CITY OF ONEIDA
COMMON COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Date:	November 5, 2026	Presiding:	Rick Rossi, Mayor
Time:	5:30p.m.	Clerk:	Sandy LaPera, City Clerk
Location:	Common Council Chambers	Meeting Type:	Regular ☐ Special ☒

CALL TO ORDER
The meeting was called to order by Mayor Rick Rossi, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and roll call.

Attendees	**Present**	**Absent**	**Arrived Late**
Mayor Rossi	☒	☐	☐:_____
City Manager Lovell	☐	☒	☐:_____
Councilor McHugh	☒	☐	☐:_____
Councilor Cimpi	☒	☐	☐:_____
Councilor Smith	☐	☒	☐:_____
Councilor Jones	☐	☒	☐:_____
Councilor Pagano	☒	☐	☐:_____
Councilor Simchik	☐	☒	☐:_____

Also Present: Sandy LaPera, City Clerk
Lee Ann Wells, Comptroller
Jessica Kaiser, Deputy Comptroller/HR Manager

CITY OF ONEIDA COMMON COUNCIL

2027 BUDGET WORK SESSION

The Common Council continued its review of the proposed 2027 City Budget, focusing on additional expenditure reductions, revenue projections, staffing, departmental operations, and potential measures to reduce the proposed property tax increase. Following further adjustments, the projected General Fund tax increase was reduced to approximately 9.73%, without an appropriation from the General Fund balance.

GENERAL FUND REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE REVIEW

Council reviewed several revenue adjustments and corresponding expenditures, including police equipment grants, crime prevention funding, school crossing guard reimbursements, and the School Resource Officer (SRO) agreement.

It was explained that certain grant revenues must be accompanied by corresponding expenditures, as the City would not receive the funding without purchasing the associated equipment or providing the applicable services. These adjustments were considered revenue-neutral.

The discussion included approximately $54,000 in Governor's Traffic Safety Committee (GTSC) funding, $8,000 for crime prevention, and reimbursement revenues associated with crossing guards and the SRO program.

Council identified an initial goal of reducing the projected tax increase to below 10%, requiring approximately $150,000 in additional adjustments.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

Council reviewed the Fire Department's anticipated retirement payouts, staffing expenses, equipment needs, and training costs.

The proposed budget included $165,000 for anticipated retirement payouts associated with the Fire Chief and a firefighter. Discussion confirmed that a firefighter was expected to retire early in 2027, with the Fire Chief's retirement anticipated in May.

Council agreed to reduce the retirement payout appropriation from $165,000 to $100,000, resulting in a $65,000 reduction. The remaining appropriation was intended to cover the anticipated Fire Chief retirement payout, with other retirement obligations to be addressed as necessary.

Council also discussed discretionary promotional materials, required training, and equipment maintenance. Members emphasized maintaining essential training while limiting nonessential expenditures. A previously identified engine repair estimated at approximately $34,000 was discussed as a potential future priority.

Opportunities to pursue grant funding for Fire Department equipment and operational needs were also discussed. The proposed new-hire expense of approximately $45,000 was reviewed without further adjustment.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Council reviewed DPW staffing levels, vacant positions, and opportunities for salary savings under the existing hiring freeze.

Discussion identified one vacant Motor Equipment Operator (MEO) position and anticipated personnel changes involving a Laborer with a Commercial Driver's License who may transition into an MEO position during 2027.

Council agreed to reduce the DPW salary appropriation by approximately $60,000, recognizing that the department could adjust staffing assignments while maintaining the ability to revisit the position if necessary.

Concerns were expressed regarding adequate staffing for snow removal and winter operations. It was reported that DPW management had developed a plan to accommodate the staffing situation.

Council also reviewed street maintenance, Central Garage operations, contractual salaries, and snow and ice removal expenses. No additional reductions were identified in these areas.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Council reviewed suggestions submitted by Councilors Janet Jones and Nathan Smith regarding potential Parks and Recreation savings.

Suggestions included reviewing program fees, seeking sponsorships through local nonprofit organizations, reducing discretionary program expenses, reconsidering certain staffing positions, and potentially postponing security camera improvements.

Specific expenses discussed included field trips, T-ball trophies, Easter egg hunt supplies, and swimming pool staffing.

Council discussed the possibility of securing outside sponsorship or donations to offset recreational programming expenses without eliminating services.

Members expressed support for preserving recreational opportunities, particularly programs benefiting children and families. The department was recognized as providing valuable community services despite ongoing budget constraints.

The proposed $12,000 security camera system was also discussed. Members noted existing security limitations, the potential availability of previously designated funding, and recommendations for improved security.

