

Transition, Preservation, and Progress

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In thinking about the work ahead of us in 2018, I'd like to talk tonight about transition, preservation, and progress.

The most casual glance at Tompkins County government for 2018 would have to identify ***“transition” as one of our inevitable priorities for the year.*** For the first time in my 16 years on the county legislature, we're bringing on a new county administrator, two new deputy administrators, and five new legislators, all within a few months. We all look forward to welcoming Jason Molino into the fold! Rumor has it he's already rented an apartment and we might be seeing him around town! This is a great opportunity to think creatively about new systems and structures. However, there is no doubt that these transitions will require special attention and time, while we also work to preserve what we have and make progress on our ongoing initiatives.

While embracing change, a second overall goal for us in 2018 might be termed “preservation.” We are anxiously watching developments at the state and federal level, because their decisions about budgets, regulations, and other policies affect county government in fundamental ways. New legislators, you're going to hear a lot about “unfunded mandates.” For example, although New York State has capped the growth in local Medicaid spending, the cost to county taxpayers is still very high. Approximately 24% of our property tax levy goes directly to pay for that one unfunded mandate, and the percentage is much larger in many counties. If the federal government cuts Medicaid, as seems very possible, we could see even more of the program's costs passed on to us.

But we can't just hold tight to what we have; ***we must move forward and make progress*** on many fronts where our path is already clear, but we still have much work to do. You will do that work in our committees. That's where the rubber meets the road, so as I describe the work of our committees for the year, I'll highlight some of those areas.

2018 LEGISLATURE COMMITTEES:

My thanks to our Vice Chair, Anna Kelles, for joining my meetings with each of you and collaborating on this list with me, in all its detail.

I'm making the following appointments, effective February 1, 2018. If you don't hear something on this list that we've talked about, it's because many of the appointments go through the oversight committees or follow another process.

A word about Vice Chairs: You'll notice that new legislators are named as vice chairs, with one exception. I hope that this will be an opportunity for mentorship, as you who are chairs work

closely with your vice chairs to develop your committee's priorities for the year and your monthly agendas.

Schedules: Cathy Covert has drafted a preliminary committee schedule; it's in your red folders. When we take a break in a little while, I'll ask you to get together in your committees and see if these dates will work. Cathy needs to finalize the schedule by Friday, so we don't have to finish this tonight, but we should start.

Budget, Capital, and Personnel – Mike Lane (Chair), McBean-Clairborne (Vice Chair), Morey, Klein, Sigler

The diversity of the County's workforce has been a concern for many years; there's been progress, but we can do better. I will ask Budget, Capital, and Personnel to make that a priority this year. A welcoming and inclusive workplace will help us recruit and retain quality talent that represents our entire community, and to better serve all our residents.

Facilities and Infrastructure - McKenna (Chair), Koreman (Vice Chair), Klein, Morey, Granison

In addition to the ongoing work of F&I, I've asked Dave to take a careful look at the space needs for the downtown departments, especially Administration and Human Resources. We're bringing new staff into Administration – the Criminal Justice Coordinator as well as a second Deputy Administrator – and at the moment they would have nowhere to sit. Human Resources is particularly stressed for space and that should be addressed this year.

Government Operations – Klein (Chair), Dawson (Vice Chair), John, Lane, Champion

Dan has told Anna and me that he's committed to continuing the review of our administrative policies that Deputy Administrator Paula Younger had led for several years – and the committee may even finish the job this year! In addition, Dan is interested in considering a few new policies, including such ideas as getting a Legislature sign on the outside of this building to the third rail of employee parking. Dan is a brave person, indeed.

Health and Human Services – Black (Chair), Kelles (Vice Chair), McBean-Clairborne, Granison, Champion

HHS is the exception to the idea of new legislators being vice chairs, as I mentioned before. In this case, Shawna will be chair with the strong support of Anna, last year's HHS Chair. Shawna's professional involvement with the human services community and demonstrated deep commitment to the issues in HHS will serve her well to lead this year.

This committee will need to closely follow state and federal decisions that will impact us and our residents, and keep the rest of us well-informed and prepared to advocate, if necessary. In addition, I hope you'll collaborate with Public Safety on cross-cutting issues and programs. Specifically, the opioid crisis is a very high priority this year, with relevance to both committees. You may want to hold joint meetings from time to time as the need arises.

Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality – Kelles (Chair), Champion (Vice Chair), McKenna, Dawson, Koreman

Among PDEQ's many issues, energy will always be a top priority. This year will be pivotal in working with NYSEG and the PSC on the development of non-pipeline alternatives to our energy needs. This initiative could be transformative if it proceeds with a full commitment to providing energy for our growing community while reducing our greenhouse gas emissions at the same time. The timing is terrific to get our Business Energy Navigator program up and running.

In a change from recent years, oversight of the Tourism program moves back to PDEQ from Budget.

Public Safety – John (Chair), Granison (Vice Chair), Kelles, McKenna, Black

Beyond staving off damage from state and federal decisions, we're under continued pressure from the State Commission of Correction regarding our jail variance. Therefore an immediate priority for Public Safety is to make sure we implement the new and enhanced programs that we've budgeted for, to keep our jail population low, to lower the population even further, and – most importantly – to give people the best possible opportunities for success.

