

Tompkins County Council of Governments
 Regular Meeting Minutes - Approved
Thursday, January 23, 2014 3:00 PM
 Scott Heyman Conference Room

Attendance

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Herb Engman	Member - Town of Ithaca	Present	
Elizabeth Thomas	Member - Town of Ulysses	Present	
Kate Supron	Co-Chair, Village of Cayuga Heights	Present	
Betty Conger	Member, Village of Groton	Present	
Irene Weiser	Member - Alternate, Town of Caroline	Present	
Bill Goodman	Member - Alternate, Town of Ithaca	Present	
J.R. Clairborne	Vice Chair, City of Ithaca	Present	
Ann Rider	Co-Chair, Town of Enfield	Present	
Ric Dietrich	Member, Town of Danby	Present	
Marty Petrovic	Member, Village of Trumansburg	Present	
Jim Zimmer	Member, Village of Dryden	Present	
Kelly Smith	Member, Town of Groton	Present	
Don Barber	Member - Alternate, Town of Caroline	Present	
Joe Mareane	Tompkins County Administrator	Present	
Marcia Lynch	Public Info. Officer, County Administration	Present	
Michelle Pottorff	Minute Taker, Legislature Office	Present	
Mary Ann Sumner	Member, Town of Dryden	Present	
Vera Howe-Sraight	Member - Alternate, Town of Enfield	Present	

Municipalities Not in Attendance: Tompkins County, Village of Lansing, Village of Freeville, Town of Lansing, Town of Newfield

Guests: Tom Scriber, Gary Stewart, Mary Opperman, Kaitlyn Schickel, Cornell University Community Relations; Ithaca Times

Call to Order

Ms. Supron, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:06 p.m.

Greeting/Sign In/Review Agenda

There were no changes to the agenda.

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RESULT:	ACCEPTED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Betty Conger, Member, Village of Groton
SECONDER:	Irene Weiser, Member - Alternate, Town of Caroline
AYES:	Robertson, Dietrich, Engman, Thomas, Supron, Shawley, Conger, Myrick, Sumner, Weiser, Goodman, Clairborne, Miller, Hartill, Rider, Rankin, Morey, Dietrich

Start-UP NY and Related Economic Development Issues

Ms. Opperman said Start-Up NY is a program run through the State. The three colleges (Cornell, Ithaca, and TC3) recently announced their intention to run a new business incubator at the Carey Building and they are working very closely with the State, the County, and the City to try to bring the right kind of economic growth to the community. The Start-Up NY program is only one component of the overall effort. She said Start-Up NY was originally envisioned to advantage the SUNY system in the economic efforts so it is written with an eye towards public universities and how they can participate in economic development in their cities, towns and regions. It also has a component for private universities so the basic concept of the plan is that universities will identify space that they have available to attract businesses into the community that will have an alignment with the academic mission of that college or university. The outcome the Governor wants is to grow new net jobs in each community with the expectation that those new jobs will grow well with the new partnership with the students and faculty expertise from the college or university. If the space is currently off the tax rolls it stays off the tax rolls and if it is on it will remain on the tax rolls.

Ms. Opperman said this puts universities in a different role than they have played before in terms of economic development and it will need to be tested to see if it will work. Cornell has had a serious but somewhat conservative approach to the availability of space and are being contacted with a lot of interest with the most being interested in the ones with businesses associated with tax advantages. She noted they have the right of refusal and do not have to take a business. She said there has not yet been any international interest but they have had some local companies, some associated already with Cornell, some local companies that are interested in staying here and growing, and interest by a couple of very small companies that are interested in relocating here. Ms. Opperman said their goal is to be open for business and to take those calls and use partnerships to figure out where they best belong. It was noted during the presentation that no business coming in can compete with a business in the region. While the initial rollout is to properties that are Cornell's they do have the ability to some extent to partner on a property that doesn't belong to them.

Ms. Rider asked how they would like to receive information on square footage that is available. Ms. Opperman provided contact information and asked that she be contacted directly mgo5@cornell.edu and they will keep a log of this information. She said they have now submitted their plan and the Empire State Development Corporation will spend the next 60 days reviewing all plans and if it is not rejected during that time it will be accepted. She stated funding for the incubator fits into a regional hotspot. The State would like every college or university to think about submitting a plan.

Mr. Dietrich asked how this would affect a community's taxes. Ms. Opperman said if a property is already off the tax rolls it can stay off the tax rolls but a property cannot be removed from the tax rolls to get that particular tax abatement. She said they have a particular interest in agriculture in food science and food safety because of Cornell's School of Agriculture and Life Sciences but it by no means is the only one.

It was stated that the State has a fairly specific rules about what kinds of companies qualify. Criteria is available online but they essentially rule out services such as a new law firm or accounting firm. They have rules that do not allow businesses that sell goods that are produced by another company and resold through a storefront.

The comment period for the plan has passed; however, anyone wishing to still make comments may send them to Ms. Opperman. They will provide updates whenever available and will also attend future meetings upon request. They are also willing to meet with individual communities to discuss this in further detail.

Discussion - Energy Conservation

Ms. Weiser reported they have been successful in receiving a grant for \$70,000 in funds and \$30,000 for in-kind services for the Home Energy Rating and Disclosure Ordinance project. The local Cleaner Greener Review Committee's Regional Economic Development group did not support the grant; however, the State did. The grant is to develop a home energy rating disclosure ordinance. They will be hiring a project manager who will coordinate with an attorney and develop this ordinance. She said they are aware most municipalities are not in a position to adopt an ordinance at this time requiring that they disclose their home energy ratings by the end of this year. Since this is not realistic they are tasking the program coordinator with developing an implementation plan of how to get from no home energy rating disclosures to eventually making it something that a town would at least consider doing.