No additional reductions were made to the Parks and Recreation budget.

PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Council conducted an extended discussion regarding the proposed Development Specialist position, budgeted at approximately $60,000.

The position was intended to assist with grant applications and administration, economic development initiatives, and implementation of the proposed Property Rental Registry.

Deputy Comptroller Jessica Kaiser advised Council that the proposed position was intended to be supported in part through grant-related administrative reimbursements and revenue generated by the Property Rental Registry.

Members questioned whether the responsibilities could be performed by existing personnel, through contracted grant-writing services, or by delaying the hiring of an additional employee.

Concerns were expressed that eliminating the position could delay implementation of the registry. However, members also questioned whether a full-time position was necessary during the initial rollout.

The registry was discussed as a potential revenue source, with an estimated $150 registration fee and an original revenue projection of approximately $90,000. Separate rental inspection revenue was also identified.

Council agreed to remove the proposed Development Specialist position and reduce the projected registry revenue from $90,000 to $45,000. The combined adjustments were identified as producing approximately $15,000 in net budget savings.

Members emphasized that eliminating the position should not prevent the City from beginning implementation of the registry. The need for additional staffing could be reconsidered as the program develops.

Council also discussed using existing employees for eligible grant administration activities, exploring outside grant-writing assistance, and identifying opportunities for grant-related administrative reimbursements.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS AND ASSESSMENT SERVICES

Council reviewed employee health insurance, retirement contributions, workers' compensation, and other benefit appropriations.

It was reported that the City's health insurance renewal had been received and that the existing benefit packages remained unchanged. Retirement appropriations were based on projected invoices from the New York State Retirement System, and no reductions were recommended.

Council also discussed the future of the City Assessor's Office.

Members acknowledged the importance of maintaining assessment services while exploring alternatives that could reduce operating costs. No further adjustments were made pending additional information.

SALES TAX REVENUE AND FINAL BUDGET PROJECTIONS

Council considered whether the proposed sales tax revenue estimate could be increased based on current collections and potential economic activity.

It was explained that the 2027 projection had originally been calculated at approximately 3% above the 2026 budget. Following discussion, Council agreed to increase the sales tax revenue projection by an additional $50,000.

With the expenditure reductions and revenue adjustments discussed, the projected General Fund property tax increase was reduced to approximately 9.73%, representing an estimated $608,984 increase in the tax levy.

It was emphasized that the proposed budget did not include an appropriation from the General Fund balance, a significant departure from prior budget practices.

Council acknowledged that some revenue projections would require active follow-through during 2027, including the potential sale of City-owned properties, implementation of the registry, and additional grant opportunities.

Members also discussed providing grant-writing training to qualified existing employees to improve the City's ability to pursue outside funding.

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE DISTRICT TAX RATES

Council reviewed the impact of equalizing the inside and outside district tax rates, including changes associated with fire protection costs.

Preliminary calculations indicated estimated annual property tax increases of $125.93 for the Inside District and $274.72 for the Outside District for a home assessed at $100,000.

It was explained that the larger increase in the Outside District reflected the transition toward equalized tax rates. Following the adjustment, properties in both districts would be subject to the same rate.

Additional calculations were requested to clarify the impact on individual taxpayers before adoption of the budget.

WATER AND SEWER RATES

Council discussed the Water Superintendent's previously presented proposals for increasing water rates by either 5% or 10%.

Members expressed concern about imposing additional utility costs on residents while also considering a property tax increase. The Water Fund's substantial fund balance was discussed as a factor supporting the continuation of existing rates.

Following discussion, Council expressed support for maintaining the current water and sewer rates for 2027, with no increases proposed at this time.

BUDGET ADOPTION SCHEDULE

Council confirmed November 17, 2026, as the public hearing date for the proposed 2027 City Budget, with adoption anticipated on December 1, 2026.

Council expressed appreciation to the staff involved in preparing and revising the budget throughout the work session process.

Summary of Principal Budget Adjustments	
Budget Item	**Adjustment**
Fire Department retirement payouts	$65,000 reduction
DPW salaries	Approximately $60,000 reduction
Development Specialist position	Approximately $60,000 reduction
Property Accountability Registry revenue	$45,000 reduction
Sales tax revenue	$50,000 increase
Final projected property tax increase	**9.73%**

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn by Councilor McHugh
Seconded by Councilor Cimpi

Ayes: 4
Nays: 0
Absent: 3 (Smith/Jones/Simchik)
MOTION RESULT: ☒Passed ☐Failed

The meeting adjourned at 6:41 p.m.

CITY OF ONEIDA

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Sandra LaPera, City Clerk