



# CITY OF ONEIDA COMMON COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

<b>Date:</b>	March 17, 2026	<b>Presiding:</b>	Rick Rossi, Mayor
<b>Time:</b>	6:30pm	<b>Clerk:</b>	Sandy LaPera, City Clerk
<b>Location:</b>	Common Council Chambers	<b>Meeting Type:</b>	Regular <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Special <input type="checkbox"/>

### CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Rick Rossi, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and roll call.

### Attendees

	<b>Present</b>	<b>Absent</b>	<b>Arrived Late</b>
Mayor Rossi	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> : _____
City Manager Lovell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> : _____
Councilor McHugh	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> : _____
Councilor Cimpi	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> : _____
Councilor Smith	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> : _____
Councilor Jones	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> : _____
Councilor Pagano	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> :6:32pm
Councilor Simchik	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> : _____

### Also Present

City Attorney Bell	<input type="checkbox"/>	Supervisor: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attorney Stacy Marris	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supervisor: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire Chief Jones	<input type="checkbox"/>	Steve Vonderweidt-Planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Police Chief Lowell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** None  
**OLD BUSINESS:** None

**SUPERVISOR'S REPORT:** None

**CITY MANAGER'S REPORT:**

City Manager Lovell stated that, in anticipation of the briefing scheduled for this evening with Planning Director Steve Vonderweidt, he would reserve most of his remarks for that discussion. He did, however, note that a lake effect snow warning is in effect, with approximately six inches of snow expected overnight and potentially icy conditions, and advised everyone to use caution and remain aware of the weather.

**MAYOR'S REMARKS:**

Mayor Rossi wished everyone a Happy St. Patrick's Day and noted that Dunn's has reopened for the season. He encouraged residents to stop by in celebration of the holiday and concluded his remarks.

**PRESENTATION:** Director of Planning and Development-Steve Vonderweidt

A comprehensive overview of the City's Downtown Revitalization Initiative projects. This presentation will help clearly communicate where each project stands, what obstacles remain, and what the path forward looks like for implementation.

Planning Director Steve Vonderweidt provided a brief overview of the City's Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) projects and related planning efforts. He noted that a detailed report had been shared in advance to give Council a comprehensive snapshot of each project's status, challenges, and next steps, and offered to answer any questions rather than review it line by line.

Council discussion focused primarily on the Veterans Memorial component of the Vet's Field project, particularly the scope and cost of a proposed large plaza design. It was clarified that the concept originated from the City Manager. Concerns were raised by Councilor Jones regarding limited community support for the scale and expense of the project, with feedback from members of the original DRI Planning Committee indicating that the memorial was not initially intended to be such a significant portion of the funding.

Additional discussion highlighted how project scopes and leadership have evolved since the DRI's inception, contributing to shifts in vision and priorities. Councilor McHugh reviewed cost estimates, noting that the Veterans Memorial project, especially when including certain elements such as aircraft-related features, was significantly more expensive than anticipated. Comparisons were made to other DRI projects, such as the splash pad and pickleball courts, to better contextualize costs.

It was also discussed that removing certain elements from the memorial project could substantially reduce overall costs, including associated contingencies and engineering fees. Council members expressed interest in further evaluating funding needs, potential modifications, and whether adjustments to project scope would impact grant funding requirements.

Discussion continued regarding the cost of the Veterans Memorial project, particularly the impact of removing plane-related elements associated with the Afterburner Committee. Councilor McHugh questioned whether eliminating those components would reduce the overall funding needed, noting that the committee is independently fundraising for those features.

In response, Planning Director Vonderweidt explained that unless the Council formally acts—such as by passing a resolution to modify the project—the current scope and estimates will remain in place. The Planning Director emphasized that his role is to carry out the direction provided by the City and Council, not to determine policy or project changes.

