

MINUTES OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
OCTOBER 21, 2025

A meeting of the Common Council of the City of Oneida, NY was held on the twenty first day of October 2025 at 6:30 p.m. at the Common Council Chambers, 109 N. Main, Oneida, NY 13421.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Rick Rossi.

<u>Attendees</u>	Present	Absent	Arrived Late
Mayor Rossi	☒	☐	☐ _____
Kyle Lovell, CM	☒	☐	☐ _____
Councilor Szczerba	☒	☐	☐ _____
Councilor Laureti	☒	☐	☐ _____
Councilor Hitchings	☒	☐	☐ _____
Councilor Winchell	☒	☐	☐ _____
Councilor Pagano	☒	☐	☐ _____
Councilor Simchik	☒	☐	☐ _____

Supervisors

Matt Roberts	☐	☒
Mary Cavanagh	☐	☒
Brandee Henderson	☐	☒
Michelle Kinville	☐	☒

Also Present

City Attorney Nadine Bell	☐	Public Safety Comm. Dave Jones	☒
City Clerk Sandy LaPera	☒	Attorney Stacy Marris	☒
Fire Chief Scott Jones	☒	Other: _____	☐
Police Chief Steve Lowell	☒		

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Roll Call

PUBLIC COMMENT

RALPH KOHLER-ONEIDA

Comments provided by Ralph Kohler:

I have several questions for the council on the council this evening:

Before I start, I recognize that you are doing a difficult and sometimes thankless job, so let me take a moment to thank you. I know you aren't doing it for the money, but for your view of the good of the community. And that includes both elected and appointed

Budget

First, last year both Mr. Hedglon and I suggested that we start the budgetary process earlier because in the Russian November last year we saw that there were a bunch of questions that couldn't be answered because of the narrow timelines. Mr. Lovell suggested when I brought this up several months ago that it had started earlier this year. Are we going to delay hearings until November again?

Ethics-Fine

Second, regarding the ethics investigation, Mr. Lovell said that possible penalties and removal from office and a \$10,000 fine. I asked him where the \$10,000 fine came from because when I look at the law, not being a lawyer and not being an expert in city government, it looks to me like in the current situation the maximum is \$1,000. I sent a note to the city attorney, Ms. Bell to understand the city's position on this but have not heard back. Why do we think the fine is \$10,000, and do you believe there's any chance that any of the elected officials could be removed from office?

Emergency Agenda

Third I think it was particularly bad form to have both of these ethics' agenda items brought up without notice. These are not emergencies, and they certainly should not be treated as such.

New Unannounced Items

My question for tonight- is there anything else new and unannounced that you're going to spring on us, and if so is it an emergency ?

Explanations

Finally, Mr. Hedglon and the Mayor, at a recent "Meet the Candidates" event, have indicated that going forward they will explain their votes and rationales I would ask all of you to do that this evening and from now on.

JANET JONES-ONEIDA

Comments provided by Janet Jones:

As we approach budget season, I believe you may have the opportunity to find creative ways to preserve services with more efficient delivery.

When deliberating tonight's Agenda Item #4 to reappoint the city assessor to a 6 year term, I suggest the Council discuss the possibility of creating some efficiencies in the Assessor's Office, given that many of the tasks can and should be automated, and the Charter allows for the Assessor to be employed in other

positions by the City, not incompatible with the office of Assessor.

At a council meeting late last year, it was disclosed that the last assessment was at least 15 years ago, and contracting with an outside firm to handle the processes and communication for reassessment was discussed.

Perhaps the individual that serves as the assessor can also be responsible for some of those chamberlain duties, that meet the city charter compatibility stipulation.

Per the New York State Taxation and Finance website: The assessor is obligated by New York State law to maintain assessments at a uniform percentage of market value each year.

In order to maintain a uniform roll, each year your assessor will need to analyze all of the properties in the municipality to determine which assessments need to be changed.

Every assessment unit should be keeping all assessments at a fair and uniform level every year. Assessors can use computers to efficiently estimate property values. They use computer assisted mass appraisal techniques to analyze sales and estimate values for many properties at once.

OLD BUSINESS

Councilor Hitchings asked Mayor Rossi to speak regarding the ongoing investigation. Mayor Rossi provided an update, stating that the investigation into the breach of confidentiality—authorized by the Common Council at its September 16 meeting—is underway. He noted that the City is in the process of engaging an independent third party to conduct the investigation and deliver findings and recommendations.

REPORTS

Mayor's Report:

We have a lot of Halloween festivities coming up! Trunk or Treat will be held on Saturday, October 25th at Veterans Field parking lot from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. Bring your little ones and their candy bags for a fun afternoon.

