



Inclusion Through Diversity

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Administrator Releases 2014 Recommended Budget

Tompkins County Administrator Joe Mareane has delivered to the County Legislature a 2014 Recommended County Budget that maintains (but does not expand) County services, addresses funding challenges at several partner agencies, maintains the County's fiscal health, and can be supported by a tax levy increase of 3.54%--less than the 4% levy goal set by the Legislature. County taxes would rise by \$21 for the owner of an average home.

“The recommended budget ensures continuity of essential County services at a time when the economy is improving, but dependence on County services remains high” Administrator Mareane states in his budget message to the Legislature. “It strengthens the County's fiscal health by reducing our reliance on one-time revenues, keeping our reserves safely above the County's 10% fund balance goal.

“The budget proposes a slight increase in the County workforce to address critical areas of need, but keeps the roster 7.5% below where it stood five years ago,” the Administrator continues. “In accordance with our new Capital Improvement Plan, the Budget commits \$317,000 in additional funding—the equivalent of a ¾% increase in the property tax levy—to maintain our infrastructure. Importantly, the Budget marks significant progress in addressing large structural deficits that have been looming in several County-sponsored agencies.”

The Recommended Budget supports total expenditures of \$170.2 million (a 2.85% increase over 2013) and local dollar spending of \$81.6 million (an increase of 1.6%). The 3.54% tax levy increase, which is below the target set by the Legislature, is above the State's 2.3% property tax cap. The property tax rate would rise by 13 cents to \$6.93 per \$1,000 assessed value, resulting in the \$21 increase to the owner of an average \$160,000 home. (The increase for total spending in part reflects pass-through of new mortgage tax revenue and anticipated debt expense to be offset by federal reimbursements.)

Positive influences on the budget include some pension relief—a slight decline in the pension rate that represents the first decrease since 2009—and a more than half-million-dollar reduction in the budgeted cost for mandated programs, much of that attributed to anticipated Medicaid savings associated with implementation of the federal Affordable Care Act. (It was the nearly \$300,000 impact of the pension rate decrease that enabled the Recommended Budget to come in below the Legislature's levy target.)

Allocations to stabilize sponsored or partner agencies represent one of the key goals of the budget, and result from detailed analysis and study over the past year regarding budget challenges for these agencies. Among the allocations are the following:

- An \$81,000 (3%) increase in support for Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3). County support has risen by only 1% over the past four years, which has required a series of spending reductions by TC3 and a greater cost share for students.
- A 315,000 (12%) increase in support for the Tompkins County Public Library, including \$175,000 in ongoing “target” funds and \$140,000 in County reserves—to begin to address the Library’s growing imbalance between revenues and expenses, despite significant spending cuts the Library has made.
- \$680,000 in new Mortgage Recording Tax revenue to Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT), with \$120,000 in Mortgage Tax funding retained by the County to apply toward its partner share contribution to TCAT—the new revenue stream expected to stabilize both partner contributions and rider fares.
- \$218,000 in support to Tompkins County Area Development (TCAD)--\$150,000 from local room tax and \$68,000 in target funding. The allocation reflects a workgroup’s recommendation that the County fund approximately one-third of TCAD’s budget, in part through room tax, through 2018.

“I wish to thank the County department heads and their staffs for their professional approach to the challenges that mark every budget,” Mareane states. “All exercised the restraint we requested, and continue to find ways to maintain service levels provided at high quality to the community.” The Administrator also recognizes the Legislature for establishing clear policy guidance and instilling a culture of fiscal discipline. “When times were the toughest, the Legislature refused to engage in the nearsighted fiscal gimmicks so many others employed,” he notes. “As a result, today we are able to maintain services, stabilize our sponsored agencies, and maintain our strong fiscal health.”

Legislators will review the recommended budget in detail at the first meeting of the County’s Expanded Budget Committee (any legislator may participate) on Monday, September 23, beginning at 5:30 p.m. in Legislature Chambers, Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Tioga Street (Park Entrance), Second Floor, 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.

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 October 17, The formal public hearing on the amended Tentative Budget will be scheduled in November, prior to the final budget adoption vote.

Public copies of the 2014 Recommended Budget are available at the County Administration office, 125 East Court Street, and at the Office of the County Legislature, 121 East Court Street. The document also will be posted on the County website at www.tompkins-co.org (Click on “County Budget.”)

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