

News Details - Legislature Approves Aquatic Invasive Species Law

The Legislature, after more than an hour of discussion, approved a new Local Law to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species, such as Hydrilla, in Tompkins County. The final approval vote was 12-1, with Legislator Dooley Kiefer voting no. (Legislators Kathy Luz Herrera and Nathan Shinagawa were excused.)

The new Local Law prohibits anyone from launching, hauling, or attempting to enter or exit a watercraft from a water body with any plant or animal material visible to the eye in or attached to the watercraft. It also prohibits transportation into or within the county with such material visible or attached to such a craft, and bars anyone from introducing any invasive aquatic material into any body of water. The law requires that any such material removed from watercraft must be discarded away from the shoreline, in a manner that prevents the items from reentering a body of water.

Much of the discussion related to penalties for violating the Law. The Law states that anyone who engages in any activity prohibited by the law will be subject to a violation under law and a maximum fine of \$250.00, if convicted. Citing the seriousness of the issue, Legislator Pat Pryor proposed an amendment that would have escalated repeat offenses to the level of a misdemeanor, subject to a maximum fine of \$1,000. After discussion, the amendment failed by a 3-10 vote, Legislators Pryor, Pam Mackesey, and Dooley Kiefer voting in favor. Several Legislators suggested setting infractions at the misdemeanor level now could potentially be counterproductive and lead to problems with enforcement and posing a considerable burden on public safety staff.

Legislators, by a 10-3 vote, also added dredging, as approved by the State Department of Environmental Conservation or another appropriate regulatory agency, to exceptions to prohibitions under the Local Law. Legislators were told some concern had recently been expressed by the City of Ithaca that the law, as written, could interfere with plans to dredge the Cayuga Inlet. Legislators Kiefer, Mackesey, and Carol Chock did not support that addition—Kiefer maintaining that change was unnecessary and not timely, and making it clear the addition of that provision was the sole reason she did not vote to support the Local Law.

Legislator Will Burbank, Chair of the Legislature's Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee, thanked his fellow Legislators for giving attention to the invasive species law to enable it to get in place this season. Mr. Burbank also thanked staff and members of the Hydrilla task force for their advice and assistance in preparing this important Local Law.

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