It will be important for Public Safety to track changes at the state level, e.g., bail reform and implementation of Raise the Age. I also hope we'll see collaboration on issues with the City of Ithaca, such as Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, or LEAD, and possible co-location. Finally, succession planning in key departments should be on this committee's agenda.

Workforce Diversity and Inclusion – McBean-Clairborne (Chair)

I know Leslyn has great plans for WDIC this year, including updating the Climate Survey. I hope there will be a strong emphasis on our work with county departments to improve success in hiring and retention of diverse employees. If it would be helpful to report directly to the program committees on the demographics of their respective departments, I hope that can be done in collaboration with Human Resources.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Jail Study – folds into Public Safety (possible extra meetings in some months)

Old Library – finished

Transportation Committee – Lane (Chair), Morey (Vice Chair), Sigler, Black, Dawson

We would like the Transportation Committee to continue this year, to provide input and direction in the development of specific projects and serve as a point of entry into the County legislative process. Projects to consider include:

- possible Rt. 13 Corridor Study;
- Airport Renovation/Expansion;
- communication with TCAT about its plans for relocation;
- county-wide problem spots; and
- multi-modal initiatives, such as infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Housing Committee – Robertson (Chair), Sigler (Vice Chair), Kelles, Koreman, Dawson

Housing is a perennial problem that impacts all sectors of our community and economy, and we can't take our feet off the gas in looking for solutions. With a new senior planner joining our staff to focus on housing, appointing this committee is an effort to give additional attention and accelerate progress. In addition to implementation of the Housing Strategy and oversight of our ongoing housing programs, this committee will consider new initiatives, such as the possible Housing Capital Reserve Fund.

For 2018, these are Chair's appointments that are made annually, as follows:

Tompkins County Area Development Board of Directors

Martha Robertson
Anna Kelles (as Chair of PDEQ)

Chamber of Commerce

Martha Robertson (Legislature Chair has designated seat, per Chamber bylaws)
Anna Kelles, Alternate

Extension Service - One liaison, second liaison optional

Dave McKenna

Local Advisory Board on Assessment Review

Caroline/Danby – Dan Klein
Newfield/Enfield – Dave McKenna
Groton – Glenn Morey
Dryden – Mike Lane, Martha Robertson
Town of Ithaca – Amanda Champion, Shawna Black, Deborah Dawson
Lansing – Mike Sigler, Deborah Dawson
Ulysses – Anne Koreman
City of Ithaca – Henry Granison, Anna Kelles, Richard John, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne

Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee

Leslyn McBean-Clairborne – Chair

Ethics Advisory Board

To be determined

Ithaca Metropolitan Planning Organization (ITCTC Policy Committee)

Michael Lane

Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance

Michael Stamm

Tompkins Center for History and Culture

Rich John – Liaison. This is a new role. Rich has played a major part in the negotiations that led to our purchasing the Tompkins Trust building and establishment of the Tompkins Center for History and Culture, and he will be our point person going forward.

Additional appointments – The formal process for many of the other appointments we’ve discussed in the past week – such as the IDA and the Community Housing Development Fund – actually go through committees, so I won’t be announcing those tonight. There are also a few additional slots to be determined, so I may be calling you!

What else will we be working on this year, as we pursue transition, preservation, and progress?

All the work that you’ll do in committees will be supplemented by our outreach efforts with New York State and our state delegation. Many of us are going to the NYSAC Legislative Conference in a few weeks, where we’ll continue the conversation we started last month with the Governor’s representatives, on several crucial issues. Jason Molino will be joining us at NYSAC and for our lobbying meetings in the Capitol.

I will also reach out to our federal representatives to share our positions on issues that reach us at the county level. Please stay tuned for opportunities to directly meet with them and their representatives; it’s always more persuasive when more Legislators show up.

We look forward to strengthened intermunicipal collaborations this year, on law enforcement, the opioid crisis and other human services, housing, and energy, and I’m sure other issues will arise through TCCOG. And we’re excited about a stronger relationship with Ithaca College, with our long-term Deputy County Administrator Paula Younger’s move “up the hill.” We also hope to strengthen the support for TC3 that we jointly provide with Cortland County, and continue our strong working relationship with Cornell University.

As you know, I was chair of this body before, for four years. Among you only Leslyn, Dave, and Mike Lane were here then. I am grateful for the opportunity to lead this body again. I don’t know about you, but I’m glad we have four-year terms, so that we can all settle in for the work ahead. As we do, I would like to reflect on Joe Mareane’s nine years of leadership here, and what we can take from his example. Nobody can “be” Joe, a point I’ve already expressed to Jason Molino. But we can learn from the impact he had on all of us.

In my opinion, Joe’s success teaches us to share credit widely for our successes, while we also accept responsibility directly for our mistakes. Be proud of what we’re doing well but know that we can do better, and commit to it. Be humble, and always maintain a sense of humor. Respect experience but welcome the new. Embrace change and look for the opportunities it represents.

Spring is usually the time of renewal. Tonight, it feels like spring is a long way away, but as I look out at you, the 2018 Tompkins County Legislature, I feel that renewal is right around the corner. Let’s get to work!