Further discussion reflected differing perspectives among Council members regarding the original intent of the DRI funding, with some expressing concern that the Veterans Memorial component had grown beyond its initially anticipated scope and cost. It was also acknowledged that project elements had evolved over time through discussions with engineers and stakeholders. The Planning Director reiterated that any changes to scope or funding would need to come from Council direction.

Discussion shifted to clarification of how Veterans Memorial costs—particularly those related to the Afterburner Committee and aircraft display—are being handled within the DRI project and future funding requests. City Manager Lovell and Mayor Rossi confirmed that those specific elements are not part of the DRI funding and are being supported through fundraising and donations, with certain components—such as logistics, transportation, and installation—anticipated to be handled by the Afterburner Committee. It was further clarified that upcoming supplemental funding requests will exclude those items, and that they will be removed in future design phases and cost estimates.

The City Manager explained that the design initially incorporated accommodation for the aircraft to create long-term efficiencies and avoid future costs associated with relocating or redesigning the site. He emphasized that any changes to the project scope would require formal Council action.

Councilor McHugh and Councilor Jones raised concerns about the overall cost and proportion of funding allocated to the Veterans Memorial compared to other recreational components, noting the impact of rising costs and limited available funding. Councilor Cimpi supported allowing staff and consultants to continue their work without additional direction, emphasizing the importance of avoiding micromanagement and allowing the process to move forward.

Discussion then turned to another DRI-related project involving a private developer, with Councilor Simchik asking whether there is a deadline for someone to withdraw.

Director Vonderweidt explained that there is no formal deadline established by the Department of State, and that the project remains active as there has been no official communication from

the developer indicating withdrawal. The State is expected to reach out directly to the developer to determine their intent. It was also clarified by Director Vonderweidt that the DRI funding is secure and not subject to a “use it or lose it” condition, meaning funds can be reallocated in accordance with State guidance if necessary. Should the developer choose not to proceed, the State would first look at other private opportunities before considering reallocating funds to existing approved projects.

Councilor McHugh expressed frustration regarding communication, noting that a lack of consistent responses and group dialogue has made it difficult to stay fully informed. While acknowledging that individual outreach is often successful, she emphasized the importance of more open and collaborative communication among all parties to ensure alignment moving forward.

Discussion continued regarding timelines and expectations for supplemental funding tied to the DRI projects. It was explained that various funding sources operate on different timelines, with some decisions expected within six to nine months, while others—such as consolidated funding—may take up to a year or more. Additional potential funding sources were identified, including grants for streetscape work, splash pads, and tree improvements, though some applications have not yet been released.

It was noted that project progress is closely tied to the timing of funding awards, and that moving forward too quickly without confirmed funding could result in inefficiencies or added costs. As a result, careful coordination is required to balance progress with financial certainty. While 30% of design plans have been completed, advancing to the next stages is expected to take several more months.

The streetscape project was identified as a potential next phase for implementation, depending on funding availability. Tree-related funding was also highlighted as a positive development that could offset certain project costs.

An overview was provided on the proposed AYSO soccer fields project, including plans to develop multiple fields in a flood-prone area, with design considerations heavily influenced by FEMA requirements. The scope of that project will ultimately depend on available funding, ranging from a minimal buildout to a more fully developed recreational complex. Design work is ongoing, though progress has been slower due to regulatory requirements, and construction is not anticipated in the immediate term.

Finally, it was clarified that while funding has not yet been fully secured for all projects, this does not prevent continued progress through the design phases. The State remains actively engaged and satisfied with the City’s progress, receiving regular updates. As projects advance toward later design stages, funding decisions will guide final project scope, with adjustments made based on available resources.

The City Manager acknowledged that rising costs—particularly for the downtown streetscape—remain a challenge but emphasized that projects are progressing through the design phases. As plans advance to 60% and 90% completion, they will be shared with Council for review, allowing for adjustments to scope as needed.

Director Vonderweift noted that while the City is behind where it ideally would have been, all DRI projects remain active and are moving forward, with ongoing efforts to secure grant funding. Key funding decisions are expected as projects reach the next design milestones, which will help determine final scope and timing.

