

MINUTES OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
JUNE 3, 2025

A meeting of the Common Council of the City of Oneida, NY was held on the third day of June 2025 at 6:30 pm at the City of Oneida Common Council Chambers, 109 N. Main Street, Oneida NY 13421.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Rick Rossi.

<u>Attendees</u>	Present	Absent	Arrived Late
Mayor Rossi	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Kyle Lovell, CM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Councilor Szczerba	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Councilor Laureti	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Councilor Hitchings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Councilor Winchell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Councilor Pagano	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Councilor Simchik	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

Also Present

City Attorney Nadine Bell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Public Safety Comm. Dave Jones	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
City Clerk Sandy LaPera	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assistant Police Chief Will Clark	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fire Chief Scott Jones	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supervisor Mary Cavanagh	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Police Chief Steve Lowell	<input type="checkbox"/>	Supervisor Matt Roberts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Roll Call

PRESENTATION: Ed Riley-Hotel Oneida Update

Ed Riley provided an update on the Oneida Hotel Project. He stated that it has been over two years since Supervisors Mary Cavanagh and Matt Roberts initially asked him to look at the Hotel Oneida building. Mr. Riley noted that he contacted the building's owner and was subsequently able to secure funding through the ESD (Empire State Development) and DRI (Downtown Revitalization Initiative) programs, which allowed the project to progress. He expressed appreciation to both the City and County for their support in resolving several challenges encountered along the way.

The project will include 18 apartment units, along with a bar/restaurant and a catering facility located on the first and second floors. Mr. Riley noted that this will not be a Historic Preservation Project, as SHPO

(State Historic Preservation Office) advised that the original blue exterior would need to be restored—an option for the developers chose not to pursue. He further stated that all entitlements are now complete, and the project is ready to close with the IDA. They are currently in discussions with three lenders to verify construction costs and anticipate securing a contractual letter within the next 30 days. Once received, Mr. Sullivan will begin demolition in July. The project is expected to follow a 14-month timeline, with an anticipated opening in the third to early fourth quarter of next year.

Mr. Riley encouraged local contractors to reach out if they are interested in participating in the project. He added that local hiring will also apply to the restaurant and facility operations, as part of their agreement with the State and City/County to prioritize local workforce involvement.

Mr. Riley displayed photos of the facility and explained different features of the project. He assured that the building will comply with all safety codes, fire inspections, and accessibility standards. Restoration efforts will preserve its original character. He also spoke about improvements to parking and sidewalks. When asked by a resident about rent costs, he responded that prices would vary but will begin at approximately \$1,000 per month for a one bedroom, which is market value and more for a two bedroom, noting that the prices will vary based on size and amenities.

Mr. Riley stated that there is a significant investment in this project and that it is in their best interest to move it forward. He noted that parking for the facility will be located across the street, with 20 spaces planned, and that his team will be responsible for making the necessary improvements. Additionally, he advised that they will utilize an alternate city-designated location to replace the parking, ensuring there will be no net loss of parking for the city.

PUBLIC COMMENT

ROBIN BIENKOWSKI-338 LENOX AVE.

Robin Bienkowski stated that she was not present to complain or express anything negative. She acknowledged the current tension within the city but emphasized the importance of recognizing the many positive developments taking place. She cited the \$1 million grant for 138 Madison Street, the Splash Pad, the Kallet Theater, and the Oneida Hotel project as examples of progress. Ms. Bienkowski encouraged officials not to be discouraged by criticism, noting that many residents support these efforts and are not concerned with the ongoing negativity. She advised them to remain focused and not be discouraged.

JIMMY WINNIE-312 LENOX AVE.

Mr. Winnie shared that he has made multiple complaints about trash at 314 Lenox Avenue but has seen no response from the Codes Department. He expressed frustration about being cited for placing his trash can out early due to his work hours, while his neighbor's property remains unaddressed. He urged officials to stop focusing on the Barbershop and instead address real issues affecting the community, including the safety of children walking in the neighborhood. He emphasized the importance of maintaining the city and that is where the focus should be.

JANET JONES-257 E. WALNUT ST.

