

**MINUTES OF THE COMMON COUNCIL**  
**SPECIAL MEETING**  
**NOVEMBER 12, 2024**

A special meeting of the Common Council of the City of Oneida, NY was held on the twelfth day of November 2024 at 5:00 pm at the City of Oneida Common Council Chambers, 109 N. Main Street, Oneida NY 13421.

The meeting was called to order by Deputy Mayor, Steve Laureti

<u>Attendees</u>	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>	<u>Arrived Late</u>
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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Left at 5:40
Councilor Simchik	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

**Also Present**

City Attorney Nadine Bell	<input type="checkbox"/>	Public Safety Comm. Dave Jones	<input type="checkbox"/>
City Clerk Sandy LaPera	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire Chief Scott Jones	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Police Chief Steve Lowell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

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**2025 CITY OF ONEIDA BUDGET**  
**POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
Police Chief-Steve Lowell

Police Chief Steve Lowell presented his 2025 Budget to the Council, highlighting the following budget line items. The majority of his presentation centered around staffing and salaries/overtime. He opened the discussion with the following statement:

“As I prepared the police departments 2025 budget, I want to share some of the key factors influencing our decisions, and to provide my thoughts on how we are collectively moving forward. This is not just a budget for the coming year—it’s part of a larger strategy to ensure we continue to deliver the high level of service that the citizens of Oneida deserve, while setting a sustainable course for the future of our department.

We are facing a number of challenges that impact how we allocate our resources. National trends in law enforcement—including staffing retention and recruitment—are certainly affecting us here in Oneida. The upcoming retirements in our department are also a significant factor, as we need to ensure a smooth transition and maintain continuity of service. We are also working through union negotiations, with contractual raises coming in the near future, and we must balance these obligations against our overall fiscal responsibility.

But even as we navigate these challenges, we are focused on one core goal: providing the best possible service to the people of Oneida. As the first responders in moments of crisis, we know that every call for service—whether routine or extraordinary—demands a response that is skilled and professional. To meet this responsibility, we must ensure our officers are as well-prepared as possible to handle the variety of situations they face, day in and day out.

That’s why this budget prioritizes training, retention, and recruitment. We need to ensure our officers are equipped with the tools, skills, and knowledge they need to succeed—not just in the routine calls, but also in the increasingly complex and demanding situations that law enforcement is asked to manage. As the landscape of policing continues to evolve, we must be proactive in addressing “mission creep”—the growing and often unpredictable scope of tasks that fall to us as public servants. This requires not just operational readiness, but also a focus on mental health, community engagement, and a long-term vision for public safety.

One of my top priorities as your Chief is to make sure we don’t just react to today’s challenges—we plan for tomorrow as well. We must take steps now to ensure that we are positioned for success not just in 2025, but for the years ahead. This budget is a start, but I am already looking ahead to 2026 and 2027, where we will continue to refine and improve our strategy. Together, we can take meaningful steps to build a stronger, more resilient department.

This will take all of us—officers, support staff, and community partners—working together toward a common vision. We have a shared commitment to Oneida’s safety, and we will continue to strengthen that commitment by investing in our people, our training, and our ability to serve with excellence.

Thank you to the Common Council for all that you do to support our department. I look forward to the continued hard work as we support each other, and build a safer, stronger future for Oneida.”

#### **001.3120.0101.000      SALARIES**

Council inquired about the difference between the total in the salary line schedule (\$2,707,773) vs the 2025 salary line (\$2,789,013). Acting Comptroller Wells advised that the Police salary line includes \$6,240 in cell phone reimbursements and \$75,000 in differential.

#### **001.3120.0102.000      OVERTIME/POLICE**

Due to staffing shortages anticipated for 2025, it is essential to consider overtime to maintain minimum staffing levels. While funds from the salary line can be reallocated to support overtime costs, Chief Lowell emphasized the importance of the council keeping this in mind during the 2025 budget process. Although 15 positions have been budgeted starting January 1, it has been confirmed that not all these positions will be filled by then, necessitating the use of overtime during the interim period.

The starting salary for an officer is approximately \$63,500 (Step 1), with no sign-on bonus currently offered. Discussions have highlighted the ongoing recruiting efforts and the current practice of advertising open positions exclusively on social media. The City Manager noted plans to contact Jessica Kaiser to assess the requirements for listing these positions on the City's website, as well as on employment platforms like Indeed, to broaden the reach of recruitment efforts.

Councilor Winchell inquired whether this initiative could be implemented directly through the council or if it needed to go through the PBA. Chief Lowell explained that proceeding without negotiating with the PBA could lead to potential grievances. If a benefit is provided to a union member and later altered or discontinued, it could trigger a grievance. Therefore, Chief Lowell emphasized the importance of establishing an agreement with the union to avoid such issues.

