



Inclusion Through Diversity

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October 9, 2012
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Turnout Light at Legislature's Annual Community Budget Forum

The Legislature tonight held its annual Community Budget Forum, inviting citizens to learn about and comment on the County's tentative 2013 budget currently under review by the Legislature.

Only three people attended, and two of them spoke—Newfield resident Richard Hunter reminding Legislators of the difficulty of coping with increasing taxes on a retiree's fixed income. He challenged Legislators to indicate how they would make significant cuts to the budget. County Administrator Joe Mareane responded that is actually what the Legislature has had to do over the last several years, taking a balanced approach of reducing its employee roster, cutting major programs, achieving wage restraint in collaboration with its major unions, and enacting modest increases in taxes. That approach, he said, has achieved stability, which has paid off in the budget he is recommending for next year.

The proposed "maintenance of effort" spending plan increases total spending by only 0.4%, the tax levy by under 3.5%, and the tax rate by 11 cents, an increase of \$18 to the owner of the average \$160,000 home. Mr. Hunter urged the County to push back against the State regarding increased mandate expense, which is behind the levy increase. Legislature Chair Martha Robertson said the County is working hard, along with other counties, to do that, to drive home the message to the State that "the property tax cap without mandate relief is a sham."

Tommy Miller, who serves as an administrator for family programs with Catholic Charities and Franziska Racker Centers, spoke of the true importance that the development and welfare of children has to all society, thanking the Legislature for its dedication and commitment to programs serving children and families.

Legislators meeting as an Expanded Budget Committee will resume hearing departmental budget presentations tomorrow, and will begin recommending modifications to the administrator's budget later this month. There are still opportunities to comment on the budget as the process moves forward. Citizens are invited submit their budget comments online at the County's web site at www.tompkins-co.org (click on "County Budget"), and are encouraged to visit the County's *Facebook* page on the budget at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Ithaca-NY/Tompkins-County-NY/111919856461>. (The *Facebook* page may also be accessed through the budget page on the County web site; you do not need to have a *Facebook* account to view the page.)

Citizens may address legislators on the budget at the beginning of any County Legislature meeting and at the Legislature's formal budget hearing, which will occur in November. All budget meetings, including the hearing, take place at Legislature Chambers of the County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 387-4058.

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