Janet Jones stated that she wanted to speak on the MRB Group Proposal and stated that in her opinion, she does not feel the city is ready for a new economic development plan yet, noting that as part of the DRI process, a local planning committee made up of city, county and state members created a plan to transform downtown into a vibrant center that should offer a high quality of life and act as a magnet for redevelopment, noting that we are not there yet and are still implementing the DRI projects, which are still getting off the ground. Ms. Jones stated that until these projects are close to completion, she does not think businesses will feel the magnetic draw to downtown Oneida. Mrs. Jones suggested that a committee be created to include stakeholders that can track the progress of local goals and the DRI program goals. This would support data-driven decisions to measure progress to identify ownership and actional takeaways, so we can get to the point where we need a new plan.

Mrs. Jones also emphasized the importance of regular communication with the public—whether quarterly or more frequently. She noted growing public frustration, as many of the projects were introduced over two years ago, yet residents are not seeing visible progress toward achieving the stated goals or improving the City of Oneida.

ROBERT BRITTON-ONEIDA, NY

Mr. Britton remarked that in all his years attending council meetings, he has never witnessed a council as dysfunctional as the current one. He referenced a prior investigation into the Mayor, which stated cost taxpayers \$17,000, and questioned how much another investigation would cost. Mr. Britton asserted that Mr. Winchell has targeted every Mayor, including former Mayor Acker, though she had the support of her council. He stated that the current council does not support the Mayor and further alleged that three council members have shown him disrespect.

Mr. Britton further noted that in January, the Council had appointed a City Manager they did not support, followed by Mr. Burnett, who held the position for only two weeks. He stated that Mr. John Monaghan then served in the role for approximately five to six months and was paid an additional \$500, despite not meeting the qualifications for the position. Mr. Britton commented that when Mr. Monaghan stepped down and Mr. Rossi assumed the role and requested the same compensation, the Council declined.

Mr. Britton stated that, in his view, most council members do not get along and that the City has never experienced such internal chaos. He questioned how difficult it is for members to cooperate and cited incidents such as individuals being removed from meetings and the need for security presence. He urged the Council to work together over the next seven months to accomplish goals for the City or consider resigning or stepping down.

Lastly, Mr. Britton commented that certain members of the Council were now targeting the City Manager. He noted that the City Manager had recently secured \$1 million in funding for the City, adding that, in his view, this equates to working for free for the next ten years.

PETER HEDGLON-ONEIDA, NY

Attorney and former Mayor Peter Hedglon advised that the job of the Common Council is to govern the city and make policy for the city, noting that individual members of the Common Council are fiduciaries and have a responsibility for the best interest of the city first and not their personal interests, not the

interests of their political party and not the interests of their political supporters. He stated that it is his hope that all 7 members of the council put the best interest of the city first and avoid the dysfunction referenced by Mr. Britton.

Mr. Hedglon stated that there appears to be significant misunderstanding on social media regarding the legal implications of an adjournment in contemplation of dismissal (ACD). He explained that an ACD may only be granted with the express consent of the prosecution, the defendant, and the presiding judge. The judge imposes conditions that remain in effect for six months. If those conditions are violated, the original charge is reinstated, and the individual may also face contempt charges.

Mr. Hedglon stated that Mr. Wayne Winchell had the opportunity to challenge the facts of the case in question but for some reason chose not to do so. He then addressed the Hatch Act, noting that allegations have been made without any factual substantiation. He explained that there are specific elements required to constitute a violation of the Hatch Act. For such a violation to occur, the individual must have meaningful involvement with the federally funded program in question. He clarified that even if a city or county receives federal funds, unless the employee in question has a certain level of functional involvement in managing or spending those funds, a Hatch Act violation is unlikely.

Lastly, he stated that, regrettably, numerous false allegations have been made against current employees since last spring. Many of these claims have been determined to be unfounded following independent investigations, which have come at a considerable cost to the City. He noted that some allegations were handled through the Criminal Justice System, involving prosecutors and a judge from outside the City of Oneida, and that those matters were resolved in accordance with the law. He urged the Council to act in the best interest of the City moving forward.

ART HALLMAN-491 RIDGE RD.

