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

Parks and Recreation Director Luke Griff

2027 CITY OF ONEIDA BUDGET

WORK SESSION

City Clerk/Parks and Recreation

City Clerk Budget Presentation

Presented by Sandy LaPera, City Clerk

Opening Remarks and Recognition of the Common Council

The City Clerk began her presentation by expressing her sincere appreciation to the Mayor and members of the Common Council for their dedication and service to the City. She acknowledged that serving on the Council involves a tremendous commitment of personal time, attention, and effort, often extending well beyond attending meetings. She emphasized that she recognizes and fully appreciates the responsibilities they have undertaken, the difficult decisions they are called upon to make, and the sacrifices involved in serving the community. She further stated that she hopes City residents recognize and appreciate the considerable time and effort Council members devote to fulfilling their responsibilities. She reiterated that their hard work and commitment do not go unnoticed and are genuinely appreciated.

Departmental Budget Requests

The City Clerk explained that her original budget request included $1,000 for equipment and $1,500 for supplies; however, the proposed budget incorrectly reflected $500 for each account.

She indicated that she could accept the $500 equipment allocation, although the original request was intended to provide sufficient funding to replace a computer or printer if necessary. She explained that equipment replacement is often more economical than repairs and that unused funds remain in the General Fund.

Regarding supplies, she explained that the department's nine-year average expenditure was approximately $1,100 annually. Required purchases include an official Council minutes book costing more than $300 and specialized security paper mandated by New York State for vital records, costing approximately $200 per order, with multiple orders typically necessary each year.

She stated that $500 would be insufficient and requested a minimum allocation of $1,000. She acknowledged that Central Storage funds might be available to offset the expense but cautioned that doing so could create the appearance of a larger departmental budget increase in subsequent years.

FOIL Request Tracking Software

The City Clerk discussed the need for FOIL request tracking software, emphasizing the increasing administrative demands placed on the two-person department.

She explained that processing requests involves tracking statutory deadlines, distributing requests to departments, monitoring responses, coordinating redactions, preparing correspondence, and issuing extensions when necessary. She provided Council with an example of the volume of requests received within a single week.

She emphasized that the current manual tracking process has become increasingly difficult to maintain alongside the department's other responsibilities. She stated that dedicated software would improve efficiency, strengthen compliance with New York State law, and reduce the City's

potential liability. She welcomed alternative solutions but stressed that the existing workload was becoming unmanageable.

Organizational Structure and Departmental Responsibilities

At the City Manager's request, the City Clerk provided an organizational chart outlining the responsibilities assigned to her office. She explained that the City Clerk reports directly to the City Manager and supervises one employee, the Deputy City Clerk.

She identified the following responsibilities:

1. **Registrar of Vital Statistics:** Oversees birth, death, and marriage records in accordance with New York State Department of Health requirements.
2. **Clerk to the Common Council:** Prepares agendas, meeting minutes, local laws, bonding documents, legal notices, and other official Council records.
3. **Records Access Officer:** Coordinates and oversees FOIL requests, including statutory compliance, correspondence, departmental responses, and record disclosures.
4. **Records Retention Officer:** Administers records retention and destruction procedures in accordance with New York State Archives requirements and coordinates departmental compliance.
5. **Building Security Administrator:** Manages the City's electronic building access system, including employee credentials, access schedules, key fobs, and system maintenance.
6. **IT and Telephone Coordinator:** Serves as the City's liaison with Total Solutions for technology, telephone, email, and network-related matters.
7. **City Newsletter Designer and Producer:** Researches community events, new businesses, and local activities through social media and other sources, and designs and produces the City's newsletter. She emphasized that producing the newsletter requires considerable research, coordination, and preparation beyond simply assembling photographs and announcements.
8. **Website Administrator:** Oversees the City's website, including creating and maintaining webpages, updating forms, publishing agendas, minutes, meeting videos, legal notices, employment opportunities, bids, RFPs, and other public information. She explained that following the City's transition from the more expensive CivicPlus platform to Revize, she personally built and populated nearly every page of the new website. She also coordinated the replacement and updating of departmental forms.
9. **Administrative Support to the Mayor and City Manager:** Provides clerical and administrative assistance, including correspondence, document preparation, copying, and distribution.
10. **Fall Festival Vendor Coordinator:** Independently coordinates approximately 100 nonprofit and craft vendors, including applications, booth assignments, and event preparations.
11. **Council Meeting Recording and Video Administration:** Records Council meetings using an iPad purchased through the department's budget and uploads recordings to YouTube and the City's website, avoiding the expense of installing a dedicated Council Chambers recording system.

