



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer  
607-274-5555, Office  
607-227-2152, Cell  
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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **TCAT and Library Among the Topics, as Legislators End Initial Phase of 2013 Budget Review**

Legislators acting as an Expanded Budget Committee wrapped up the presentation phase of their 2013 County budget review tonight, looking over eight more proposed spending plans from County departments and agencies in County Administrator Joe Mareane's recommended 2013 budget.

Presenting were the Tompkins County Public Library, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT), the County Attorney, District Attorney, Solid Waste Management Division, Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council (ITCTC), Cooperative Extension, and Tompkins Community Action.

Presentations for both TCAT and the County Library focused on structural deficits proposed to be addressed in the 2013 budget.

For the Library, the County Administrator has recommended a \$159,000 target, the largest single property tax-supported over-target request in the recommended budget, along with \$20,000 in one-time funding for technology. The funding would enable the Library to maintain current staffing levels after years of reductions, but will require the Library to apply \$200,000 in reserves to support the operating budget, nearly exhausting its reserves. Library Director Susan Currie told Legislators she deeply appreciates the administrator's recommendations, but is concerned as she looks to the future, since the fund balance will disappear in the next year or two. Currie told Legislators the Library scrutinizes each expenditure and is reaching the limit of what it can do. "I fear we will end up being a shell of the library we should be, if this continues in the years ahead," she said. The Library will apply to the State for a waiver of the requirement to be open at least 60 hours per week, as a Central library serving a population of more than 100,000, but will have to come up with a plan to meet that requirement within two years.

For TCAT, the administrator has failed to include in his budget a requested \$100,000 as the County's sponsor share of a proposed \$300,000 capital reserve fund and another \$10,978 for more immediate capital expenses, actions that because of system partnership agreements would prompt the City of Ithaca and Cornell to also withhold their support. TCAT Director Joe Turcotte said that, while the system is coping with no operating increases for the past five years, there are looming capital needs, including the replacement of 17 of its bus fleet over the next three to five years, with questionable opportunities for state and federal funding. Turcotte said TCAT is currently experiencing its highest ridership ever, with the system frequently unable to meet rider demand with a stable and aging fleet. Administrator Mareane told Legislators they might consider splitting the capital request, since allocation of the \$10,000 for shorter term needs could bring in nine times that amount in partner, state, and federal dollars.

The District Attorney's budget includes \$182,500 in one-time over-target spending to support a new case management software system compatible with the County's computer-aided dispatch and records system used by area law enforcement agencies. D.A. Gwen Wilkinson said she expects the new

system to have immediate impact, in terms of efficiency and effective communication, and characterized it as essential to keep pace with the times.

For Solid Waste, as part of the budget, Director Barb Eckstrom noted that her budget would apply more than \$360,000 from the Solid Waste Fund Balance to keep the annual fee at \$56 per unit for 2013, an approach supported by the administrator. Eckstrom said challenges include a downward trend in recyclable revenues from fiber expected to continue through the first half of 2013.

Over-target spending for Cooperative Extension, recommended by the administrator, includes \$12,000 for some cost-of-living staff pay increases (less than what was requested), as well as \$42,000 in one-time funding to assist in administrative restructuring, including web-based support and development of fee-for-service programming. Director Ken Schlather noted that employees have not received a pay increase in three years.

The committee will begin considering recommended amendments to the County Administrator's recommended budget at its next session October 23 at 5:30 p.m. That meeting will begin at 5:30 p.m. at Legislature Chambers of the County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca. Additional voting sessions are scheduled for October 25 and 30, as needed.

An electronic version of the 2013 Tentative Budget, the Expanded Budget Committee schedule, and other information regarding the Tentative Budget are posted on the budget page of the County web site at [http:// www.tompkins-co.org/ctyadmin/Budget/index.htm](http://www.tompkins-co.org/ctyadmin/Budget/index.htm).

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

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