CITY OF ONEIDA
COMMON COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Date:	October 29, 2026	Presiding:	Rick Rossi, Mayor
Time:	5:30pm	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: City Clerk, Sandy LaPera

Comptroller, Lee Ann Wells

Fire Chief, Scott Jones

City of Oneida
2027 Budget Work Session – Fire Department

October 29, 2026
Fire Chief Scott Jones

Department Staffing and Organization

Fire Chief Scott Jones reviewed the Fire Department's proposed 2027 budget, beginning with personnel and the organizational structure. The department has 24 authorized line positions, including an Assistant Chief, three Deputy Chiefs, four Lieutenants, and 16 firefighters, in addition to the Fire Chief and administrative support. Council discussed whether supervisory positions could be restructured to reduce costs. Chief Jones explained that supervisory personnel are trained as incident commanders and provide coverage during absences under the department's 24-hour-on, 72-hour-off schedule.

Salaries, Contractual Increases, and Holiday Pay

Council reviewed the contractual 5% increase in base pay, annual step increases, stipends, and holiday compensation. Chief Jones explained that the 5% increase applies to base salaries, while other compensation components affect overall personnel costs. Employees receive compensation for 104 holiday hours annually under the contract. Employees may also spend two hours with family on Thanksgiving and Christmas when staffing permits, without creating additional overtime.

Overtime and Staffing Vacancies

Chief Jones requested $160,000 for emergency overtime, compared with $140,000 in the proposed budget. Approximately $137,000 had been spent to date, against an adjusted 2026 budget of $185,000. Historical spending averaged approximately $148,000 annually over the preceding five to six years. Overtime is driven primarily by vacancies, illness, injuries, military leave, and contractual leave. The department can generally accommodate one absence per shift before overtime is needed. One position was vacant, and additional retirements were anticipated in early 2027, including the Chief's. He discussed recruiting lateral transfers and reserving two February Fire Academy positions, with graduation expected in May. Waiting for the August academy could prolong vacancies until late in the year. Council considered historical averages and maintaining separate overtime accounts with a combined total for review. No final increase to emergency overtime was established.

Anticipated Retirement Payouts

Council discussed retirement payouts omitted from the initial proposed budget because notice had not yet been received. Estimated payments were $99,615 for the Fire Chief and approximately $64,000 for another employee, with a combined budget estimate of $165,000. Council discussed budgeting these costs in the retirement account rather than relying on later transfers or the General Fund.

Recruitment and Training Costs

Chief Jones discussed competition from neighboring municipalities. One firefighter trained by the City later accepted employment with Utica. Under a four-year prorated agreement, the employee may owe nearly $15,000 in training reimbursement, which the City is pursuing. A lateral transfer hired earlier in the year has worked well. Council reviewed EMS training overtime ($3,000 considered sufficient due in part to in-house instructors), Fire Marshal overtime for investigations and prevention, training overtime ($22,000 supported), personal leave overtime ($12,500

covering approximately half the available contractual hours), and short-staffing overtime (a $40,000 request based on projected recruitment).

Ambulance Services and Potential Revenue

Council considered whether the City could establish a revenue-generating ambulance transport service. Chief Jones reported approximately 2,400 total calls to date, most involving EMS. The City provides advanced medical care but lacks the certificate of need to transport and bill patients. He described past investments in advanced training amid concerns about ambulance availability and changing state certification requirements. Council discussed equipment, staffing, billing, collections, and potential service improvements. Chief Jones recommended a feasibility study using existing response data and municipal comparisons before committing to ambulance operations. No decision was made.

Equipment, Protective Gear, and Supplies

The annual contractual uniform allowance is $800 per employee, approximately $20,000 for 25 positions. The $15,000 turnout gear maintenance appropriation was considered manageable. Complete protective gear costs approximately $4,000–$5,000 per set. The department also reviewed small equipment, medical supplies, and repairs.

Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus

Approximately 70 breathing apparatus cylinders will reach the end of their 15-year service life in 2030. Replacement cylinders cost approximately $1,200–$1,400 each. Chief Jones requested $34,000 to phase in purchases, but the reduced $12,000 appropriation must also cover equipment and compressor maintenance and testing. Council discussed a multiyear replacement plan to avoid a large expense when the cylinders expire.

Technology and Contractual Expenses

Chief Jones reviewed scheduling, incident reporting, preplanning, and employee callback subscriptions. Council supported consolidating the $2,000 contractual subscription appropriation into the technology account and adding $2,500 in new funding, for a revised technology appropriation discussed at approximately $16,000.

Building Maintenance and Chief's Expenses

The original $15,000 building maintenance request had been reduced to $5,000. The larger request would have supported station communications and camera improvements; the remainder covers routine repairs. The Chief's $3,000 request for professional memberships, subscriptions, meetings, travel, and miscellaneous administrative expenses was eliminated from the proposed budget.

Apparatus Maintenance and Repairs

Chief Jones described an aging fleet, with apparatus ranging from approximately 10 to 30 years old. New apparatus can take three to four years to obtain. Engine 291, a 2010 vehicle, needs an estimated $34,000 engine repair. Other costs include approximately $14,000 for tires and $16,000 for required annual testing. Council discussed adding $34,000 to the $30,000 vehicle maintenance appropriation but deferred a final decision. Members also considered shared aerial equipment with neighboring departments, although Chief Jones identified operational limitations.

Potential Regional Services and Revenue

Chief Jones suggested exploring contracts to provide fire protection services to neighboring municipalities facing volunteer staffing shortages. Preliminary discussions with Verona had not produced a formal proposal. Council acknowledged the possible revenue opportunity; no agreement was approved.

Fire Prevention and Community Outreach

Chief Jones described school fire prevention programs, educational materials, and possible expanded outreach to older residents. Council supported essential prevention activities while limiting optional expansion. After discussing $3,000 and $5,000, Council agreed to maintain $5,000 for fire prevention and community outreach.

Other Departmental Expenses

Council reviewed radio repairs, training tuition, promotion-related supplies, annual physicals, and new-hire expenses. The proposed $45,000 new-hire appropriation would cover academy training, equipment, and required examinations for approximately three employees. Annual physicals are required, and additional evaluations may be needed after employee injuries.

Budget Adoption Timeline and Additional Work Sessions

Following the presentation, Comptroller Wells discussed the deadlines for constitutional tax limit filings and Madison County tax bill preparation. She advised that the budget would need to be substantially complete approximately 11 days before adoption. A December 1 adoption would require completion around November 19; a later special meeting could move the working deadline to approximately November 24, subject to County confirmation. Further work sessions were discussed for Monday, November 2 at 5:30 p.m.; Tuesday, November 3 at 5:30 p.m.; and following the rescheduled regular Council meeting Wednesday, November 4, with notices as required. It was also noted that an additional budget work session would be tentatively scheduled for Thursday, November 5, at 5:30 p.m. The meeting would be held if needed; otherwise, it would be canceled.

Summary of Budget Directions

Budget Item	**Direction Discussed**
Emergency Overtime	Further review; no confirmed increase
Training Overtime	Maintain $22,000
EMS Training Overtime	Maintain $3,000
Short-Staffing Overtime	Further review
Retirement Payouts	Include $165,000

Breathing Apparatus Cylinders	Develop replacement plan before 2030
SCBA Cylinders	Develop replacement plan before 2030
Technology Expenses	Consolidate accounts; net increase of $2,500
Building Maintenance	Maintain $5,000
Vehicle Maintenance	Revisit proposed $34,000 increase
Fire Prevention	Maintain $5,000
Ambulance Service	Evaluate financial feasibility
Regional Fire Services	Explore potential contractual revenue

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn by Councilor McHugh
Seconded by Councilor Simchik

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0
Absent: 0
MOTION RESULT: ☒Passed ☐Failed

The meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

CITY OF ONEIDA

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Sandra LaPera, City Clerk