Management Responsibilities and Employee Dedication

The City Clerk acknowledged the financial challenges facing the City and Council's efforts to reduce expenditures. However, she expressed concern regarding potential reductions affecting noncontractual and management/confidential employees, including department heads.

She emphasized that these employees frequently assume additional responsibilities and work outside regular business hours, including evenings, weekends, and holidays. She stated that, in her experience, department heads are dedicated to the City and routinely go beyond their assigned responsibilities.

As examples of this commitment, she noted that she personally paid $200 annually for three consecutive years to provide a bagpiper for the City's September 11 remembrance ceremony, totaling $600. She also paid $200 for professional photographs for the City's website, along with other miscellaneous expenses. She emphasized that these contributions were voluntary and were mentioned to illustrate the personal dedication of City employees rather than to seek recognition.

She encouraged Council to consider the responsibilities, additional hours, and commitment of department heads when evaluating personnel reductions, regardless of employee residency or contractual status.

Revenue Generation and Long-Term City Investment

The City Clerk encouraged Council to place greater emphasis on increasing revenue rather than relying primarily on departmental and personnel reductions to balance the budget.

Drawing upon her 20 years of experience with the City, she expressed concern that insufficient attention had been directed toward long-term revenue opportunities, including business development, sales tax revenue, and the City's inside/outside district structure.

She emphasized that attracting new businesses, responsible property owners, and investment requires maintaining an appealing and safe community. She encouraged Council to prioritize the condition of commercial plazas, continued investment in parks and recreational programming, and support for law enforcement efforts to address drugs and other community concerns.

She stated that maintaining City services and improving the community's overall appearance and quality of life are important components of economic development and future revenue growth.

She concluded by encouraging Council to pursue a balanced approach that considers expenditure reductions while also focusing on economic development, revenue generation, and the long-term vitality of the City.

Council Discussion Following the City Clerk's Presentation

FOIL Tracking Software

Following the conclusion of the City Clerk's presentation, Councilor McHugh questioned whether the proposed FOIL tracking software could be used by other City departments, particularly the Police Department, when responding to requests for body camera footage and other video recordings. She asked whether the software could assist with redactions and whether it could serve as a citywide resource to make the FOIL process more efficient for multiple departments.

The City Clerk confirmed that her office coordinates FOIL requests for all City departments but explained that the Police Department performs its own specialized redactions because law enforcement records may involve additional restrictions, including ongoing investigations. She

clarified that JustFOIA is primarily a request-management and tracking system rather than a replacement for the Police Department's existing redaction software.

She advised that three software providers had been evaluated and that JustFOIA, a company specializing in FOIL request management, was the preferred option. She explained that the software would allow departments to upload responsive records directly into the system, provide centralized tracking of requests and statutory deadlines, and improve communication between departments and the City Clerk's Office.

She further noted that the department processes more than 200 FOIL requests annually and emphasized that the software would substantially improve the efficiency of managing that volume.

In response to a question regarding the approximately $8,000 cost, the City Clerk clarified that the expense would be an annual fee rather than a one-time purchase.

It was also noted that the software would provide a public-facing portal allowing requesters to monitor the status of their requests. Additional features, including automated email redaction capabilities, could reduce administrative work and potentially limit legal expenses associated with reviewing records and redactions.

Canva Subscription and Citywide Software Use

Councilor McHugh questioned whether the City's Canva subscriptions could be consolidated into a single account accessible to multiple departments rather than maintaining separate subscriptions.

The City Clerk explained that she uses Canva to design and produce the City's newsletter and that the subscription costs approximately $14.99. She noted that the account was originally established under her personal email address and that she had personally paid the subscription expense for approximately two to three years before requesting reimbursement through the City budget.

She explained that she had explored transferring the subscription to a City account but was advised that doing so would result in the loss of previously created designs and materials associated with her personal account. Because of the extensive history of newsletter designs and other work stored in the account, she elected to maintain the existing account to preserve those materials.

Copier Expenses and Departmental Usage

Councilor McHugh questioned whether the City's copier expenses were based on a flat rental fee or actual usage, including the number of copies produced. It was explained that the copier arrangements generally involve a base charge covering a specified volume of copies, with additional charges for usage exceeding that allowance.

Councilor McHugh suggested reviewing the number of copiers throughout City departments to determine whether costs could be reduced by consolidating equipment and adjusting computer printing settings to allow employees to use shared networked copiers. She referenced a school

district arrangement in which multiple employees send documents electronically to centralized copiers, reducing the need for individual machines.

During the discussion, it was noted that the City had previously attempted to limit the number of color copiers due to their higher operating costs. Certain departments, including Parks and Recreation and DPW, maintained color printing capabilities for operational purposes. It was also noted that the Comptroller's Office utilizes a shared copier/printer arrangement.

