

Veterans Memorial Park DRI

WHAT WAS APPROVED, WHAT CHANGED, AND WHY

Public Facts at a Glance | August 6, 2026

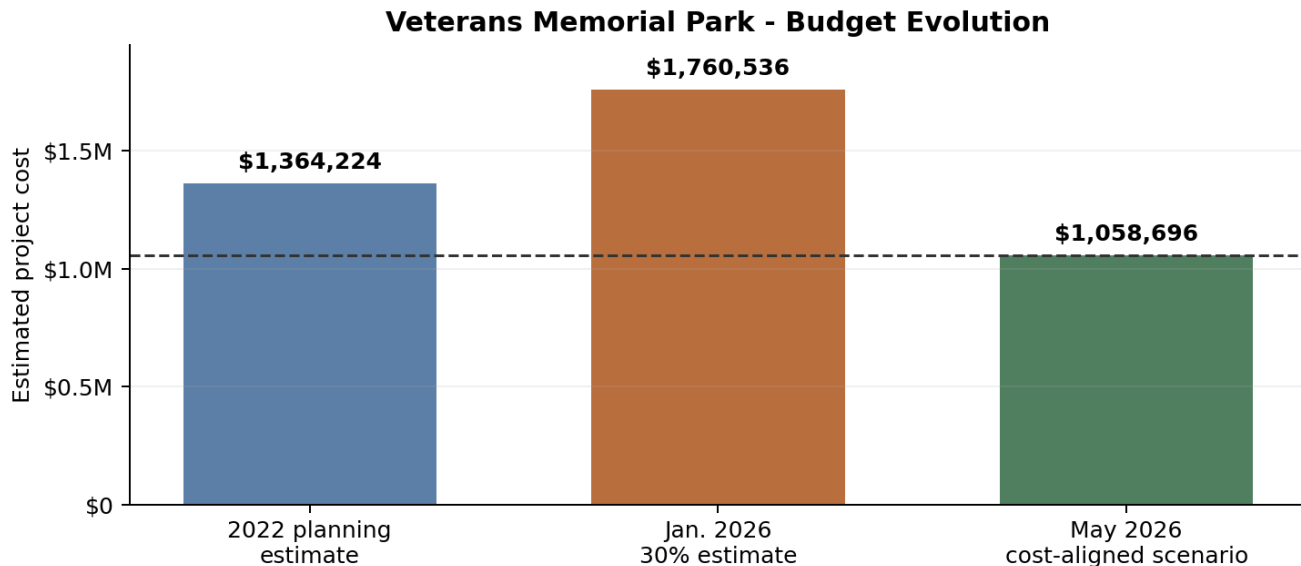
The central fact

The \$1,760,536 figure was a preliminary 30% design estimate - not approved spending, not a bid award, and not a construction contract. The estimate exposed a cost problem before construction, and the City revised the project to a working total of \$1,058,696, approximately \$304 below the \$1,059,000 DRI award.

Why this summary was prepared

Councilor Janet Jones posted a personal Veterans Memorial Park video on YouTube on June 22, 2026, and circulated it to the City-established Afterburner Committee from her City email on July 30. Because the video used preliminary and superseded figures without consistently explaining their project stage, approval status, or funding source, the City assembled the complete documentary record so residents can review what actually happened.

Questioning a public project is appropriate. The public also deserves the full context: what was conceptual, what was approved, what was revised, who had authority to act, and which costs are public or private.



These figures represent different planning and design stages - not three approved contracts.

Current working project and funding

Component	Working estimate	Current treatment
Splash pad	\$657,913	Retained; flow-through system; working location remains the engineer's recommendation
Courts	\$77,168	Tennis-to-pickleball conversion and limited court work
Pool bathhouse	\$168,692	Reduced scope focused on the pool-complex bathhouse
Core Veterans Memorial	\$154,923	DRI-funded and complete without the aircraft
TOTAL	\$1,058,696	\$304 below the \$1,059,000 DRI award

Public core memorial + privately funded aircraft package

DRI funds a complete memorial that can stand on its own. Private Afterburner fundraising must cover the aircraft, transportation, preparation, pedestal or mount, aircraft-specific foundation, crane, installation, and every other aircraft-specific cost. The January estimate identified at least \$159,000 in direct aircraft and mounting costs, but that is a known minimum - not a complete fundraising target.

