



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Little Talk About the Budget at County Budget Hearing

The Tompkins County Legislature tonight called its annual hearing to listen to public comments on the recommended 2014 County Budget, but nearly all the comments related to the Public Safety Building renovation that would add seven beds to the county jail and reduce the boarding-out of inmates that costs the County close to a quarter-million dollars a year.

Close to 30 people attended the hearing, and all but three of the 14 people who addressed the Legislature followed up comments made to the Legislature at its last meeting expressing deep concern about the jail project—registering their firm opposition to what they maintained is an unneeded and misdirected expansion, and urging that the county delay any action to allow a meaningful dialogue and public input, and to explore why the jail is overcrowded and what can be done about that.

No funds are allocated to the Public Safety project in the 2014 recommended budget, and while the project is listed in the capital plan for the next five years, no funds would be allocated until 2015 at the earliest, if the Legislature decides next year to proceed beyond design and bond the project.

Responding to the concerns, Public Safety Chair Brian Robison promised to schedule a presentation and discussion the December 9 meeting of the Public Safety Committee, which will include an overview of the project and the county's criminal justice system. He said he would work to have all components of the system there, including judges and those who deliver the County's Alternatives-to-Incarceration programs.

Regarding the budget, Craig Anderson and Rich Frantz, both from the town of Dryden, urged Legislators to work to reduce spending and lower taxes, and to keep that in mind when they vote on the budget. Ithacan Gino Bush, among those who spoke out on the jail project, also called for taxes not to be raised. Joe Gibson, of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program thanked Legislators for restoring funding to the program..

The \$170.2 million recommended 2014 budget, which includes \$81.4 million in local dollar spending, would raise the tax levy (the total amount of property tax revenue needed to balance the budget) by 2.95%. The countywide average tax rate would increase by 9 cents (1.34%), to \$6.89 per thousand dollars assessed property value, an increase of \$14.81 for the median county home, assessed at \$163,000.

The Legislature can further amend the budget before final passage. The adoption vote is scheduled for the Legislature's next meeting on Tuesday, November 19, which begins at 5:30 p.m. at Legislative Chambers in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building (second floor), 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca. There will be another opportunity for comment at that meeting.

Budget comments may be submitted online at <http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/ctyadmin/Budget/index> or through the county budget Facebook page. Residents may call the Legislature Office at 274-5434, if needed, to obtain contact information for their county Legislator.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584; James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; Brian Robison, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 351-3601.

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