The City Clerk explained that a shared copier arrangement had previously been considered for her office; however, building security concerns and the nature of the department's responsibilities made a dedicated copier necessary. She emphasized that the office regularly processes birth, death, and marriage certificates, which must be printed on specialized security paper. These transactions often involve multiple copies and require employees to spend considerable time preparing documents.

She explained that requiring staff to repeatedly leave the Clerk's Office to use a shared copier would create security vulnerabilities, as the office handles sensitive records and must remain secure. She noted that the department frequently processes multiple vital records throughout the day, sometimes including numerous death certificates in a single transaction, making constant trips to another location impractical and potentially compromising employee safety and office security.

The City Clerk clarified that she could not speak to the copier needs of other departments but emphasized that the dedicated equipment in her office serves a necessary operational and security purpose.

It was further noted that shared copier equipment is available in other areas of City Hall for departmental use.

Summary

The City Clerk requested reconsideration of the departmental supplies allocation, emphasized the operational need for FOIL tracking software, and outlined the extensive statutory, administrative, technological, and community responsibilities performed by the two-person City Clerk's Office.

She further emphasized the dedication of department heads and encouraged Council to consider the potential effects of continued expenditure reductions on City operations and employee morale. She advocated for greater attention to revenue generation, economic development, public safety, and community investment as part of the City's long-term financial strategy.

Following her presentation, Council discussed the potential citywide benefits of FOIL tracking software, opportunities to consolidate Canva subscriptions, and possible cost savings through a review of departmental copier arrangements. The City Clerk emphasized the importance of considering departmental security and operational requirements when evaluating equipment consolidation.

No formal action was identified in this portion of the discussion.

Parks and Recreation Department

Presented by Luke Griff, Parks and Recreation Director

Overview

Director Luke Griff reviewed the Parks and Recreation Department's proposed 2027 budget, including personnel, recreational programs, Chapman Pool operations, equipment, maintenance, program revenues, and capital needs.

Departmental Staffing and Operating Expenses

Griff reviewed seasonal and part-time staffing, including recreation maintenance workers, recreation center personnel, and Chapman Pool employees. Council acknowledged the department's efforts to control expenditures, particularly discretionary expenses such as travel and meals.

Griff also reviewed general operating expenses, including recreational supplies, equipment, field maintenance materials, printing, advertising, and program-related costs.

Chapman Pool Operations and Sponsorship

Griff discussed Chapman Pool operating expenses, seasonal staffing, admission fees, and membership options. Council considered whether adjustments to daily admission fees and seasonal memberships could increase revenue while maintaining affordable access for residents. Griff explained that certain membership changes would require additional administrative procedures.

Council also discussed seeking financial assistance from a local foundation to offset pool operating costs, potentially through a seasonal sponsorship. Griff indicated that preparations to open the pool typically begin following Memorial Day and require approximately 40 labor hours. He agreed to provide additional operating cost information to assist with a potential funding request.

Griff also reviewed pool maintenance expenses, including approximately $15,000 budgeted for chemicals.

Equipment, Playground Maintenance, and Software

Griff reviewed expenditures for recreational equipment and supplies, noting that costs have remained relatively consistent. He discussed the periodic replacement of engineered wood fiber mulch at City playgrounds, generally purchased every other year at approximately 100 cubic yards.

He explained that he had explored purchasing mulch with available 2026 funds; however, the supplier had not committed to pricing. Council discussed the treatment of unused appropriations at year-end.

Griff also reviewed the department's RecDesk software subscription, which is used for program registration and payment processing. Although subscription costs have increased, he indicated that the software remains beneficial to departmental operations.

Senior Citizen Programs and Field Trips

Council discussed reinstating senior citizen trips to the fair, which had been discontinued following the COVID-19 pandemic. Griff suggested offering residents age 65 and older priority registration and opening remaining spaces to other residents if participation was insufficient.

Council emphasized establishing participation fees that would cover transportation expenses. Griff indicated that he would contact the school district regarding bus availability, passenger capacity, and costs.

Youth Sports Programs

Griff reviewed the T-ball program, explaining that expenses primarily include uniforms and equipment. Coaches serve as volunteers, and he acknowledged the ongoing difficulty of recruiting enough individuals to ensure all teams can participate.

Regarding youth flag football, Griff reviewed the proposed $500 allocation. He explained that the City previously operated a league for approximately 10 to 12 years but discontinued it as participation declined and a similar program became available through another municipality's Parks and Recreation Department. Council discussed whether the allocation should remain in the budget to allow the City to reinstate the program if necessary.