Ms. Weiser said there are model home energy rating disclosures that will be reviewed and initially the vision is to work by way of market incentive. There may be some homebuyers, realtors, and sellers that would be interested in this and they will be working with various stakeholders to talk about how to develop this. They envision this as beginning on a voluntary basis. They learned at a meeting yesterday that it may be legally questionable. There are other disclosure requirements that currently exist such as for radon ratings. However, someone cannot be required to do the test but if they have done a test they are required to disclose what the ratings are. There are still many questions that need to be addressed, including how to enter into a contract with the State.

Ms. Weiser said contract negotiations are supposed to begin in early March and they will be reviewing what has been written up to this point. It is also a good time for towns who are not yet participating to come on board. The participating municipalities at this time are the Towns of Caroline, Danby, Dryden, Ulysses, Ithaca, and the City of Ithaca. She clarified there will be two layers of groups - one will be the administrative group that will include the municipal representation; and they expect the Program Manager will be responsible for convening a group of stakeholders such as Better Housing of Tompkins County, Tompkins Community Action, Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, realtors, and others, to look at how this would be implemented.

Ms. Weiser said there are a lot of interesting possibilities for Tompkins County for a variety of initiatives related to sustainability and alternative energy and energy conservation and asked if there is interest by members to develop a standing committee. Based on the interest expressed Ms. Weiser and Ms. Sumner will draft a resolution to be considered at the next meeting.

Report from Nominating Committee/Selection of Vice Chair

Ms. Thomas reported on behalf of the Nominating Committee and said there were several members who volunteered to serve in the capacity of Vice Chair. Following a brief discussion it was MOVED by Ms. Weiser, seconded by Ms. Sumner, and unanimously adopted by voice vote by members present, to appoint J.R. Clairborne to the position of TCCOG Vice Chair.

During a brief discussion of the rotation process for the Vice Chair to move to Co-Chair next year, Mr. Clairborne noted his moving to that position would be contingent upon his reappointment by the Mayor to represent the City on TCCOG.

Report from Cable Committee

Mr. Engman said a letter will be sent out this week to Time Warner Cable advising them the Committee is now ready to begin negotiations. There was a discussion by members over the increased frustration by customers over the change Time Warner made in their technology which has resulted in a loss of service to their customers, including municipalities. Mr. Clairborne said as a member of the City's Public Access Committee he would be willing to communicate any concerns TCCOG members have.

State Tax Relief Commission's Property Tax Freeze

Tax Commission Report (ID # 4691)

Mr. Mareane provided members with a Power Point presentation on the Property Tax Commission Relief report. He explained the Tax Relief Commission was set up and after nine weeks of work and has issued its recommendations and noted none of the members of the Commission represented local governments or school districts. He reviewed the major recommendations contained in the report that impact local governments and schools. The first is a two-year freeze on local property taxes and the second is circuit breaker which would link property taxes to a person's ability to pay which would only be available to homeowners who live in jurisdictions that had adhered to the property tax cap. He believes this would mean the County, the town, school district, and City would have to adhere for this to be applied.

In the second year to get the rebate check not only would the municipalities have to stay within the cap, they would also have to enter into a shared service arrangement or consolidated services plan with a savings of the equivalent of three percent of the tax levy. The plan is silent on year three.

If the plan had been in place in 2014 budget cycle the County would have to cut an additional \$300,000 out of the budget to lower the budget to the cap which is the equivalent of five positions in the budget. He said under the plan advanced by the Tax Relief Commission the owner of an average home would have saved slightly under \$14.81 - \$7.49 through a lower County tax bill than the one passed, and a check from the State in the amount of \$7.31. He said the cost implement the rebate program would also have been significant.

Mr. Mareane said he believes there is a better way than the course recommended to achieve significant sustainable tax relief in a manner that embrace's the Governor's call for bold realignments of governmental responsibilities that produce optimal efficiencies, economies of scale and a more equitable distribution of costs. He suggested the State initiate a four-year realignment of the relationship with its counties that will result in the State assuming the full costs of its major programs that are now being administered and co-funded by counties. If the State were to assume costs for its own programs he believes there would be permanent, sustainable, and historic reductions in property taxes.

He explained the alternative proposal contains the following phases:

Phase I - The State takes over the full cost of the Medicaid program, bringing New York State in line with nearly every other state in the country. If this were to happen there would be a 26% reduction in the property tax in Tompkins County.

Phase II - The State takes over the full cost of its PreK Special Education and Early Intervention Programs. This would result in an additional \$2.6 million property tax cut.

Phase III - The State takes over the full cost of its constitutional obligation to provide legal defense to the indigent and child welfare programs. This would result in another \$4.2 million property tax cut.

Phase IV - The State takes over the full cost of its Temporary Assistance programs. This would result in another \$6.9 million property tax cut.

At the end of the four-phase program the realignment of costs would be complete and County

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taxes could be cut by over \$25.5 million, or 57%. The annual County tax bill on an average \$163,000 home would drop from \$1,122 to \$487. He said if the State were to take over the unfunded mandates counties would have to step up and assume accountability for its costs. He said if the goal is meaningful and sustainable property tax relief to deal with what the Governor has described and the most onerous tax that we have and one that is discouraging economic development this is a way to get there. This was presented to the County Legislature this week and will be presented at the New York State Association of Counties Conference tomorrow.

It was mentioned that the Association of Towns that is working on a similar effort on behalf of the towns. Mr. Engman suggested the towns, villages, and City do something similar as they also have unfunded State mandates to deal with. He asked that members try to develop a list of unfunded State mandates, along with the cost and provide him with the information.

It was suggested there be information communicated to the public and that there be a discussion at the next meeting to address how to support the County's work on property tax relief.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:40 p.m.