Chief Lowell reiterated that recruitment and retention issues extend beyond financial incentives, noting that opportunities for specialized assignments and the appeal of higher salaries at other agencies are significant factors. He proposed including funding for three additional positions in the budget, raising the total number of positions to 18. He addressed the need for a plan to develop funding strategies for these roles over the next three years and confirmed his intent to continue seeking grant opportunities to support these efforts.

Deputy Mayor Laureti noted that the council typically does not allocate funds based on potential future needs and suggested maintaining the current budget structure. Given the stage of the budgeting process, he recommended returning the funds to the Fund Balance for use as needed. Chief Lowell reported that there are currently 8 vacancies, 3 of which are occupied by officers in field training, which will reduce the number of vacancies to 5 in January. Deputy Mayor Laureti expressed his preference for prioritizing the filling of existing vacancies before considering the addition of new positions. Chief Lowell asked if they could increase the number of staffing table to 18 to avoid delays. This would increase the number of positions, but not the dollar amount, which could be set by council resolution. It was advised that there will be potential for 6 retirements in 2025, of which 4 are current sergeants.

The discussion also covered the current staffing levels within the department, the proposed changes, and the balance between supervisors and patrol officers. Additionally, police training coverage was examined. The City Manager, when asked for his input, expressed concern for the Police Department but emphasized the importance of filling existing budgeted positions before seeking additional taxpayer funding for new roles. He noted that the allocated funds would ultimately be spent, whether on salaries or overtime expenses. City Manager Lovell acknowledged the gravity of the situation and stated that we need to focus on recruitment and the possibility of hiring new recruits and engaging lateral transfers.

There was also mention of potential revenue of \$38,525.57 from the Oneida City School District to provide for the assignment of crossing guards employed by the City to serve at certain intersections within the school district. Chief Lowell advised that this would be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Common Council, and if approved, the City Manager could authorize for this to be included in the General Fund.

There was discussion about grant funding and how money has to be spent up front in order to get reimbursement. Councilor Simchik reminded Council that they cannot change revenue; however, the City Manager can.

There was discussion regarding how the positions of Police Records Clerk, Senior Account Clerk, and Senior Telephone Operator were structured, including if they were a step schedule setup. The Acting Comptroller

clarified that, of the three positions, only the Senior Account Clerk is currently governed by the CSEA Collective Bargaining Agreement. Once the Common Council establishes the wage rates for the Police Records Clerk and the Senior Telephone Operator positions, a Memorandum of Understanding will be signed with the CSEA Union, and those rates will subsequently be included in the CSEA Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Chief Lowell emphasized the importance of these support positions to the department, expressing a strong desire for their addition. Mayor Rossi pointed out that since these roles were not previously included in the budget and are new, the council has the authority to establish their salaries. Once set, these salary levels would become the standard for these positions moving forward, contingent upon approval by the Civil Service Commission. Council requested that the Police Record's Clerk and the Senior Telephone Operator salaries increase to \$45,000, which has been recorded in the General Fund.

The discussion also covered the position and salary of the Community Service Officer, focusing on the need to adjust the compensation to a more competitive level. Chief Lowell expressed interest in revising the job title to better represent the actual responsibilities and scope of work performed by the individual in this role. Mayor Rossi stated that his goal with most of the clerks and operators is to raise their salaries to a competitive level. He emphasized that failing to do so could result in the city losing these employees to better-paying opportunities elsewhere.

#### **001.3120.0108.000      STEP OVERTIME**

The Council approved to increase the Step Overtime line to \$26,024 to match the revenue in 0025.3392 (GTSC), which has been recorded in the General Fund. Chief Lowell advised that some of this request is funded through the State's Traffic Safety Committee and is grant reimbursed. Some of his request is a buffer for shift differential or overages if someone gets held up on an arrest.

#### **001.3120.0317.000      CLOTHING**

The Council requested that the clothing line be increased to \$48,750, which has been recorded in the General Fund. This is partially contractual where every officer gets \$750 per year. This request includes new hire expenses.

#### **001.3120.0413.0000      TRAINING**

The increase in training costs is partly attributed to the choice of Police Academy, which charges an attendance fee per recruit. This fee covers the training program, any ammunition charges, etc. but does not include housing expenses, which is free. This budget request is for 6 people.

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Winchell  
Seconded by Councilor Hitchings

Ayes: 6

Nays: 0

Absent: 1-Pagano

**MOTION CARRIED**

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

**CITY OF ONEIDA**

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Sandra LaPera, City Clerk