Where the project stands now

- Final sealed construction documents are not complete.
- Department of State final-design approval has not occurred.
- No public construction bid has been issued and no construction contractor has been selected.
- The working scenario is within the DRI award, but final design, State review, bidding, and formal Council authorization are still required.
- Future changes should be based on clear, collective Council direction and documented cost, schedule, grant, and operational impacts.

The practical conclusion

The record reflects a normal public-project process: an ambitious community concept was designed, priced, tested against available funding, revised, and brought back within budget before construction. That is evidence that the process worked.

How the project developed

Date	Documented milestone
2021-2022	Community planning produced one bundled project. A May 2022 profile used a \$55,620 memorial planning figure and warned costs could rise; Cameron's July estimate later used \$88,000 and a \$1,364,224 total concept.
Jan. 2, 2024	Council formally authorized the municipal DRI projects to move into design.
May 7, 2025	The City retained C&S for 30% preliminary design - not final design or construction.
Aug. 19, 2025	Council unanimously created the advisory Afterburner Committee to pursue the F-16 through donations and sponsorships; it had no spending authority.
Sept. 16, 2025	At a 2:30 p.m. walkthrough, City administration, Planning, Parks, Helen Acker, and C&S openly discussed the aircraft as a possible enhancement. C&S was asked to study fit and cost.
Jan. 6, 2026	C&S delivered the 30% package: \$1,760,536 for the full ideal concept, including a \$637,364 aircraft-centered memorial concept. The drawings were preliminary and not for construction.
Mar. 17, 2026	Planning publicly presented the preliminary estimate, funding gap, and private aircraft-funding distinction to Council in a 30-page DRI report.
Mar. 23-27, 2026	The City Manager formally separated a complete DRI-funded core memorial from a privately funded aircraft package. The revised memorial could stand alone with lawn at the center.
Apr. 2026	The City recovered the original estimate and repeatedly value-engineered the splash pad, courts, bathhouse, and memorial.
May 1, 2026	The City Manager circulated the first working scenario within the DRI award: \$1,058,696, including \$154,923 for the aircraft-independent core memorial.
June 17, 2026	County Public Health completed a satisfactory pool inspection with zero hazards, zero other violations, and no required reinspection.
June 22 / July 30	Councilor Jones posted her video publicly June 22 and circulated it to the Afterburner Committee from her City email July 30. The City Manager responded with the documented record.

Recurring claims compared with the record

Claim or impression	What the documented record shows
“The City approved a \$1.76 million project.”	No. It was the first complete 30% estimate of the ideal preliminary concept. No bid, construction contract, or \$1.76 million expenditure was approved.
“DRI money is paying for the F-16.”	No aircraft-specific cost is included in the current DRI working amount. Aircraft acquisition, transport, preparation, mounting, foundation, crane, and installation are assigned to private fundraising.
“The \$637,364 memorial is the current plan.”	No. That January concept was superseded. The current working DRI amount for the aircraft-independent core memorial is \$154,923.
“The pool filter was removed to fund the aircraft.”	No. Parks reported the existing system remained functional, the splash pad uses a separate flow-through system, and County Public Health later completed a satisfactory inspection with no hazards or violations.
“Council was not kept informed.”	The record includes Council-wide estimates, drawings, written responses, City Manager updates, monthly reports, and Planning’s 30-page public DRI report presented March 17, 2026.
“The original estimate fixed percentages for each amenity.”	The State awarded one bundled \$1,059,000 project. The 2022 estimate included component assumptions and substantial shared costs, but no adopted line-item subaward schedule has been located.

Bottom line

The City followed the documented DRI design and review process: the project was authorized for design, the preliminary estimate identified an affordability problem, aircraft-specific costs were separated, the project was value-engineered within the award, and no construction spending was approved from the \$1.76 million estimate.

Principal sources

Oneida DRI Strategic Investment Plan; May 13, 2022 City Park Upgrades profile; Cameron Engineers Budget Estimate; State Award Booklet and Grant Contract; Common Council Resolutions 24-7, 24-8, and 25-151; C&S contract, drawings, narrative, and estimates; Planning’s March 17, 2026 DRI report; March-May City Manager/C&S correspondence; June 17 County inspection; June engineering responses; June 22 video publication and July 30 distribution correspondence. The full Master Evidence Timeline contains the detailed chronology and source index.

Prepared by the City of Oneida Department of Planning, Development & Codes

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