



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

NICOLE WATTS
Chairwoman

SPENCER BERG
Deputy Clerk

COUNTY FACILITIES COMMITTEE MINUTES – JANUARY 20th 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Ryan, Ms. Hernandez, Mr. Thompson, Mr. McCarron

ALSO ATTENDING: Chairwoman Watts, Minority Leader May; see also attendance sheet

Chair Ryan called the meeting to order at 2:46 p.m., and asked the Deputy Clerk to take the roll. The previous meeting's minutes were approved.

1. BOARD OF ELECTIONS:

- a. **INFORMATIONAL** – Board of Elections Headquarters (Dustin Czarny, Democratic Commissioner of Elections; Kevin P. Ryan, Republican Commissioner of Elections; Archie Wixson, Jr., Commissioner of Facilities Management)
 - Chair Ryan reads written statement which discusses bonding and the rules around bonding. Shares that he has asked the county to include the committee on communication regarding bonds. *(Full statement in Attachment No.1)*
 - Commissioner of facilities, Commissioner Wixson presents himself and begins discussion about what the need for repairs. Generally, it is explained that the issue has largely to do with water leaking as a result of leaf clogs, bird damage, and decay of materials
 - Later goes on to discuss the additional recommendations that have been brought up by the commissioners, including parking, rugs replacement and re-painting
 - Commissioner Czarny also talks about federal cyber security grant

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Ryan asks about the number of roof fixes undergone by facility management
 - Commissioner Wixson explains nothing this large before
- Chair Ryan asks Commissioner Ryan to share his experience
 - Commissioner Ryan expresses frustration that this has been such an outstanding issue that has never been addressed
- Chair Ryan asks Commissioner Czarny the same
 - Commissioner Czarny concurs and also highlights the need to replace the carpeting as well because of possible mold due to leaking
- Mr. McCarron asks about ownership of trees that are causing issues
 - Commissioner Wixson answers that the trees belong to the adjoining properties and can not be removed because they provide erosion control value
- Ms. Hernandez asks Mr. Wixson about whether the roof is flat
 - Mr. Wixson says the roof is essentially flat
- Chair. Ryan asks Commission Ryan about any other scopes of work
 - Commissioner Ryan answers that there are other things, such as the carpet mentioned previously. Mainly cosmetic things, which all have to wait until the roof is done.
 - Commissioner Czarny is also trying to work with the city to get a crosswalk installed

- because you must walk across a four-way road in order to get to the cross walk
- Commissioner Ryan adds on about Safety, wants to establish swipe access for the offices and a gate for the two counters because of issues in the past.
- Ms. Hernandez asks Commissioner Czarny whether Syracuse owns the parking lot
 - Commissioner Czarny clarifies that no, they own the road
- Ms. Hernandez follows up and asks about the selling of the property by the property owner, as that has been previously discussed
 - Commissioner Czarny shared that this was a discussion that was had but that previous conversations had fallen apart. Highlights major issue with parking
- Mr. Thompson gives the commissioners a chance to speak publicly about why this is meaningful
 - Commissioner Ryan explains how the equipment is expensive and can be easily damaged by water. County employees deserve a safe place to work in. Black mold could be a problem
 - Commissioner Czarny highlights that the BOE serves the entire voting base of the county and that it's misguided that the BOE is not working constantly throughout the year
 - Commissioner Ryan adds that they are already working on 2026
- Mr. Thompson asks about HVAC, heating and cooling, and how they will be affected by repairs
 - Commissioner Wixson says yes, they will be affected, and are a part of the problems. Repairs were just done in late fall
- Mr. Bush comments that they should just pull the plug on the entire building. The road is dangerous, the floor is bad, it's time we find a more adequate place to serve our voters The BOE is getting busier every year and they don't have the facilities.
 - Commissioner Czarny says they would love to have a new place but that moving anywhere requires years of work adjusting the place to be properly fit to the BOE. Right now, the current layout is incredibly efficient and appreciated by other BOEs. Issues in the past with being downtown
 - Commissioner Ryan agrees. But we couldn't just take anywhere, it needs to be a building with warehouse space, ample parking. "It's the least bad option we have"
- Chair Ryan asks Commissioner Wixson whether the amount of work put in has paid off
 - Commissioner makes clear that it hasn't all the way. The project was very efficient, with only \$11 million to make all repairs

2. DISCUSSION OF CORRESPONDING OUTSIDE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

a. INFORMATIONAL – Onondaga County Boards and Commissions

- Chairwoman Watts hands out document (*Attachment No. 2*)
- Chairwoman Watts begins to speak about outside board and appointments
 - Explains how there are confirmations and appointments and that the goal of the process is that the committee should make a decision about who they believe would be best suited for committees and boards
 - Resumes are being collected for new roles, and encouraged legislators to put forward people. Also wants these boards to stay in touch
 - Send Resumes to John DeSantis

