

## **Building On, Building Up**

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Chair, Tompkins County Legislature  
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Thank you so much for the privilege of serving as your chair for 2019. I'm grateful for your confidence and for the opportunity to continue the things we've set in motion. And my thanks to Shawna Black for her interest in serving as our Vice Chair. She brings so much to the table and I look forward to working in partnership with her. I'd also like to recognize Anna Kelles, 2018 Vice Chair, for her incredible energy and intelligence in service to our county.

2019 will be a year for building – building on the foundations we set in 2018, building toward goals we should set for the next three years. And probably, building *up*, literally.

### **Building on the Work of Our Staff**

Before I launch into a discussion of our goals for the year and our committee appointments, I want to say a few words about our staff. Here's where "building on" really means something to me, and I hope to each of you. As legislators we come into this job with a wide variety of skills and experience. As any *honest* elected official will admit, we don't necessarily have any particular skills for our jobs, aside from whatever it takes to get one more than 50 percent of the votes. We get on-the-job training, if we're smart enough to look for it.

On the other hand, the people who work for Tompkins County are carefully selected for the exact positions they hold, and then coached and trained to continue to improve. Whatever their job, they are professionals, constantly looking for better ways to do things, other models to learn from, and ways to build on each other's work.

Whatever we might accomplish as legislators is built on the work of our staff. It may sound obvious, but we couldn't do anything without them. The work we do together is a team sport, and we legislators owe a debt of gratitude to the people who serve our community every day. In my humble opinion, we don't thank them enough. Please join me in recognizing the hard work of the dedicated employees of Tompkins County.

So, where are we now, and where are we going?

Twenty-five percent of our term is completed; what will we have to show for the next seventy-five percent?

A year ago, half of us had served only two years *or two weeks* on this body, and our county administrator wasn't even in the room! We didn't know what the deputy administrator positions would look like or who they'd be. And we had no idea where they'd sit, once we hired them!

A year ago, we'd just lost our jail variances, we worried that our boardout costs would balloon, and we didn't even know who would be running for Sheriff. At the state level the whole Legislature and the Governor were entering an election year. Some of us couldn't have even picked Cynthia Nixon out of a line-up! And nobody could know what the federal midterm elections would bring.

As of today, some things have shaken out and settled down. So now it's time to build.

### **Building on Relationships**

It's time to build on the relationships we've started with New York State. We've become really good at punching above our weight – for example, the Governor heard Amanda's footsteps coming and now he's proposing a *statewide* plastic bag ban!

Thanks to our advocacy with the state, we're closer to getting a third county judge than we've ever been. The Alcohol and Drug Council is better-positioned to receive state support for a full detox center, as they work to move into their new space on N. Triphammer Rd. And the airport project is fully under way! We will build on these and other successes when a number of us go to NYSAC at the end of this month, and meet with members of the new New York State Senate.

We will leave no stone unturned. As evidence, Deborah, Annie, and I went to the White House in August and made contacts to support our FAA proposal for the airport. In the Congressional meetings I had in Washington last week, I carried the message about our airport to seven Congressional offices and to both of our Senators. Did you know that five members of the New York delegation are committee chairs in Congress this session, including Rep. Nita Lowey as chair of the all-important Appropriations Committee? And of course, we benefit from Sen. Schumer's national leadership position. These contacts are important relationships to build on, as we look for funding, for a potential new TCAT facility, for example.

### **Literally, Building**

This year we will be all about building in the literal sense. Coming back from the cuts during the Great Recession, we have a staff that's outgrown its knickers. The Facilities and Infrastructure Committee will be busy, overseeing the renovations in the Old Jail, evaluating the Tioga Street property, and overseeing that project if it moves forward. Public Safety will be bringing us to a decision about the jail and about a possible shared law enforcement facility with the City of Ithaca. And we will be supporting more housing construction as well, helping to create a more sustainable and equitable community for all who want to live here.

### **Building on Last Year's Committee Work**

It seems that 2018 was a year for learning, with a lot of informational presentations in our committees. Building on that foundation, let's make 2019 a year for setting clear, achievable goals and keeping our focus there.

**I am asking that each committee establish three specific goals for the year.** This should not be a laundry list, but a considered choice of the top three priorities for your time and attention. The month of March is a reasonable deadline to agree on these goals, so that the remaining  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the year can be focused on that work.

**I will convene a meeting of committee chairs and vice chairs,** as soon as we can schedule one. We should discuss what this goal-setting means, as well as committee process and the optimal roles of committee members and staff. Stay tuned for that Doodle poll.

**Schedules:** Cathy Covert has drafted a preliminary committee schedule; it's in your red folders. I'll ask you to get together at the end of our meeting, in your committees, and see if these dates will work. Thank you.