Updates were also provided on private development projects, including Hotel Oneida and other sites, noting that progress has been slower and remains dependent on developer action, though the City continues to follow up regularly.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Councilor Jones  
Seconded by Councilor Cimpi

**RESOLVED**, that the minutes of the meeting held on March 3, 2026, are approved as presented.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

**MOTION RESULT:**  Passed  Failed

### APPROVAL OF WARRANT

Motion by Councilor Simchik  
Seconded by Councilor Cimpi

**RESOLVED**, that Warrant No. 6, including checks and ACH payments totaling \$2,862,874.97, as audited by the Voucher Committee, is hereby approved for payment in the usual manner at the discretion of the Comptroller.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

**MOTION RESULT:**  Passed  Failed

DISCUSSION: Councilor Simchik advised that just over \$2.4 million was for taxes collected and the remainder was for actual bills.

**DISCUSSION ON AGENDA ITEM NO. 1**

The City Clerk clarified the terminology related to Item No. 1, explaining that the “deed recording fee” referenced in the resolution is also known as the “deed stamping fee” in the City of Oneida. She noted that this fee is separate from county recording fees and is used solely for City purposes, including documenting payment and confirming the Assessor’s receipt and review of the RP form. She further explained that the proposed resolution would increase this fee to \$40 and that the language could be amended for clarity to reference both terms, asking whether Council wished to revise the wording accordingly.

The City Clerk explained that the City’s system must continue to use the term “deed recording fee” for consistency and recordkeeping purposes, as changing it would disrupt historical data and reporting. She clarified that, while the term remains, the fee is administrative in nature and not the same as official county recording.

It was noted that the stamp language has been updated to avoid confusion with county processes, now indicating that the document has been “received and reviewed” rather than “filed and recorded.” The resolution language was also clarified to reflect that “recording fee” and “stamping fee” are interchangeable for understanding purposes, without requiring any system changes.

Further discussion confirmed that while this type of process is not used by any other municipality in Madison County, it is utilized in other cities such as Utica and Rome. The conversation then shifted toward discussion of the proposed fee amount.

Councilor Cimpi suggested increasing the proposed deed recording (stamping) fee beyond \$40, with members expressing support for a higher amount as a way to generate additional revenue without increasing property taxes. It was noted that such fees are typically paid infrequently and are less burdensome than recurring taxes.

Council members also acknowledged that fees had not been adjusted in many years, resulting in the need for larger increases rather than smaller, incremental adjustments over time.

Following discussion, a motion was made and approved to amend the resolution, increasing the fee to \$100.

**A RESOLUTION APPROVING AN INCREASE TO THE CITY OF ONEIDA DEED RECORDING FEE  
OTHERWISE KNOWN AS A DEED STAMPING FEE**

**RESOLUTION 26-49**

Motion to approve the resolution as amended by Councilor Cimpi  
Seconded by Councilor Pagano

**WHEREAS**, the Common Council of the City of Oneida previously established a Deed Recording Fee, otherwise known as a Deed Stamping Fee, in the amount of thirty dollars (\$30.00) by Resolution No. 13-41, adopted on February 19, 2013, in accordance with Local Law No. 1 of 2013 adopted on February 20, 2013; and

**WHEREAS**, the Deed Recording Fee, otherwise known as a Deed Stamping Fee, has remained unchanged since its adoption in 2013; and

**WHEREAS**, the Common Council has reviewed the current fee and determined that an adjustment is appropriate in order to better align the City of Oneida's Deed Recording Fee, otherwise known as a Deed Stamping Fee, with the practices of other local municipalities; and

**WHEREAS**, the proposed increase will assist the City in offsetting administrative costs associated with the processing and recording of deeds.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Common Council of the City of Oneida hereby approves an increase to the City of Oneida Deed Recording Fee, otherwise known as a Deed Stamping Fee, from thirty dollars (\$30.00) to one hundred dollars (\$100.00); and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that this revised fee shall take effect immediately upon adoption of this resolution and shall be incorporated into the City's fee schedule.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

