

**MINUTES OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
NOVEMBER 13, 2024**

A special meeting of the Common Council of the City of Oneida, NY was held on the thirteenth 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>	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 type="checkbox"/>	Public Safety Comm. Dave Jones	<input type="checkbox"/>
City Clerk Sandy LaPera	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Codes Director Bob Burnett	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fire Chief Scott Jones	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assessor Rebecca Lennon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Police Chief Steve Lowell	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parks & Rec Director Luke Griff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Water Super. (Acting) J. Monaghan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**2025 CITY OF ONEIDA BUDGET
All Other Departments**

CITY CLERK

City Clerk, Sandy LaPera, distributed a comprehensive handout to the Mayor, City Manager, and council members detailing the responsibilities associated with the City Clerk and Deputy City Clerk's office. The document emphasized that many of the listed duties involve multiple steps and acknowledged that additional responsibilities, not outlined in the handout, also fall under their purview.

In New York State, the Registrar and Deputy Registrar must approve all death certificates before a funeral director can transport the deceased. This approval is often required during holiday weekends, necessitating the Clerk or Deputy to be on-call and perform duties remotely. Unlike other local

municipalities, the City of Oneida has a hospital, resulting in the processing of over 400 birth certificates and approximately 200 death certificates annually.

The position title of "Secretary to the Mayor" was restructured with the hiring of the current Deputy City Clerk, following approval from then City Manager Doug Selby. Consequently, the budget allocation for this role was transferred from the Mayor's budget to the City Clerk's budget for 2025. Historically, the Deputy City Clerk managed both roles; however, increased departmental responsibilities and the introduction of the City Manager position have made it impractical for one individual to report to three supervisors. Currently, the Deputy City Clerk reports directly to the City Clerk, with both providing administrative support to the Mayor and City Manager alongside their standard duties.

The City Clerk highlighted the significant workload involved in organizing the Fall Festival, which she managed independently this year due to the Deputy's recent hire and the office being overwhelmed with FOIL requests. She noted that, moving forward, the Deputy will participate in the event's preparation to help distribute the responsibilities.

The City Clerk also mentioned that she assumed responsibility for the Community Gardens after the Community Development Assistant's retirement. She successfully managed the end-of-season procedures by coordinating efforts with both the gardeners and the DPW Supervisor to ensure the gardens were properly closed for the year.

The City Clerk highlighted the \$1,000 annual stipend she receives for her role as the Website Administrator. She also noted that she took on the responsibility of managing the City Newsletter, introduced in 2024, without any additional compensation, as it was not included in the budget. The Clerk mentioned that the software used for creating the newsletter, Canva, incurs a cost of around \$200 per year, which she personally covers. She advised that for performing both services, she receives approximately \$800 per year (\$1,000-\$200).

In conclusion, the City Clerk requested that her salary reflect a 4% increase instead of the 3% increase proposed in the budget by the Mayor, citing the additional workload she has taken on. She also recommended that the Deputy City Clerk receive a 4% salary increase upon completing her first year of employment.

CODES

Codes Director Bob Burnett commenced his presentation at 5:20 p.m., addressing the Mayor, City Manager, and council members. He distributed a handout detailing the job responsibilities of his Account Clerk and expressed his desire for the council to consider her promotion to a Senior Account Clerk position, citing both the volume and the high quality of her work.

There was also discussion about the clothing allowance for the Codes Department, advising that it should be re-titled to state "Personal Protective Equipment." The Mayor had removed the requested amount of \$1,500; however, Council agreed to add back in \$1,000 based on feedback from the City Manager.

ASSESSOR

City Assessor Rebecca Lennon began her presentation at 5:25 p.m., explaining the department's staffing history. Previously, it comprised a part-time City Assessor and a full-time Assessor's Aide. When the Assessor's Aide retired, Lennon was initially hired part-time to fill that position before becoming the City Assessor in June 2023. At that time, she was informed that filling the Assessor's Aide position would be revisited during budget discussions since it was already summer. Upon becoming Assessor, she transitioned to full-time and aimed to fill the Assessor Aide role part-time. However, this position was cut from the 2023 budget, leaving her without an aide and managing all responsibilities alone for the past year and a half, which has been highly demanding.

