



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legislators Begin to Consider 2013 Budget Amendments

Seven weeks after receiving a recommended 2013 County Budget from County Administrator Joe Mareane, Legislators acting as an Expanded Budget Committee began to propose recommended changes to the budget, after hearing presentations from departments and agencies. Twelve legislators were present at tonight's meeting.

Reviewing nearly two dozen proposed amendments, legislators recommended the following changes to the budget. Tonight's decisions may be reconsidered at later expanded committee meetings and will require approval by the full Legislature to become final.

OFFICE FOR THE AGING:

By a margin of 9-3, legislators approved \$30,781 in target funding to offset the loss of State aid for the Weatherization Referral Assistance and Packaging (WRAP) program, underwriting staffing expense related to the home repair program for low-income seniors. Director Lisa Holmes said the funding would enable in-home assessment to continue to assist seniors in receiving help through other agencies. Several legislators characterized the program as an important element in the County's safety net.

MENTAL HEALTH:

By a vote of 8-4, funds were added to support a Psychiatric Social Worker position—\$46,205 in target funding, projected to be supplemented by \$46,000 in revenue. While not requested as part of the department's budget, Legislature Chair Martha Roberson, who proposed the amendment, maintained the position addresses a health and safety and a public safety issue, reducing delays in intake time and meeting individual and community needs, while addressing significant staffing cuts in the department since 2009.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES:

\$13,076 to support certified network engineer services was reclassified as one-time funding, instead of target, and \$2,000 in one-time funding was added to address overtime demands to serve other County departments—both changes approved by unanimous vote.

FACILITIES:

By a vote of 7-5, \$13,000 in one-time funding was approved to wire the Tompkins County Public Library Borg Warner Room for cable TV broadcasting. The expense would provide the basic infrastructure to enable County and other community meetings held in that space to be televised via governmental or public access channels.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT:

Without dissent, legislators removed from the budget use of \$285,716 in one-time and rollover funds to support a permitting management system for the Environmental Health Division, that project already approved by the Legislature this year, outside of the 2013 budget process.

COUNTY HISTORIAN:

Three years of one-time funding, \$2,000 each year, was approved, by an 11-1 vote, for the County's Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission, to help fund the commemoration through its scheduled conclusion in 2015.

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT:

By unanimous vote, \$570 in target funding was added to the budget, to correct an oversight regarding a rent agreement increase.

AIRPORT:

Also by unanimous vote, legislators approved expense and revenue shifts in the Airport budget, with no impact on local expense.

Other actions:

Legislators failed to support two proposals to modify how a structural deficit is addressed for Tompkins County Area Development (TCAD), declining to replace with target funding a portion of the \$170,000 in one-time funding recommended by the administrator.

Several personnel-related changes were proposed, but failed to win support:

- Proposed restoration of a Probation Assistant, in the Department of Probation and Community Justice, at a cost of approximately \$67,000, to handle low-risk caseload, failed by a 3-9 vote.
- For Facilities, the proposed addition of a Cleaner position, at a cost of about \$39,000, failed by a tie vote of 6-6, and a proposed \$15,000 increase in salary for a vacant Assistant Director of Facilities position, to reflect expertise in the area of “green building” construction, was discussed, then withdrawn.
- There was discussion, but no action yet, on whether a shared Sustainability Planner position in Planning, shared with the City of Ithaca, at a cost of \$25,567, should be removed from the budget, or be supported by dedicated contingency funding, since the position has not yet been approved as part of the City’s budget process.
- A proposal to allocate \$20,000 to begin to restore hours for staff in the Planning Department, after prior years’ budget reductions, failed by a vote of 2-10.

Proposals to increase funding for the agency Opportunities, Alternatives, and Resources (OAR) failed to win support. A proposal to increase the agency’s target funding by \$15,000, beyond the \$25,000 recommended by the administrator, was defeated by a 4-8 margin; a proposed \$10,000 increase failed by a 5-7 vote.

A proposal to increase the OAR Bail Fund by \$15,000 failed by a margin of 2-10, and an alternate proposal to increase in by \$3,000 was defeated by a 3-9 margin. Public Safety Chair Peter Stein said he did not believe the action necessary now as part of the budget, that such an action could be taken later, when the fund gets low.

Potential Tax Impact of Recommendations to Date

In its first actions, the committee added \$64,480 in target spending to the County Administrator’s recommended budget. If tonight’s committee recommendations were approved, the county’s total 2013 tax levy would increase by 3.63%, and the average county tax rate would stand at \$6.79 per thousand dollars assessed property value, up 12 cents from the 2012 rate and by only a penny from the Administrator’s budget.

The committee resumes deliberations Thursday, October 27. Another voting meeting could take place Tuesday, October 30, if needed, to consider any additional changes to the recommended budget

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

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