MINUTES OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
BUDGET MEETING
NOVEMBER 10, 2025

A special meeting of the Common Council of the City of Oneida, NY was held on the tenth day of November 2025 at 6:00pm 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

Attendees	**Present**	**Absent**	**Arrived Late**
Mayor Rossi	☒	☐	☐_____
Kyle Lovell, CM	☒	☐	☐_____
Councilor Szczerba	☒	☐	☐_____
Councilor Laureti	☒	☐	☐_____
Councilor Hitchings	☒	☐	☐_____
Councilor Winchell	☒	☐	☐_____
Councilor Pagano	☐	☐	☒6:06pm
Councilor Simchik	☐	☐	☒6:16pm

Also Present

City Clerk Sandy LaPera
Comptroller-Consultant Lee Ann Wells
City Engineer, Jeff Rowe
City Assessor, Rebecca Lennon
Councilor Elect Lynne McHugh
Councilor Elect Janet Jones

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Roll Call

2026 BUDGET WORK SESSION
DPW/WATER/SEWER/ASSESSOR/CITY CLERK

Budget Hearing – Departmental Discussions

DPW

Overview and Process

Mayor Rossi opened the budget session and explained that the session is not open for public comment and is intended strictly for budget discussion among council members and department heads.

The City Manager emphasized that this is a new format for budget review, serving as a template for future sessions. The goal is to have open discussion rather than a line-by-line review, allowing adjustments to the process as needed. Council members were encouraged to raise specific questions or concerns about individual budget lines if necessary.

Councilor Hitchings stated that she had received the budget upon its release, thoroughly read and reviewed it, and had previously discussed her questions with City Manager Lovell. She commended him for doing a great job preparing it.

DPW

The City Manager noted that the DPW budget is bare-bones this year, with no major changes anticipated.

A key improvement highlighted was the creation of a dedicated budget line for the Traffic Safety Board's sign expenditures. Previously, multiple sign replacements required fund transfers, but with this change, recurring sign needs will now be proactively budgeted. Councilor Hitchings stated she was pleased to see this addition included. It was also confirmed that no new sidewalk maintenance funding is included in the base budget.

Sidewalk Funding and Grants

The City Manager clarified that the existing sidewalk grant funds will be fully expended by the end of the current year.

Any future sidewalk work will rely on new grant opportunities.

Without additional grant funding, there will be no new sidewalk projects beyond those already covered.

Administration (001.5010)

Discussion then moved to DPW Administration expenses.

Payroll savings were noted following the retirement of former Assistant City Engineer Tom O'Herien. The Civil Engineering Technician has been assisting the City Engineer with some of the related duties in the interim; however, the position is currently being advertised.

The City Manager explained that the position requires specific certifications, making it difficult to fill.

City Manager Lovell explained that as long as the position remains vacant, the City realizes ongoing payroll savings. He added that the budget still provides for the position in the event it is filled later in the year.

The City Manager described the approach as both optimistic and cautious, saying, “You always want to pray for rain, but dig a well.”

Central Garage (001.1640 and 001.1660)

The Central Garage budget was reviewed next:

- Last year’s budget: $20,000
- Current year: $18,000
- Year-to-date spending: approximately $14,191, including a large end-of-year calendar order.

Snow and Ice Removal (001.5142)

The City Manager and council members discussed the Snow and Ice budget, noting that:

- The previous winter was particularly severe, requiring use of nearly all allocated funds.
- Salt prices increased due to a statewide shortage, significantly impacting costs.
- These additional expenses are reflected in the new budget, though the City hopes for better weather and lower material costs next year.

Traffic Expenses (001.3310)

The City Manager and council discussed traffic signal and lighting costs. Intersections considered for potential change or removal included Broad & Elm, and Broad & Farrier. It was suggested that these intersections, and possibly others, may be converted to four-way stops due to low traffic volume.

Traffic light replacement costs were estimated at around $25,000 each, though exact figures were unavailable. The Traffic Safety Board has not yet reviewed these intersections; any changes would require formal recommendation from the board.

The original department request of $99,100 was reduced to $49,100, effectively eliminating new traffic light or box purchases. The remaining $49,100 covers outsourced maintenance, including streetlight and signal repairs, bucket truck inspections, LED maintenance, and power work.

Outsourced work, coordinated by the City of Sherrill, is billed to the City of Oneida at approximately $125 per hour, which includes the operator and materials. Additional outsourced work is performed by Power Construction Group, Scanlon, and Powerline Construction. The $49,100 amount does not include traffic-box replacement costs, as those items were removed. Mayor Rossi requested that City Manager Lovell provide additional information on this line item at the next meeting.