Griff also reviewed youth basketball expenses, including paid officials and Junior NBA jerseys costing approximately $25 each. He indicated that program revenues cover most expenses and emphasized maintaining affordable registration fees.

Fall Festival

Griff reviewed Fall Festival expenditures, including portable restroom rentals, craft supplies, and other event-related expenses.

Council discussed the continued popularity of the event, noting that approximately 100 vendors participate annually and that a waiting list exists. Members suggested increasing vendor fees and exploring opportunities to expand the event to accommodate additional vendors.

The City Clerk explained that vendor registration fees are currently $25 if paid by May 1 and $40 thereafter, while food trucks pay $150. Approximately 15 nonprofit organizations participate at no charge. Vendor registrations generate approximately $2,500 in revenue, excluding food truck fees.

Council discussed potentially increasing vendor fees to $30 for early registration and $50 thereafter.

The City Clerk emphasized that the Fall Festival was established as a free, family-oriented community event rather than a means of generating revenue for the City. She explained that keeping vendor fees affordable encourages participation by small businesses and nonprofit organizations, while free admission allows families, particularly those who may not have the financial means to attend other events, to enjoy a day of activities and entertainment without an admission charge.

While expressing concern about substantial fee increases and the importance of preserving the event's original purpose, the City Clerk agreed that increasing vendor fees to $30 for early registration and $50 thereafter would be reasonable.

No final decision was made regarding vendor fee increases or expansion.

Additional Community Events

Council discussed offering additional summer events to attract visitors and provide more recreational opportunities for residents. Griff acknowledged the potential benefits but emphasized that staffing limitations would make organizing additional events difficult.

Discussion included partnering with outside organizations and potentially involving an economic development specialist in coordinating activities. No specific plans were established.

Halloween Party and Haunted House

Griff reported that the department's recent Halloween Party attracted approximately 1,500 attendees. Expenses included decorations, game supplies, prizes, and children's giveaways.

Council complimented the department on the event's success and relatively low expenditures, with discussion referencing approximately $400. Griff acknowledged the significant assistance provided by volunteers and family members.

Adult Basketball League and Revenue Accounting

Griff reviewed the City's adult basketball league, which has operated for more than 50 years and currently consists of approximately eight teams. Registration fees are approximately $700 per team, and Griff indicated that the program comes close to covering its expenses.

Council questioned whether the staff time and gymnasium space used for the league could be directed toward youth activities. Griff explained that the City provides numerous youth programs and that the adult league remains a valuable recreational opportunity. He further noted that independently organizing the league would be difficult because of scheduling, gymnasium rentals, officials, insurance, and other administrative responsibilities.

Council discussed officiating costs and whether volunteers or City employees could serve as referees to reduce expenses. Griff explained that officiating adult basketball can be challenging because of the competitive nature of the games.

Griff also identified discrepancies between basketball registration revenue recorded through RecDesk and the amounts reflected in the City's revenue accounts. He explained that payments appeared to have been received but may have been credited to an incorrect account. Council recommended reviewing the transaction records with the City Chamberlain to reconcile the revenue and ensure future payments are properly recorded.

Griff noted that basketball seasons cross fiscal years, making revenue projections difficult because registration payments and expenses occur in different budget periods.

Potential Weekend Basketball Tournament

Council discussed organizing a weekend basketball tournament as an additional recreational event and potential revenue source. Suggestions included charging team entry fees, awarding an

inexpensive trophy, and promoting participating teams and winners through the City's website and newsletter.

Discussion also included attracting teams from outside the area and using local officials or volunteers to minimize expenses. No decision was made.

Recreation Center Security Camera System

Griff reviewed the proposed security camera system for the Recreation Center, clarifying that his requested appropriation was approximately $19,825, rather than the higher amount reflected in the proposed budget.

He explained that the project had been deferred for approximately three years and that costs continued to increase. The existing system allows live viewing but does not record footage, preventing incidents from being reviewed afterward.

Griff emphasized that the proposed system is necessary for employee and public safety, particularly given the size and frequent use of the building. Proposed coverage would include the gymnasium, dining room, hallways, parking areas, and dog park.

Council discussed the cost and scope of the system. Griff strongly recommended retaining the funding due to the facility's security needs. No final decision was made.

Conclusion

Council's review focused on maintaining recreational services while identifying opportunities to control expenditures, improve revenue reporting, and generate additional income.

Key considerations included Chapman Pool sponsorship, recreational program fees, the possible reinstatement of senior citizen trips, youth flag football funding, Fall Festival vendor fees, the financial performance of the adult basketball league, and additional community events.

Griff emphasized the importance of maintaining affordable recreational opportunities while addressing staffing limitations and the Recreation Center's security needs. No final budget decisions were made during this portion of the work session.

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