**MOTION RESULT:**  Passed  Failed

### **ADVERTISE FOR RFP-ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATION**

#### **RESOLUTION 26-50**

Moved by Councilor Simchik  
Seconded by Councilor McHugh

**RESOLVED**, to authorize the Director of Planning and Development to advertise a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the installation and operation of an electric vehicle charging station.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

**MOTION RESULT:**  Passed  Failed

DISCUSSION: Discussion on Item No. 2 focused on a proposal to advertise an RFP for the installation and operation of electric vehicle charging stations. It was explained that the project is supported by a previously awarded grant of nearly \$500,000, though significant delays occurred in obtaining necessary extensions.

The Director of Planning and Development outlined that the RFP was developed with input from engineers and based on examples from other municipalities. Due to funding and practical considerations, the project will likely include fewer chargers than originally anticipated, potentially one fast (Level 3) charger and additional slower units.

It was noted that the stations could generate revenue for the City, and a suggestion was made to reserve a portion of that revenue for future maintenance costs once the initial agreement period ends. Location flexibility was also discussed, with final placement to be determined based on engineering recommendations within the general project areas.

### **BUDGET TRANSFERS AND AMENDMENTS**

#### **RESOLUTION 26-51**

Moved by Councilor Simchik

Seconded by Councilor Jones

**RESOLVED**, to approve the budget transfers and amendments as authorized by the Comptroller or a third party duly retained by the City of Oneida to perform such services.

	<b><u>To</u></b>	<b><u>From</u></b>
<b>2026 Budget Adjustments</b>		
\$ 14,700.00	003.8110.0400.0002 Sewer Rehab Expense	003.0003.0912.0000 Sewer Fund Balance
<b><i>To allocate funds to cover charges involved with an emergency repair</i></b>		
\$ 37,880.23	001.1620.0403.0001 Contracts MB/FD	001.0022.2680.0000 Insurance Recovery
<b><i>To re-allocate funds to apply the insurance funds received to cover the repairs to the heating/cooling system</i></b>		

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

**MOTION RESULT:** Passed Failed

**SPECIAL EVENT APPLICATION-2026 WALK FOR AUTISM/CITY OF ONEIDA CO-SPONSOR**

**RESOLUTION 26-52**

Moved by Councilor Simchik

Seconded by Councilor Pagano

**WHEREAS**, Jennifer and Ben Bailey, on behalf of “Families First”, have submitted a Special Event Application requesting approval to host the 2026 Walk for Autism in the City of Oneida; and

**WHEREAS**, the purpose of this event is to raise awareness and support for individuals and families affected by autism within the community; and

**WHEREAS**, the Common Council of the City of Oneida recognizes the importance of this event and its positive impact on the community, as well as the mission of Families First in supporting local families; and

**WHEREAS**, the event organizers have agreed to comply with all necessary permitting, safety, and logistical requirements as set forth by the City of Oneida; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Oneida wishes to co-sponsor this event in support of autism awareness and advocacy efforts within the community;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, by the Common Council of the City of Oneida, that:

1. The Special Event Application submitted by Jennifer and Ben Bailey for the 2026 Walk for Autism through Families First is hereby approved.
2. The City of Oneida shall co-sponsor the event, providing necessary municipal support as deemed appropriate by city officials.
3. The event organizers shall coordinate with the City of Oneida’s departments, including public safety, public works, and any other relevant agencies, to ensure a safe and successful event.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

**MOTION RESULT:** Passed Failed

DISCUSSION: Councilor McHugh expressed support for this community event, describing the organizers as a wonderful family and valued members of the community. Mayor Rossi noted that the City is co-sponsoring the event, which was successfully revived last year after a hiatus. He encouraged residents to attend and support the event on April 25, highlighting it as a meaningful cause and a positive community activity.