She noted that historically, the department has always had two, and at times three, staff members to manage tasks such as screening phone calls, processing paperwork, handling exemptions, and other administrative duties. These responsibilities were in addition to monitoring property sales, new constructions, and reviewing building permits to ensure assessments reflect improvements. Other tasks include maintaining updates in the RPS system, recording deeds, sending monthly letters to new homeowners to verify inventory accuracy, and serving as secretary to the Board of Assessment Review.

Assessor Lennon mentioned that when she was initially appointed to her position, she was not certified by New York State; however, she has since completed all the required courses and is now fully certified. She added that she is also a notary, a service she provides because, at the time of her appointment, there was only one other notary in the building. She noted that she covered the costs for this certification out of her own pocket. Additionally, she has taken steps to streamline and update the department's record-keeping processes.

She highlighted recent legislation passed by the council that raised the limits for the senior tax exemption and the exemption for Cold War veterans. This change has added to her workload, as it requires her to manually update the status in the system. She noted that she recently prepared and sent out 120 letters for seniors and needs to update the records of 39 Cold War veterans to ensure they receive the exemptions they are entitled to.

Assessor Lennon stated that she is requesting a \$15,000 salary adjustment, explaining that she is currently the lowest-paid department head. Without an aide, her workload has increased substantially, justifying the need for this salary adjustment.

Further discussion addressed her Training and Travel-Meals budget lines. It was clarified that the continuing education classes required for her role are fully reimbursed by New York State, as they are mandatory. Mileage and hotel expenses associated with this training are minimal. Deputy Mayor Laureti inquired why these reimbursements were not reflected in the revenue line, to which Mayor Rossi explained that this might be due to the timing of when the reimbursement is received. It was noted that a portion of the expense is reimbursed directly to the City, while the meal and mileage reimbursements are made directly to her.

Councilor Laureti reached out to Acting Comptroller Wells as to why this was not included in the revenue, to which she responded that this was not submitted to her by the Assessor; however, if an adjustment is needed, she will make the revision.

Assessor Lennon elaborated on the requested \$1,000 for Certiorari expenses, explaining that if cases go before the Board of Assessment Review (BAR) and involve commercial businesses challenging their

assessments, they may proceed to Certiorari. She mentioned that she currently has five such cases, with one potentially settled. She noted that she has not yet received any bills related to these cases and was unsure how these expenses are typically managed. With this line removed from the budget, she assumed that any related costs would need to be covered by another fund. Additionally, she expressed uncertainty about the payment process for members of the Board of Assessment Review.

She further explained that the contract line was meant to cover her time off, during which the former Assessor Aide would come in part-time to manage the office. With that individual no longer available, the office now closes when she is absent, and the City Clerk redirects her customers. Councilor Laureti asked if the current Codes Clerk, if promoted to an Administrative Aide position, could assist with the duties in her office. However, Councilor Hitchings and Mayor Rossi pointed out that all clerks are currently too busy to take on additional work, and adding more responsibilities would be too challenging. Mayor Rossi noted that while the proposed salary increases for these positions are substantial, they are necessary to align the pay with where it should be. She concluded by explaining what job responsibilities could be done by an aide.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks and Recreation Director Luke Griff began his presentation at 5:40 p.m. and stated that he believes his Account Clerk should also be considered for a title and pay change due to the significant responsibilities she manages. It was noted during the discussion that the current salary for this position is \$38,165 and he would like to propose that this position be reclassified to an Administrative Aide, with an adjusted salary of \$46,828. He did not include this in his original budget submission, however, he expressed concerns that not making this adjustment could lead to a union grievance, given that similar changes are being considered for other positions in other departments. Additionally, it was mentioned that Administrative Aides would have the capability to cross-train across departments. Councilor Hitchings stated that the Administrative Aide position title allows for the individual to do more things than an Account Clerk position.

City Manager Lovell explained that the strength of the Administrative Aide position lies in its flexibility, distinguishing it from an Account Clerk role, which is specific to one account. Councilor Laureti emphasized the importance of having staff capable of filling in for others during absences, noting that an Administrative Aide would be suitable for this purpose. However, he expressed concerns about the feasibility of this arrangement given the current workload of the Account Clerks. Councilor Simchik echoed this concern, questioning how cross-training would be possible when the clerks are already stretched thin with their existing responsibilities. Mayor Rossi added that the current practice of assigning additional job responsibilities to staff is already stretching them thin, and therefore, they should be adequately compensated for the increased workload.