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Ms. Hernandez asks whether the Majority Leader and Minority Leader still maintain control
 - Chairwoman Watts confirms they maintain control

3. PARKS & RECREATION:

- a. INFORMATIONAL – Parks and Recreation (Brian Kelley, Commissioner)
 - Chair Ryan voices disappointment and disapproval in the County Executive’s communication about not communicating with Commissioners directly. (*Full statement in Attachment No. 3*)
 - Commissioner Kelley acknowledges and discusses structure and size of the departments, operating budget, staffing, current projects, what policies work. (*Attachment No. 4*)

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Ms. Hernandez asks about the tram at Onondaga Lake Park
 - Commissioner Kelley says they’re getting new funding to get a bigger one

Amending the 2026 Onondaga County Budget to Accept Grant Funds from the New York State Dormitory Authority’s Community Resiliency, Economic Sustainability, and Technology Program
Commissioner Kelley reads the resolution and expresses why its meaningful

- Worked with Senator Ryan and Soil and Water District to get the grant

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Ryan asks what the blades are and where they are located
 - Commissioner Kelley explains that they’re placed on the bottom and are unlike the big trucks.

A motion was made by Mr. McCarron, seconded by Ms. Hernandez, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

- c. Amending the 2026 Onondaga County Budget to Accept Grant Funds from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation Snowmobile Program
 - Commissioner Kelley reads the resolution and explains why it's meaningful
 - Accepts money from the state to create trails.

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Ryan flags possible issue with language
 - Issue is clarified and no change needed
- Chair Ryan makes a joke about bringing a trail to his district and the city of Syracuse

A motion was made by Mr. Bush, seconded by Mr. Thompson, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

- d. Personnel Resolution
 - Commissioner Kelley shared that this is to create a new position for a veterinarian at the zoo

- They have the money for it and right now they are hiring someone who wasn't always on site.

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Ryan asks if this will change the budget, and if they are they unionized
 - No the budget will not change
 - County representative, they will be a full county employees
- Ms. Hernandez asks how the salary will be determined
 - Salary range is determined based on grade, grade will be grade 35, possibility it may be hired as a greater step
- Chair Ryan asks how competitive of a hiring process this is
 - Commissioner explains that they have a great internal candidate, so they aren't worried, but expect a number of qualified candidates
- Mr. Bush shares concern that the amount of money being offered isn't worth it
 - Commissioner assures that they will be paid the same level as the director
 - County representative assures that that due-diligence has been completed
- Chair Ryan asks about the Zoo Director
 - Commissioner states that they are doing a few interviews tomorrow

A motion was made by Mr. McCarron, seconded by Mr. Thompson, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

- e. Authorizing the Purchase of Real Property Located in the Towns of Geddes and Onondaga
 - Land was offered to them, people in the community wanted to protect it. Three acres park can add to their portfolio.

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Ryan asks whether anyone has considered turning it into housing
 - Commissioner states no
 - Legislator Thompson, who represents the area, explains the context of the situation, which was strong opposition to the possibility of housing
- Chair Ryan asks about possible liability issue
 - Commissioner says unlikely to cause issues

A motion was made by Mr. Thompson, seconded by Mr. Bush, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

Meeting adjourned at 3:47 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



SPENCER BERG, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: FACILITES

DATE: **JANUARY 20th, 2026**

[illegible]

Attachment No. 1: Statement

In relation to bonding, I have been advised that there is typically a 60-day window from the time bonding legislation is sent to outside counsel. I understand there is some flexibility in that process, including whether items first move through Finance and how they align with agenda placement. As a practical matter, the cutoff for agenda inclusion is generally the second Friday of each month, meaning items sent out will not appear on the next agenda, but on the following month's agenda.

I have asked CFO Kristi Smiley to have the BOE roof bonding legislation drafted, and she indicated she would share that request with the Executive's Office. We also sought clarification on whether the Legislature may request that bonding legislation be sent out, and it was made clear that this is not restricted by the charter, but rather reflects a historical practice.

I am not interested in disputing that process at this time. What I am asking for is mutual consideration of legislative priorities and their advancement to outside bond counsel.

I have asked that anticipated bonding items be shared with the Legislature when they are sent to outside bond counsel, so members are informed early and not placed in a position where delays caused by insufficient information or late communication could be mischaracterized as legislative inaction or stalling.

Attachment No. 2

List of Boards and Commissions

Capital Program Committee

Authorized by **Section 3.11 of the Onondaga County Charter**, this committee is convened by the County Executive to manage long-term infrastructure planning. Its mission is to evaluate and prioritize projects for the county's six-year Capital Improvement Plan, ensuring that facility upgrades align with budgetary constraints and public need.

- **Appointing Authority:** Legislative Appointment.
- **Current Appointment:**
 - **Legislator Nicole Watts** (Must be Chair)
 - **Legislator Maurice Brown** (Must be Chair of Ways & Means)
 - **Legislator Ryan or Denton** (Must be Chair of "Public Works")

Vehicle Use Review Board

Established by **Resolutions 97-93 and 330-77**, this board provides administrative oversight of the county's vehicle fleet. It reviews departmental requests to ensure that vehicle assignments are essential for operations and comply with fiscal policies.