Following that event, you can head over to the Recreation Center, which will host its annual Halloween Party from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Activities include a Haunted House, face painting, 25-cent games, and a costume contest.

Then, on Halloween night, we'll have our popular Trick or Treat Street on Cleveland Avenue from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. DNA Tacos will be there, and tomorrow morning I'll be helping hang pumpkins along the median, just like last year.

Candy donations are always welcome! This is a huge event, and the neighbors go through a lot of candy. Donations can be dropped off at 343 Cleveland Avenue. Volunteers are also needed to help at barricade locations—feel free to dress up and join the fun!

My family and I will be setting up in the median this year with a pop-up tent to hand out candy. If you live on the outskirts of town and don't get many trick-or-treaters, you're welcome to set up there as well. Lastly, don't forget to check out all the wonderfully decorated Halloween houses around the City. Many residents have shared photos and videos online—it's great to see Oneida turning into a true Halloween Town with Fall Fest and all these community events!

Supervisor's Report: None

City Manager's Report:

If you receive an email from any non-official source claiming to be from the City of Oneida and requesting wire transfers or financial transactions, please know that it is not legitimate. The City will never solicit funds or request wire transfers through email. An active investigation has been opened regarding this matter, and we will see it through to its conclusion.

This Friday, the Greater Oneida Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards Banquet will be held at Vernon Downs. This event serves as an important reminder of how vital our local businesses are to the success and vibrancy of our community. I want to express my sincere appreciation to all the entrepreneurs, small business owners, and organizations who continue to invest in Oneida. A thriving business community means a thriving city, and I firmly believe in that principle.

We are also continuing work on the 2026 Executive Budget Proposal, which will be filed before the October 30th deadline. This year's budget preparation has been a careful balancing act—addressing increasing operational costs, infrastructure needs, and maintaining a responsible fiscal policy. It hasn't been easy, and I appreciate everyone's patience as we work through the details.

The completed budget will be released on time, and budget hearings will be scheduled sometime after the November 5th Council meeting. We'll coordinate with Council members to finalize those dates for early November.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Pagano

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the regular meeting of October 7, 2025, are hereby approved as presented.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

APPROVAL OF WARRANT

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Pagano

RESOLVED, that Warrant No. 20 checks and ACH payments in the amount of \$1,152,752.45 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

MONTHLY REPORTS

RESOLUTION 25-179

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Pagano

RESOLVED, that Monthly Reports from the City Clerk, City Engineer, Codes Department, Fire Department, Planning Department, Parks & Recreation Department, and Police Department are hereby received and placed on file.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

BOARD REAPPOINTMENTS-RECREATION COMMISSION

RESOLUTION 25-180

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Simchik

RESOLVED, to approve the Mayor's recommendation to reappoint the following to the Recreation Commission for a three (3) year term:

- Mark Flynn
- Lisa Coakley
- Diane Farina

- Jack Cavallo
- Jennifer Nellis

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

BOARD APPOINTMENT-RECREATION COMMISSION

RESOLUTION 25-181

Moved by Councilor Hitchings

Seconded by Councilor Pagano

RESOLVED, to approve the Mayor's appointment of Norma Happle to the Recreation Commission for a three (3) year term to fill a vacancy due to the expiration of Nicole Rossi's term on November 1, 2025.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

CITY ASSESSOR REAPPOINTMENT-REBECCA LENNON

RESOLUTION 25-182

Moved by Councilor Hitchings

Seconded by Councilor Winchell

WHEREAS, pursuant to New York State Real Property Tax Law ("RPTL") § 310, the City of Oneida appoints a Sole Assessor for a six-year term commencing October 1, 2025, and ending September 30, 2031; and

WHEREAS, the City desires to ensure the continuity, accuracy, and timeliness of assessment administration for the benefit of City taxpayers; and

WHEREAS, Rebecca Lennon is duly qualified to serve as Sole Assessor and meets the minimum qualification standards established by the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, Office of Real Property Tax Services (ORPTS);

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Common Council of the City of Oneida hereby reappoints Rebecca Lennon as the Sole Assessor for the City of Oneida for the term October 1, 2025, through September 30, 2031; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the compensation and benefits for the Sole Assessor shall be as provided in the duly adopted City budget and/or applicable policies; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Mayor and/or City Manager are authorized to take any and all actions necessary to effectuate this reappointment, including execution of the oath of office and submission of any required filings or notices to Madison County and to ORPTS; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this resolution shall take effect immediately.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

DISCUSSION:

City Manager Lovell began by referencing Janet Jones's earlier remarks, noting that "great minds think alike." He commended Becky (the City Assessor) for being an outstanding asset to the City, particularly during the recent Chamberlain's Office challenges.

