Tompkins and Cortland Counties, which authorizes Cortland County to operate a commuter transportation service to Cornell University and the City of Ithaca, under contract with First Transit, Inc. Tompkins County, with concurrence of Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT) approves extension of the agreement as of October 1, 2019. The public transportation agreement succeeds an initial agreement that had been approved by the Legislature in 2012.

The Legislature approved the award of \$10,500 in Fall 2019 Community Celebrations grants to six local organizations, funded through local Room Occupancy Tax funding as part of the Tompkins County Tourism Program and as recommended by the County's Strategic Tourism Planning Board.

A Public Hearing was scheduled for the Legislature's next meeting on October 15th regarding proposed amendments to the County's Comprehensive Plan. The hearing will be held at 5:30 p.m. at Legislature Chambers, located in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

Finance Director Rick Snyder reported on County sales tax receipts for August 2019. Non-reconciled receipts for the month show the County's portion of receipts up by 8.43% compared to August of 2018 and year-to-date receipts running 5.2% above a year ago.

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