



Tompkins County Legislature

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2023 State of the County

I am honored to report that the State of Tompkins County is strong. This fact is exemplified by the upcoming County Administrator's report on departmental achievements that you will hear in a few minutes.

We're addressing our community's most pressing challenges – mental health, homelessness, food insecurity, climate change, and housing - while maintaining efforts critical to our essential service delivery. We also continue to make strides even while recruiting new employees which has become even more challenging than ever.

Budget & Economy

Whereas last year we saw a record State budget with a prolific economy recovering from COVID-19, I recognize that going into the 2023 budget we have concerns about the global economy and where things will shake out with inflation's rising prices that are impacting households and our organization.

These are critical discussions that must inform our decision making. I know this Legislature is at its best when we balance our concerns, tempered expectations, and new ideas as we plan our budget.

Historically, we have been careful stewards of public funds, and my hope is we will continue to have a robust organization and healthy fund balance that can help us weather another storm, if needed.

Employees & Infrastructure

We will soon receive the initial results of our, much anticipated, compensation study. This will give us benchmarks to ensure that we're on the right track offering wages that are fair and attractive to employees and recruits.

Tompkins County is a great place to work, and we will have many considerations to make in the coming year related to how we compensate our colleagues. I continue to contribute the success of our county on the many people that work here. We strive to be an employer of choice and want our employees to feel valued.

This year will also see continued discussion on the physical infrastructure that makes our county successful. 2022 saw discussions around capital projects and building improvements. I expect the same will continue in 2023.

I want to also highlight the decisions made by this Legislature to kick off work on the green facilities plan in 2022, this is setting us up for a long-term sustainable future for all our buildings and operations. We have been a leader in New York State and will continue to do so in the upcoming year.

These are not only investments in our organization, but also for our community. We expect safe and effective spaces to deliver services, and the best and most driven employees to deliver such services. This year will see the first strategic operations plan developed, which is set to give us further direction on how to best meet our obligations and find new ways to serve the public and operate as an effective organization.

Service Delivery

The core of what we do in Tompkins County is delivering services to the public. Whether that be keeping over 300 miles of roads clear and in working condition or ensuring WIC or SNAP benefits are delivered to those in need. I believe the state of these services is strong, and 2022 showed a high level of output and resilience by our organization. When it comes to the services that we offer to the public, no one should feel left out or disregarded by Tompkins County.

In the coming year we must strive even further to ensure consistency and equity across the entirety of our County.

In 2022, Public and Mental Health completed their merger, with services now integrated in one Whole Health model. Our staff found new ways to better meet the needs of the public and adapt with best practices – this is an example of what we should be striving for across the organization. A monumental achievement in 2022 was the Legislature’s final agreement on \$6.5 million in grant funds through the Community Recovery Fund. The applications to this fund showed us gaps and opportunities across the County.

It’s also clear that so many people and organizations are still trying to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. I believe the \$6.5 million in investments will truly be transformative, but we’ve also heard loud and clear that certain areas continue to need funding and our constituents are quick to remind us that they feel the County should be doing more. We will continue to seek out other ways to meet these needs and find opportunities for organizations in our community.

Ongoing Programs

In 2022 we made investments in the areas of Reimagining Public Safety, housing, and homelessness, and addressing the EMS crisis in our County. It’s time for us to move past conversations on these topics and into action. Bringing on and empowering staff to coordinate in these issue areas will be critical for us – I look forward to gaining expertise and making progress this year.

These issues require us to think critically about equity in service delivery, and how we can make lasting change – as these are not new issues, just newly explored in depth by our Legislature. We have a responsibility to choose approaches and make investments that are sustainable for the long term.

Closing

In closing, as we look back at 2022 and forward into 2023, it is clear that effective partnerships and a shared vision for success are more important than ever. Whether it be supporting our transportation services, improving housing outcomes, improving economic development, or addressing the opioid crisis, we and our partners share the responsibility for the work.

In Tompkins County, we are successful because we hold values that reflect our community.

2022 was the first year with our newly minted Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement, which proudly hangs in all County buildings including the Legislature Chambers. I believe it is a commitment that gives us strength in what we do, and I look forward to another year of living by our values.

In closing, we have many challenges before us, but we are in a unique time to build upon our strengths and what we’ve learned over the past few years. This group of 13, soon to be 14 legislators – will be tasked with many big decisions in the upcoming year.

It seems more people than ever are looking to us to address our community’s challenges. The question that will define next year’s State of the County is how we rise to that challenge.

Thank you.

Shawna Black, Chairwoman
Tompkins County Legislature