Demolition Expense (001.3650)

The City Manager stated that demolition expenses are relatively straightforward. The line covers effective safety measures such as signage, fencing, and tarp that goes around the fencing, making it a very minimal line item.

Council members asked what the plans were for demolition and referenced previous building collapses. The City Manager explained that the $1,500 line allows the City to install tarps and maintain watertight protection around structures as needed, noting that there were no planned demolitions currently that he is aware of.

Discussion then turned to Madison Street. City Manager Lovell advised that progress will depend on Jim Monaghan's project timeline, with financing now in place and expected traction in the coming months. The city continues to maintain close communication with the representatives, who recently presented their Madison Street Revival Plan to Empire State Development (ESD) in Syracuse. ESD is the state-level organization that reviews, funds, and supports local revitalization projects like the Madison Street plan. City Manager Lovell commended the plan as ambitious and said he remains optimistic about its outcome.

City Manager Lovell clarified that one of the buildings involved is being sold by Paul Marco to Monaghan as part of the Madison Street Revitalization Project. The project includes multiple grants supporting the work and the city only owns one of the properties.

The demolition line is simply to ensure the city can cover protective measures such as fencing, safety signage, and dust control tarps. The City Manager stated there is no demolition budgeted beyond those safety provisions.

Street Maintenance and Mosquito Control (001.5110)

Discussion transitioned to street maintenance and mosquito control. It was confirmed that the mosquito technician position remains unfilled. The Mayor stated the role involves multiple requirements and certifications, including chemical spraying and pesticide licensing.

The City Engineer confirmed that there is one current MEO operator pursuing the necessary online training to obtain certification. The process has taken over a year, done on personal time.

Councilor Simchik noted the position covers more than mosquito control—it involves all pesticide and chemical applications. City Engineer Rowe advised that chemical spraying typically occurs between May and September, several times per week, depending on mosquito activity. Additional duties include herbicide applications for weed control and machine operation (snowplowing) during the winter months. Councilor Simchik suggested keeping this in the budget.

Councilors asked whether the position itself had been eliminated or simply left vacant. The City Manager clarified that it remains budgeted but unfilled, and that a qualified MEO could move into the mosquito technician role once certified, which would then create a vacant MEO position.

Discussion followed on possibly cross-training existing staff to handle spraying as part of their normal work routine—pulling employees temporarily from mowing or other maintenance tasks, to which City Engineer Rowe advised would be up to the union. The City Manager said the issue could be revisited later in the budget once staffing and certification questions are resolved.

WATER

Water and sewer rates will remain unchanged from last year. The City Manager commended the Water Department and DPW Engineer Rowe for their hard work in improving operations, collections, and accounting practices. He praised Water Superintendent, Drew Campany, for strong leadership and accountability within the department, noting a phenomenal turnaround.

The City Manager discussed healthcare costs, noting that the initial USI renewal increase of 24.7% was reduced to about 17.1% after negotiations. This remains a major cost driver in the budget. Chemical and supply costs continue to be monitored closely, as prices remain a concern.

SEWER

The City Manager reviewed sewer revenues, noting that sewer rents are strong and both the water and sewer funds are financially healthy. Revenues are performing as expected, and similar numbers are projected for next year. The transfer to the bond reserve from the sewer fund for 2026 will total $348,405.

City Comptroller (consultant) Lee Ann Wells explained the bonding process for the wastewater treatment plant. The City will issue a long-term bond of approximately $55 million to replace the renewed BANs. Bond fees are based on the total amount and will be a one-time cost. Ongoing transfers to the bond reserve will help offset future debt service payments over the next 30 years.

ASSESSOR

Councilor Hitchings asked the City Assessor whether she was having difficulty collecting the $30 Deed Recording fees. The Assessor responded that it is about 50-50—some residents pay promptly while others require follow-up, though most eventually pay.

CITY CLERK

The City Manager introduced the City Clerk's Office as the final department for review, noting it is a small department with limited expense and revenue lines. He invited questions or concerns regarding individual items.

The City has eliminated fishing and hunting licenses, as they were not a significant source of revenue and had become impractical based on the amount of commission received and the expenses incurred—both administrative and in supplies.

Councilor Hitchings inquired about the imposition of late fees for dog license renewals and how this was going. The City Clerk advised that coordination between the Clerk's Office and Police Department has improved significantly since the hiring of a new Community Service Officer, resulting in better tracking and enforcement of renewals.

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Simchik

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0
MOTION CARRIED

The special budget session concluded at 6:50pm.

SANDRA LAPERA, CITY CLERK