Councilor Laureti reiterated his position that, although an Administrative Aide could cross-train, they would receive higher pay but lack the time to do so, a point with which Councilor Winchell concurred. Councilor Hitchings clarified that her suggestion for cross-training did not imply a need for complete knowledge of another's role, but rather sufficient understanding to provide coverage when necessary. Mayor Rossi advised that this is being done every day now with the Clerk's office covering for the Chamberlain's office when she is out. Organizationally, the City Manager advised that each Clerk he has encountered is very busy helping out when needed, and that this expectation needs to be made clear to the individual receiving the new position/pay.

Director Griff noted that he had initially requested an additional full-time Maintenance worker, which was ultimately removed from the budget. In response, he proposed hiring a seasonal maintenance worker for the position at \$16.50 per hour, 40 hours per week, for a duration of 32 weeks, totaling \$21,120. He emphasized that this role is essential, beginning in early spring when efforts focus on preparing the parks, readying fields, mowing grass, and clearing leaves. Currently, he has only one maintenance worker available starting April 1 to handle these tasks, with additional staff arriving in May.

Director Griff mentioned that, historically, he has employed two seasonal workers starting around April 1. He noted that after May, the workload typically decreases. City Manager Lovell asked whether any personnel from the Department of Public Works (DPW) or other departments could assist. In response, Director Griff explained that while they do collaborate closely with the DPW, requesting assistance on an almost daily basis would not be practical.

There was a discussion regarding the need to purchase a new lawn mower, highlighting that this is part of an annual rotation plan aimed at minimizing maintenance costs and repair expenses. It was noted that a new Ferris mower is purchased each year while another is traded in, ensuring that the equipment remains under warranty. This program has proven to be highly effective in managing expenses and maintaining reliable equipment, and Director Griff noting that they mow 70-80 acres weekly. Councilor Winchell expressed a preference for hiring a part-time worker at \$16.50 per hour rather than a full-time employee at a higher salary, or even the possibility of hiring two part-time workers.

The Council discussed the potential of forming a single crew through shared services with the Department of Public Works (DPW), which the City Manager agreed to explore further.

Director Griff reported that the estimated trade-in value for the current mower is \$10,500, while the cost of a new mower is projected at \$15,188, resulting in a net expense of \$4,688 for the City to acquire a new mower. To facilitate this purchase and ensure it is financially neutral, the council agreed to the following:

- Ferris Mower line should be increased to \$4,000
- Decrease Contracts-Concerts/Entertainment by \$3,000
- Decrease Equip Repair/Maint (0409) by \$500 to \$15,500
- Decrease Park Beautification (0421) by \$500 to \$3,000

Councilor Winchell inquired about who is responsible for the maintenance of the EADs, and Director Griff clarified that the Fire Department handles their maintenance, although the Parks and Recreation Department covers the cost.

In conclusion, Director Griff discussed the outdated camera system currently in place. While there have been no significant issues, he noted that the system serves as a deterrent. However, the existing wireless system limits the placement of cameras. He shared that he received an estimate from Abdoo Security for \$10,000 to equip the Rec Center, the rear of the Rec Center, the Dog Park, and the back parking lot. He mentioned that there were some funds available in the Dog Park account that could contribute to this cost, along with approximately \$1,000 raised by private donors.

Mayor Rossi mentioned that although he previously had to remove the Park Program from the budget, he would like to see it reinstated in the City. There was an extensive discussion about the feasibility of bringing the program back, considering factors such as community interest and participation. It was noted that Vets would be the most suitable location if the program were to be reintroduced.

There was a discussion regarding the number of lifeguards at the pool and the increasing costs of chlorine and training. Director Griff informed the Council that Madison County has applied for a grant aimed at supporting community pools within the county. If this grant is awarded, it would help offset some of these expenses. He noted that, should the grant come through, the hourly rate for pool staff could be reduced by \$2 per hour, with a bonus paid at the end of the season using the grant funds. This would also all for payment of lifeguard certifications, training for new lifeguards and increasing the amount of time the pool is open.

