



Inclusion Through Diversity

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## **MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 5:30 p.m., 9/4/12**

### **Administrator Releases 2013 Recommended Budget**

Tompkins County Administrator Joe Mareane has delivered to the County Legislature a 2013 Recommended County Budget that increases total spending by just four-tenths of one percent, sustains current levels of service, and can be supported within the 3.5% tax levy goal set by the Legislature. In his budget message to the Legislature, Administrator Mareane points out that the 2013 recommended budget is the first in four years to reflect stability, rather than further retrenchment.

The recommended budget includes one of the lowest property tax increases of the past 15 years, raising the average residential tax bill by just \$18.

“In an era characterized by economic uncertainty, stability is a real accomplishment,” Mareane notes. “The budget is the product of hard work and clear thinking by the County Legislature, department heads, and County staff as we have worked to adapt to a changed environment. It is also a reflection of a mutually-held understanding that success rests on the principle of shared sacrifice.”

The administrator says the budget is the product of careful, shared decisions over the past four years—to reallocate resources where needed, achieve higher levels of productivity with a reduced workforce, and allocate reserves modestly to avoid abrupt, jarring cuts. He recognizes the County’s largest unions for working with the County to achieve long-term wage agreements that align with the times.

“We are a different, smaller, and more efficient government than we were four years ago,” says Mareane. “But barring another economic setback, I believe we have regained a fiscal equilibrium that remains elusive for many other local governments throughout the country.”

The 2013 Recommended Budget supports total expenditures of \$164.8 million (an increase of 0.4%) and local dollar spending of \$80.0 million—a 3.1% increase that reflects diminished state and federal aid. The property tax levy would increase by 3.48%, within the Legislature’s 3.5% levy goal and slightly above the 3.31% estimated property tax cap imposed by New York State. The property tax rate would rise by 11 cents to \$6.78 per \$1,000 assessed value, resulting in the \$18 increase to the owner of an average \$160,000 home.

While maintaining essential services, the budget addresses what Mareane describes as some of the “cracks and fissures” in the organization revealed after consecutive years of cutting, and it invests in productivity-enhancing technology and training to help sustain operations with a diminished workforce.

Among allocations recommended to address areas of critical need: applying savings within the Highway Division budget to support a Motor Equipment Operator position, and increasing the highway materials budget by \$233,000; a \$159,000 increase in target support for the County Library (along with \$20,000 in onetime funding for technology) to begin to address a structural funding deficit; and \$170,000 in onetime funding to help sustain Tompkins County Area Development (TCAD), in light of recession-related decline in project fee revenue.

Among technology-related enhancements: adding a Deputy Director position to provide technical and managerial support for the Information Technology Services department, and also investing in several new systems including a records management and permitting system for the Health Department's Environmental Health division, a highway management system, and replacement of a 20-year-old case management system in the District Attorney's Office.

"I extend my deep appreciation to the County's department heads and County staff who have worked hard to craft a 2013 budget that addresses the priorities and targets established by the Legislature—and who have, over the last four years, contributed mightily to the efforts that have preserved core services and brought us to a point of relative stability," Mareane states. "I am also grateful for the guidance and assistance of the Legislature in shaping this budget, and for the leadership it has shown as we have navigated through some very turbulent fiscal times." The administrator also recognized the many contributions of Finance Director David Squires, who will retire next fall, for the "steady hand" and sound financial management he has brought to County finances over the past 20 years.

Legislators will review the recommended budget in detail at the first meeting of the County's Expanded Budget Committee (any legislator may participate) on Tuesday, September 11, beginning at 5:30 p.m. in Legislature Chambers at the Tompkins County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca—the first in a series of meetings that will continue through September and October. At these meetings, departments and agencies will have the opportunity to explain their budget requests and how programs would be affected by the recommended budget. The Expanded Budget Committee will accept or alter the Tentative Budget, and will present to the Legislature the Tentative Budget with its recommended changes. The Legislature then will vote on whether to accept the changes, and the amended Tentative Budget will be presented to the public for comment.

Initiatives to inform the public about the budget and gather input while the Expanded Budget Committee's deliberations are in process will include the County's annual public information meeting on the Tentative Budget later this month (date yet to be finalized). The formal public hearing to accept comment on the amended Tentative Budget will be scheduled in November, prior to the final budget adoption vote.

Public copies of the 2013 Tentative Budget are available at the County Administration office, 125 East Court Street, and at the Office of the County Legislature, 320 North Tioga Street. As of Wednesday, September 5, the document also will be posted on the County website at [www.tompkins-co.org](http://www.tompkins-co.org), where the public also is invited to comment on the budget.

*Contacts: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.*

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