

Legislature Adopts 2012 Tompkins County Budget

After two-and-a-half months of budget deliberations, the final action took less than ten minutes, as the Tompkins County Legislature tonight adopted the County's 2012 budget and its capital program for the next five years.

The adopted budget is identical to the amended tentative budget approved by legislators earlier this month. It increases the County tax levy by 3.99% and the countywide average tax rate by 3.1% to \$6.67 per thousand. The budget passed by a vote of 11-2, with Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no. The levy increase is just over 1% above the 2.92% level that would be required to fall within the state property tax cap.

Budget committee chair Jim Dennis remarked that the core of the budget contains 24 fewer staff positions, making 68 fewer County positions since 2009, but that the County was able to sustain crucial programs during a time of ongoing economic downturn. The situation, he said, is not without risks, especially because of fiscal uncertainty at the State level, but the County was able to avert major layoffs and cutbacks because of matters that cut its way. Dennis noted that some counties are spending up to 70% of their fund balance to maintain services, something he described as "frightening."

Dennis, Legislature Chair Martha Robertson, and County Administrator Joe Mareane all thanked staff and their colleagues for hard work throughout the long budget process. Mareane told legislators, "I appreciate what you've done, and what agencies and department heads have done, in a year that was as challenging as ever." He credited legislators as being "careful, deliberate, thoughtful, caring about services, but also about the taxpayer." And he said, "We will now commit ourselves to keeping this budget in check."

Legislator Kiefer said, because the Legislature worked hard to arrive at a good compromise, she had the luxury of voting no. She said she remains concerned that reductions made in this budget will "set ourselves up for a harder time next year."

Comparison of 2011 and 2012 Tompkins County budgets:

Total Expenditures

2011: \$160,047,676

2012: \$161,924,448 (Percent change: 1.2)

Local Share (spending on local programs; revenue raised from the local community, primarily through property and sales tax):

2011: \$76,118,983

2012: \$77,511,307 (Percent change: 1.8)

Property Tax Levy (total amount to be collected from owners of taxable property):

2011: \$40,600,519

2012: \$42,220,798 (Percent change: +3.99)

Property Tax Rate (countywide average amount per \$1,000 of assessed property value):

2011: \$6.47

2012: \$6.67 (Percent change: +3.1)

Tax change on a \$160,000 home \$31.85

In a separate action, the Legislature, by unanimous vote, also set the 2012 Solid Waste Annual Fee, which holds the fee steady at its current rate of \$56.00 per billing unit.