He explained that Becky immediately stepped in, taking on additional responsibilities and helping to keep daily operations running smoothly. Lovell emphasized her dedication, professionalism, and strong work ethic, noting that she has been instrumental in maintaining continuity along with a regular rotation of other staff members who have provided assistance. He concluded by expressing sincere appreciation for her commitment and contributions.

Councilor Hitchings added that the City Assessor also recently assisted in the Planning Department, helping to keep operations running efficiently there as well. She commended the teamwork and flexibility demonstrated across departments in supporting one another during busy times.

HUMANA GROUP MEDICARE ADVANTAGE PLAN RENEWAL

RESOLUTION 25-183

Moved by Councilor Hitchings

Seconded by Councilor Simchik

WHEREAS, the City of Oneida provides health insurance benefits to eligible retirees through the Humana Group Medicare Advantage Plan; and

WHEREAS, Humana has submitted the renewal agreement for the 2026 plan year, outlining the terms, rates, and coverage continuation for retirees currently enrolled in the plan; and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interest of the City to maintain continuous and uninterrupted health coverage for its retirees under the Humana Group Medicare Advantage Plan;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Common Council of the City of Oneida hereby

authorizes the City Manager to execute the 2026 Humana Group Medicare Advantage Plan Renewal on behalf of the City of Oneida.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

BUDGET TRANSFERS/AMENDMENTS

RESOLUTION 25-184

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					
\$	30,000.00	001.3410.0102.0000		001.0001.0912.0000	
		Fire Overtime		General Fund Balance	
<i>To allocate funds for the expected overtime expenses for the remainder of 2025</i>					
\$	30,000.00	001.3410.0114.0000		001.0001.0912.0000	
		Short Shift Overtime		General Fund Balance	
<i>To allocate funds for the expected overtime expenses for the remainder of 2025</i>					
\$	5,000.00	001.1640.0403.0001		001.0001.0912.0000	
		Police Vehicle Repairs		General Fund Balance	
<i>To allocate funds for Police vehicle repairs and maintenance</i>					
\$	44,500.00	001.9785.0600.0001		001.0001.0889.0000	
		Police Vehicle Leases		General Fund Vehicle Reserve	
<i>To allocate funds for Police vehicle leases for the remainder of 2025</i>					
\$	2,325.00	001.8020.0400.0000		001.0001.0912.0000	
		Planning Contracts		General Fund Balance	
<i>To allocate funds to cover contractual expenses for Planning Consultant Services</i>					

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

EXCELLUS PLAN RENEWAL-2026 HEALTH AND DENTAL INSURANCE

RESOLUTION 25-185

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Pagano

RESOLVED, to authorize the City Manager to sign an agreement with Excellus for Health and Dental Insurance renewals for 2026.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

WAIVE RULE TO ACCEPT AGENDA ITEMS

RESOLUTION 25-186

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Pagano

RESOLVED, that per Resolution 08-180 adopted by the Common Council on August 19, 2008, the provisions of the procedure to accept agenda items are hereby waived.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

AGREEMENT-F & W FORESTRY SERVICES INC.

RESOLUTION 25-187

Moved by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Simchik

RESOLVED, to authorize the City Manager to sign an agreement with F & W Forestry Services, Inc., 4685 Middle Settlement Rd., New Hartford, NY 13413, to provide forestry services on parcels of watershed lands in Oneida County, NY, with tax map designations as follows:

- 56-1-13
- 74-1-8
- 74-1-6.1
- 75-1-1

- 93-2-19
- 111-1-13
- 112-1-39.1
- 112-1-43

The term of the contract will be from October 17, 2025, to November 1, 2026 , or until the expiration of any Timber Sale Agreements.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

WAIVE RULE TO ACCEPT AGENDA ITEMS

RESOLUTION 25-188

Moved by Councilor Hitchings

Seconded by Councilor Simchik

RESOLVED, that per Resolution 08-180 adopted by the Common Council on August 19, 2008, the provisions of the procedure to accept agenda items are hereby waived.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

ADVERTISE FOR BIDS-SALE OF FOREST PRODUCTS

RESOLUTION 25-189

Moved by Councilor Hitchings

Seconded by Councilor Simchik

RESOLVED, to authorize Jeff Rowe, City Engineer, to advertise for bids for the sale of forest products on land owned by the City of Oneida as part of the Forestry Management Program.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

NEW BUSINESS: None

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Simchik

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

The regular meeting is hereby adjourned at 6:48 p.m.

CITY OF ONEIDA

Sandra LaPera, City Clerk