Resident Hallman stated that he previously lived at 251 Oak Street and currently resides at 491 Ridge Road. He shared that he has lived in the City since 1988 and, in the past, was able to maintain the drainage ditches on Oak Street himself. However, due to his age, he is no longer able to do so. He reported that he contacted the City regarding deteriorating clay tile pipes, which are now disintegrating and no longer providing drainage. Mr. Hallman also raised concerns about the culvert pipe installed by the City at his current residence on Ridge Road, stating that it was installed too high. Although he reported this to the Department of Public Works at the time, he was told it had been installed correctly. He stated that he personally witnessed the installation and disagrees with their assessment. As a result of the improper installation, standing water and mosquito problems have persisted, and no corrective action has been taken.

Mr. Hallman stated that from Ridge Road to North Willow Street, no action has been taken to address the drainage issues, and he appeared before the Council seeking a resolution. He provided his phone number, and City Manager Lovell responded that he would speak with the City Engineer after the meeting and arrange for someone to inspect the situation.

Resident Joe Magliocca added that the drainage ditch near Mr. Hallman's property empties into the ditch near his own home. He noted that the storm drain runs parallel to North Willow Street and stated that these drainage issues have been ongoing for years. Mr. Magliocca reported that the ditch now overflows, resulting in flooding for residents on the west end of Grand Street. He also commented on the deteriorating condition of the clay tile pipes and ditches, stating that they have not been properly

cleaned in decades, despite efforts to begin addressing the problem last year as reported by Mr. Hallman.

OLD BUSINESS

None

MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Rossi thanked all those who attended the Memorial Day Parade and expressed appreciation to everyone involved in organizing the event. He also noted that, as of now, no rescheduled date has been provided for the fireworks that were canceled due to the weather.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

FINANCIAL UPDATES

- The completed Annual Financial Report for 2024 was submitted to the Office of the State Comptroller on April 23, 2025, prior to the May 1, 2025, deadline.
- The completed American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) reporting was submitted on April 22, 2025, prior to the April 30, 2025, deadline
- Quarterly Grant reporting to DHSES was submitted on April 24, 2025, prior to the April 30, 2025, deadline
- Closed Fiscal Year 2024
- Began working on insurance renewal documents

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE (DRI) UPDATES

- *Hotel Oneida*-discussed by Mr. Riley
- *Restore and Upgrade the Devereaux Building*-finalizing contractor selection, with the next steps being to submit MWBE Utilization Plan that is currently past due
- *Improve Downtown Infrastructure and Streetscaping and Upgrade Facilities at Veteran's Memorial Park & Develop AYSO Soccer Fields*-waiting for proposed contracts from C & S.to be received and reviewed by the City Attorney and the accounting to be in order for invoicing
- *Redevelop the Lerman Building (155/159) Madison St.* for Commercial and Residential Uses-Paul Marco is working on financing the project
- *Develop a Downtown Business Assistance Fund*-MRB is currently in the bidding phase for 114 Vanderbilt Ave., then a contractor will be selected
- *117 Madison St.*-the project owner has been out of town; asbestos survey will be scheduled
- *130 Broad St.*-received PCZBA and SHPO approval, they are scheduling the asbestos survey this

week

- *134 Vanderbilt Ave.*-HCR approved the contractor bid. MRB is waiting to schedule a pre-construction meeting
- *145 Madison St.*-currently in the bid phase and process of selecting a contractor
- *146 Madison St.*-the scope needed to be redone due to an expansion of the asbestos survey, then it will go out to bid after the scope of work is determined
- *169 Main St.*-HCR approved the contractor bid, pre-construction meeting complete

RESTORE NY ROUND 9 – 136 & 138 MADISON STREET

The Madison Street Revival Project will revitalize severely dilapidated and long-vacant buildings. The project includes:

- Selective demolition of unsalvageable portions
- Rehabilitation of salvageable building sections
- Construction of new upper floor space
- Installation of a common elevator/stairwell to connect the buildings
- Off-street parking lot construction at the rear of the site

Purpose & Impact

- Preserving contributing to historic Structures
- Creating work-from-home opportunities in a mixed-use context
- Increasing the city's tax base
- Attracting new businesses and residents
- Supporting goals in the City's Comprehensive Plan and DRI strategies

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Pagano

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the regular meeting of May 20, 2025, are hereby approved as presented.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