WATER

At 6:30 p.m., interim Water Superintendent John Monaghan, currently contracted to fulfill the role until a permanent appointment is made, presented the Water Department's 2025 budget.

Former Superintendent Monaghan mentioned that the Water Department has a lawnmower, used for maintaining the reservoir, that they are willing to transfer to another department for mowing duties. Although funds have already been allocated in the Recreation budget for a new Ferris mower, and DPW has also requested one, this existing unit could potentially be assigned to DPW. The City Manager will decide on the most effective approach to manage this resource allocation.

Mr. Monaghan highlighted that, similar to other departments, his support staff should be considered for title changes and potential salary increases, aligning with prior requests from other departments. He emphasized the need for an Administrative Aide with a skill set that would alleviate some of the Superintendent's responsibilities. He noted that under Civil Service regulations, if the Council decides to create new titles, these positions must go out for bid. The roles are designed for the department as a whole, not tailored to current incumbents. This means that if someone with more seniority and the necessary qualifications wishes to bid for the position, they can, making this more than a simple promotion for current employees.

Mr. Monaghan clarified that cross-training between departments, such as having an Administrative Aide from the Police Department trained for the Water Department, would not be practical due to the department-specific nature of the responsibilities. Mayor Rossi added that while some level of cross-training could be implemented to cover brief absences or day-off coverage, it is not meant for long-term coverage.

Mr. Monaghan indicated that the budget for this year will be very fluid due to uncertainty regarding the Town of Verona's departure. He noted that he has projected their revenue for only half of the year, based on the information provided to him, but emphasized that these figures are subject to change.

Mr. Monaghan discussed a recent survey he received from the Madison County Health Department, which identified several items at the Water Treatment Plant that will need replacement. He noted that the costs for these replacements are not yet available and, therefore, not included in the current budget. He mentioned that either he or another representative would likely need to approach the council in the future to request budget transfers to cover these expenses, as much of the plant's equipment remains original to 1979.

Former Superintendent Monaghan reviewed both the revenue and expense sections of the budget, noting that the expense figures were based on estimates. He also discussed adjustments to water rates. The minimum charge for 2024, currently set at \$22, is proposed to increase to \$23. The wholesale rate is

expected to rise from \$2.72 to \$2.84. Additionally, the monthly and quarterly rates would increase from \$4.20 to \$4.41.

The discussion addressed the potential impact of losing the Town of Verona/Durhamville on the water department's operations and finances, including considerations for bonding related to the dam. Options to adjust rates for large consumption users to generate additional income were explored. Mayor Rossi and Councilor Hitchings noted that, if Verona departs, the resulting rates would be comparable to those of the Onondaga County Water Authority (OCWA), which already serves Canastota. They suggested that it might be more feasible to purchase water from OCWA rather than continue producing it independently. However, John Monaghan pointed out that the current infrastructure is not equipped to support such a transition.

When Verona initially considered transitioning its water supply, the plan was to connect to the Mohawk Valley Water Authority (MVWA). Infrastructure was being developed, but governmental decisions halted progress, leaving the project inactive for a period. Subsequently, the City of Rome expressed interest in the initiative. It was at this juncture that the City of Oneida should have engaged in discussions, as the project's design extended beneath Oneida's transmission line to Durhamville. This location would have been an ideal connection point, offering the community the option to purchase water instead of producing it independently.

He explained that for this plan to work, the pipeline from Rome would need to be large enough to support the water needs of Verona, Durhamville, and Oneida. However, only a 20-inch pipe was installed, which limits the volume of water that can flow through it. At present, if a connection were made, it would not provide sufficient water, as Verona had only ensured enough supply for its own expansion. In response to Councilor Simchik's inquiry about whether this setup would be a long-term solution for Verona, Mr. Monaghan noted that there is a possibility they might return to sourcing water from Oneida, but this scenario could take years to materialize, and the Water Fund has limited capacity.

A follow-up meeting is planned with the City Manager, Councilor Hitchings, and Councilor Simchik to further discuss the water-related issues and budget.

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Hitchings
Seconded by Councilor Pagano

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

MOTION CARRIED

The special meeting is hereby adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

CITY OF ONEIDA

Sandra LaPera, City Clerk