**FINAL ASSESSMENT ROLL-2025 SIDEWALK REPLACEMENT PROGRAM**

**RESOLUTION 26-53**

Moved by Councilor Simchik  
Seconded by Councilor McHugh

**RESOLVED**, that the final Assessment Roll for the 2025 Sidewalk Replacement Program is hereby received and placed on file, **and be it further**

**RESOLVED**, that the Public Hearing regarding said Assessment Roll will be held on Tuesday, April 7, 2026, at 6:30pm in Common Council Chambers, 109 N. Main St., Oneida, NY.

Ayes: 6

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

Recusal: 1 (Jones)

**MOTION RESULT:** Passed Failed

Councilor Jones recused herself from voting on this resolution, as she is participating in the program involving sidewalk replacement.

In response to a question raised by Councilor Cimpi seeking clarification on the program, it was explained that the program is structured to benefit both the property owner and the City, with costs repaid over a 10-year period, and that not all participants are eligible for subsidies.

**NEW BUSINESS**

A reminder was provided by Councilor Simchik that the Thruway bridge on Route 46 will be closing at the end of the month for replacement, with construction expected to impact traffic throughout the summer.

Additionally, Councilor McHugh expressed appreciation for first responders who handled a recent fire at the Mansion House. It was noted that, with the assistance of mutual aid, the fire was

contained and significant damage was avoided, and gratitude was extended for their efforts in protecting an important historic structure.

## **COUNCIL DISCUSSION**

### **CITY BUDGET**

Discussion focused on the City's declining general fund balance, noting it is projected to fall below the 20% threshold, which may necessitate future tax increases or spending reductions if no action is taken.

Council emphasized the need for proactive budget planning, including identifying efficiencies, reducing costs, and exploring new revenue sources. Concerns were raised about ongoing expenses—such as overtime and certain recreational programs—where costs may exceed revenue, suggesting a need to evaluate whether some programs should be self-sustaining.

Additional concerns included a significant, unexpected loss in sales tax revenue due to amended filings, with limited transparency or explanation from the State, prompting interest in further investigation.

Council also discussed potential long-term strategies, including reassessing rental properties and exploring phased reassessments to ensure a more equitable distribution of the tax levy, while clarifying that reassessment does not inherently increase overall taxes but redistributes the burden.

Discussion focused on the high cost of a citywide reassessment, with estimates indicating it would be a significant financial undertaking. As a result, a phased approach was identified as the most practical and cost-effective option. It was reiterated that reassessment would not necessarily increase the overall tax levy but would redistribute it more equitably among property owners.

Council also explored alternative revenue strategies to reduce reliance on property taxes. A rental registry was discussed as a potential tool to generate revenue and offset the increased demand for City services from rental properties, while also improving accountability and enforcement.

Additional ideas included pursuing a local sales tax increase, though it was acknowledged that doing so would be challenging due to the need for State approval.

Audience member Gregg Myers suggested reviewing disparities in tax rates and assessed values between the Inside and Outside Districts, including consideration of eliminating the distinction between the two. Discussion continued regarding equity in taxation between residents inside and outside the City district. It was acknowledged that some residents outside the district may feel they receive fewer services and could be resistant to absorbing additional costs, similar to past concerns raised with sidewalk programs.

Council members compared this to other shared costs, such as school taxes, noting that services are funded collectively regardless of individual usage. It was also clarified that while some services differ—particularly highway maintenance, which is largely handled by the State or County in

outside areas—other services are still provided, though sometimes on a limited or request-based basis.

Council expressed interest in exploring potential changes to the current inside/outside tax structure to create a more equitable system. It was agreed that further analysis and data would be needed, and staff will work on developing preliminary figures and options to bring back to Council for future discussion.

Overall, Council emphasized the need for a multi-faceted approach to address budget challenges through both cost control and new revenue opportunities.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Jones  
Seconded by Councilor Pagano

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

**MOTION RESULT:**  Passed  Failed

The meeting adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

CITY OF ONEIDA

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Sandra LaPera, City Clerk