APPROVAL OF WARRANT

Moved by Councilor Winchell
Seconded by Councilor Simchik

RESOLVED, that Warrant No. 11, checks and ACH payments in the amount of \$426,177.43 as audited by the Voucher Committee are hereby approved for payment in the usual manner at the discretion of the Comptroller or a third party duly retained by the City of Oneida to perform such services.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

BOARD APPOINTMENTS-WATER BOARD

RESOLUTION 25-104

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Pagano

RESOLVED, to approve the Mayor's appointment of Ihor Semko, 1000 Westwood Trail, Oneida, NY 13421 to the Water Board for a 5-year term.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

IMPOSING LATE FEES ON DELINQUENT DOG LICENSE RENEWALS

RESOLUTION 25-105

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Winchell

WHEREAS, Article 7 of the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law authorizes municipalities to establish local dog licensing fees and associated penalties, including the imposition of late fees; and

WHEREAS, timely renewal of dog licenses is essential to ensuring accurate records, public safety, and compliance with State and local law; and

WHEREAS, the City of Oneida seeks to encourage prompt renewal of dog licenses through the establishment of reasonable late penalties for overdue renewals;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Common Council of the City of Oneida hereby imposes a late fee of Ten Dollars (\$10.00) for any dog license renewal submitted more than thirty (30) days after the license expiration date; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a late fee of Twenty Dollars (\$20.00) shall be imposed for any dog

license renewal submitted more than sixty (60) days after the license expiration date; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that said late fees shall be in addition to the standard dog license fee and shall take effect immediately upon adoption of this resolution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Clerk is hereby authorized and directed to take all necessary administrative steps to implement this resolution, including updating applicable forms and notices.

Ayes: 5

Nays: 2 (Szczerba/Laureti)

MOTION CARRIED

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AGREEMENT WITH MRB GROUP FOR AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGIC PLAN**

RESOLUTION 25-106 TABLED

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Simchik

Following a brief discussion, the Council voted to table the resolution based on resident Janet Jones' comments and Councilor Laureti's agreement with her concerns.

WHEREAS, the City of Oneida desires to engage in comprehensive planning efforts to foster economic growth and sustainability; and

WHEREAS, MRB Group, with offices located at 18 Division Street, Suite 303a, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866, has submitted a proposal to provide professional services related to the development of an Economic Development Strategic Plan for the City of Oneida; and

WHEREAS, the proposal submitted by MRB Group outlines a scope of services, deliverables, and schedule for the preparation of an Economic Development Strategic Plan at a total cost not to exceed Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars (\$25,000.00);

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Common Council of the City of Oneida, New York, that the City Manager is hereby authorized to execute the proposal and any related documents with MRB Group for professional services to develop an Economic Development Strategic Plan, in an amount not to exceed \$25,000.00.

Motion to table by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Simchik

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION TABLED

BOARD APPOINTMENT-PLANNING COMMISSION/ZBA

RESOLUTION 25-107

Moved by Councilor Hitchings

Seconded by Councilor Winchell

RESOLVED, to approve the Mayor's appointment of Gregg Myers, 427 S. Willow St., Oneida, NY 13421 to the Planning Commission/ZBA for a term to expire on November 26, 2026, to replace a vacancy from previous Board member, Randy Bonville.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

BOARD APPOINTMENT-WATER BOARD

RESOLUTION 25-108

Moved by Councilor Hitchings

Seconded by Councilor Simchik

RESOLVED, to approve the Mayor's appointment of Zak Kristan, 337 Genesee St., Oneida, NY 13421 to the Water Board for a term to expire on April 30, 2026, to replace a vacancy from previous Board member, Mary Parry.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

BUDGET TRANSFERS/AMENDMENTS

RESOLUTION 25-109

Moved by Councilor Hitchings

Seconded by Councilor Pagano

RESOLVED, to approve the budget transfers and amendments as outlined by the Comptroller or a third party duly retained by the City of Oneida to perform such services.

	<u>To</u>	<u>From</u>
2025 Budget Adjustments		
\$ 8,000.00	001.1420.0412.0000	001.0001.0912.0000
	Attorney-Acquisition of Real Property	General Fund Balance

To allocate funds for property searches needed for possible city acquisition due to delinquent taxes

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

DISCUSSION: Councilor Laureti inquired about the purpose of the transfer. City Attorney Bell clarified that it was not related to her services, but likely to costs associated with properties taken for back taxes that lacked viable legal descriptions. After the properties were auctioned and sold, it was discovered that two parcels did not have proper metes and bounds descriptions. The City had to conduct extensive research to recreate these legal descriptions. One of the properties also lacks a boundary line agreement, as no record exists. This agreement will need to be recorded before the property can be transferred.