## **2019 LEGISLATURE COMMITTEES:**

With that, I'm making the following appointments for 2019, effective February 1. The committees that have late January meetings will convene with their 2018 membership.

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

Once again, this committee should prioritize work to improve the diversity and inclusion among our workforce. The 2018 Climate Survey will be a strong tool to move forward on these issues.

### **Facilities and Infrastructure - McKenna (Chair), Koreman (Vice Chair), Morey, Lane, Klein**

As I've already mentioned, F&I will have a lot of exciting projects on its plate this year!

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

Mike's long experience on the legislature will guide the review of our administrative policies that Dan and the committee worked on last year.

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

A key issue for HHS this year should be tackling the issue of homelessness, in particular how we provide shelter through our new contract with St. John's.

### **Housing and Economic Development Committee – Kelles (Chair), Dawson (Vice Chair), Sigler, Koreman, Granison**

One of the main concerns Shawna and I heard in our meetings with you all was the relatively light workload of the Housing Committee and the heavier load of PDEQ. So this year, we're trying a rebalancing. Economic development programs – TCAD, Workforce, the Chamber, DIA, and Tourism – will move to a new "Housing and Economic Development" committee.

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

We're hoping that "PEEQ," as it'll be called, will not feel as jammed this year. The two committees, HED and PEEQ, will meet during the same week, at the request of staff. This will facilitate planning and managing their workload. Deborah and Anna are already coordinating closely for their joint work.

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

Getting to know our new Sheriff and Undersheriff, transition in DOER, and recommendations to the full legislature on our jail and Road Patrol facilities are among Public Safety's big tasks for the year.

**Workforce Diversity and Inclusion – McBean-Clairborne (Chair), Koreman, Kelles, Granison**

Following up on the results of the Climate Survey is just one of many goals that Leslyn and WDIC will have in 2019.

**SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

**Transportation Committee** – It's great that the Transportation Committee has moved the conversation about Rt. 13 to action, and the next steps are in the capable hands of the Planning and Sustainability Department. Mike Lane and Deborah Dawson will be on the Steering Committee for that project, with other stakeholders; the remaining work will go to F&I.

**For 2019, the following are Chair's appointments that are made annually:**

**Tompkins County Area Development Board of Directors**

Martha Robertson, Anna Kelles (as Chair of HED)

**Chamber of Commerce**

Martha Robertson (Legislature Chair has designated seat, per Chamber bylaws)  
Shawna Black, Alternate

**Extension Service -**

Dave McKenna, Amanda Champion

**Local Advisory Board on Assessment Review** – on hold for 2019; GO should discuss this in July 2019 to advise us as to whether this will come back in 2020.

**Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee**

Leslyn McBean-Clairborne – Chair

**Ethics Advisory Board**

Rich John - Chair

**Ithaca Metropolitan Planning Organization (ITCTC Policy Committee)**

Michael Lane

**Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance**

Heather McDaniel

**Tompkins Center for History and Culture**

Rich John – Liaison

**Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization**

Deborah Dawson, Delegate; Anne Koreman, Alternate

**Special Negotiating Committees** to conduct collective negotiations with employee organizations. CSEA Blue Collar has agreed to a 6-year contract, as we will vote tonight.

To all committees for all bargaining units: Jason Molino, Amy Guerri

CSEA White Collar: Glenn Morey, Shawna Black

Corrections Union: Rich John, Anne Koreman, Derek Osborne, Jennifer Olin

Road Patrol/Civil Division: Mike Lane, Henry Granison, Derek Osborne, Jennifer Olin

**Additional appointments** – The appointments to the IDA will go to PDEQ on January 24, as follows: Rich John, Chair; Martha Robertson, Vice Chair; Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Mike Sigler, Jennifer Tavares, Laura Lewis, and John Guttridge.

TCAT – Deborah Dawson has already begun a new term on the TCAT Board of Directors.

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As we sit here tonight, the country is in unprecedented chaos. The federal government is in the longest shutdown in history, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day today. Polarization seems worse than ever, even more intractable than during the Vietnam War protests, for those of us old enough to remember. I could go on, but I'll spare us all.

At least in our little corner of the country, we don't have to contribute to that. We each have a choice. Will this year of "building" include building each other up? Let's remember that the foundations of trust and respect that have made this an exceptional organization have taken years to build up. Let's *listen to each other* and to our other partners in this work. The votes come and go. I've taken enough votes during my 17 years here to know that what lasts are NOT the votes won or lost, but the relationships I've been privileged to build.

Let's commit to truly working together this year. We work for the people, and we do our best work when we listen and learn. Let's make the most of the next seventy-five percent. Thank you.