The City Clerk advised that this budget transfer was actually for 8 properties, at \$1,000 per property that will be needed for possible city acquisitions due to delinquent taxes.

CONTRACT-CLOUDPERMIT

RESOLUTION 25-110

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Simchik

RESOLVED, to authorize the City Manager to sign a contract with Cloudpermit, 11911 Freedom Drive, Suite 720, Reston, VA 20190 for code/permitting software for the Fire Department.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

DISCUSSION: The City Manager explained that the transfer is for Cloudpermit software for the new Codes Department. This software allows for seamless online permitting and full digitalization of the process. The total cost is approximately \$7,500 per year and includes unlimited permit applications. Residents will be able to apply for and track the status of permits entirely online.

Councilor Laureti asked if different options had been explored. City Manager Lovell advised that Civic

Plus had been considered; however, based on the numerous problems the city has had with them, they were not considered.

Councilor Laureti expressed concern that some companies may retain ownership of data unless a higher premium is paid. He requested confirmation that this had been properly researched. He also questioned whether a third vendor should be considered to fulfill the standard requirement of obtaining three quotes. Fire Chief Scott Jones responded, noting that he had evaluated the third option—Municipity—which was included in last year’s Capital Project budget at \$50,000. However, that platform, as well as Civic Plus, is geared toward larger municipalities, whereas the proposed software is better suited for a city of our size. Chief Jones confirmed that we would retain ownership of all data and that the system is entirely cloud-based. If approved, the software will operate in the background while staff become familiar with it, with a full public launch anticipated in early 2026.

Councilor Laureti questioned if this would be better than what the city currently uses, to which Fire Chief Jones responded that it was better than using Excel spreadsheets, adding that this will allow all involved to have real time tracking abilities and will provide alerts for the applicant to stay on track. The contract price and terms were discussed and it will allow for more budgeting flexibility.

**RECEIVE AND PLACE ON FILE THE “REVISED” STANDARDIZED NOTICE FORMS FOR AN ON-PREMISES
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE LICENSE (NEW APPLICATION) AND WAIVE THE 30-DAY NOTIFICATION
REQUIREMENT- SAY I DO EVENTS LLC**

RESOLUTION 25-111

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Winchell

WHEREAS, the City of Oneida Common Council received *revised* Standardized Notice Forms pursuant to the requirements for providing thirty (30) day advanced notice to a local municipality or community board for a new license application for an on-premises alcoholic beverage license; and

WHEREAS, Say I Do Events LLC has submitted such notification regarding its intent to apply for new liquor licenses for the following locations:

- The Blind Squirrel-161 Phelps Street
- Jadie & Junes-130 Broad Street
- Dunn’s Grille-137 Phelps Street

WHEREAS, the submission of this Notice Form is a procedural requirement under the New York State Alcoholic Beverage Control Law and provides the City with an opportunity to review and comment, if necessary, on the proposed license applications; and

WHEREAS, the City of Oneida has no objection to the filing of the said applications and wishes to expedite the process for Say I Do Events LLC.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the City of Oneida Common Council hereby acknowledges receipt of the *revised* Standardized Notice Forms for Say I Do Events LLC, places the same on file with the City Clerk's Office, and does hereby waive the thirty (30) day notification requirement as provided under the New York State Alcoholic Beverage Control Law.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

DISCUSSION: The City Clerk explained that due to a change in the original notice submission, the State required the applicant to restart the process rather than simply amend the existing submission. Mayor Rossi noted that Mr. Stirpe had purchased the former Dispatch building and plans to open a restaurant there named Jadie & June's, for which this liquor license application applies. He also added that Mr. Stirpe has acquired the former Dunn's Bar & Grille.

NEW BUSINESS: None

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Pagano

Seconded by Councilor Simchik

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

The regular meeting is hereby adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

CITY OF ONEIDA

Sandra LaPera, City Clerk