- **Appointing Authority:** Legislature recommends; County Executive approves.
- **Current Status:** Six members, including two direct Legislative Appointments.
 - VACANT (Some Legislator)
 - VACANT (Some Legislator)

Facility Legislative Liaisons (Zoo, Beaver Lake, Erie Canal)

To ensure direct oversight and communication between the county and its marquee recreational assets, the Legislature appoints representatives to the boards of the **Rosamond Gifford Zoo, Beaver Lake Nature Center**, and the **Erie Canal Museum**. Unlike general advisory boards, these specific appointments are mandated by the **governing documents and bylaws** of each respective organization. These liaisons serve as a vital link for reporting on facility maintenance, county funding utilization, and strategic alignment with county goals.

- **Appointing Authority:** Onondaga County Legislature.
- **Current Appointments:**
 - **Erie Canal Museum:** VACANT (Some Legislator)

- **Friends of Beaver Lake: VACANT (Some Legislator)**
- **Friends of Rosamond Gifford Zoo: VACANT (Some Legislator)**

Attachment No. 3: **Mr. Ryan's Statement**

The purpose of this informational session is to establish a direct line of communication between the Legislature and the Commissioner.

It is my understanding that past practice has required all communications with commissioners to be routed through the Executive's Office and its staff. I am not comfortable with that arrangement. In the spirit of democratic governance, the Legislature is a co-equal branch of government, expressly designed to provide oversight and serve as a check on the administration's operations. A system in which the Executive's Office controls what information is shared, and which questions are permitted to be answered, undermines the purpose of separate branches of government.

I recognize that this practice places commissioners in a difficult position, as they have been discouraged from engaging directly with legislators without prior approval. Nevertheless, I respectfully ask the administration to reconsider this approach and to allow commissioners to communicate directly with the Legislature so that we may fulfill our elected responsibilities.

I am fully aware that, absent the Executive's Office's agreement to change this operating procedure, the Legislature has limited ability to compel compliance. As Committee Chair, my only procedural leverage would be to delay the advancement of committee items in an effort to encourage cooperation. However, I do not believe that approach serves the public interest.

I was elected by the people of Onondaga County to help oversee county government and ensure it is functioning transparently and effectively. Accordingly, I will move these agenda items forward in good faith, as an effort to rise above partisan considerations and conduct the people's business. I respectfully ask the administration to meet that good-faith effort by changing course and allowing open, direct communication between commissioners and legislators.

Attachment No. 4: **Parks Q&A Sheet**

Facilities Committee Info-Parks

Q- What is the current Organizational Structure, including key Leadership and vacancies?

A- Structure- Parks Main Office-Commissioner, two Deputy Commissioners, three directors- (Recreation, Administration, Operations.) Parks Field Staff- 17 different sites managed by 7 Superintendents at various levels (Supt 1, 2 and 3). There are 92 full-time employees, and up to another 150 part-time employees managing these sites when fully staffed. The Parks department has 6,500 acres of Park land both maintained and programmed and several sites that are naturalized or have minimal maintenance responsibilities from our staff. We host over 2,000 programs and events annually and our attendance is 3.5 million park users per year. The Department has been highly successful in resource sharing and managing our Parks as districts-Southern District-Highland Forest, Jamesville Beach, Veterans Cemetery, Pratts Falls, and Carpenters Brook Fish Hatchery. The Northern District-Onondaga Lake Park-including Longbranch, Oneida Shores, NBT Stadium, Hopkins Road and Beaver Lake Nature Center. The Zoo is standalone because of its scope and mission. We also oversee and maintain sites that are not heavily programmed or minimally maintained-Edgecliff Park, Indian Hill Monument, Otisco Conservation Area, the Jordan Level, and Spafford Forest. Those sites are taken care of by the districts that are closest to those facilities. We currently have 6 vacancies.

Q- What are the current operating and capital budgets, and how do expenditures compare to adopted levels.

A- Current Operating Budget (2026)-\$23,381, 625. Current CIP budget (2026)- \$3,460,000. Expenditures are typically well absorbed within our 2026 budget. Our Budget is carefully put together by each Park Manager anticipating, through actual quotes and research, what costs will be for the following year. The only site that exceeds adopted levels typically is the Rosamond Gifford Zoo. These expenditures are subsidized by the Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo in the range of 2-4 million dollars per year.

Q-What are the current staffing levels (authorized vs. filled) and what workforce challenges exist?

A-Staffing levels 92 funded full-time employees, 86 filled at this current time. Workforce challenges are staff turnover at the entry level positions. Grades 3-8.

Q- What major projects or initiatives have been completed recently, are underway, or planned?

A- Projects completed recently include-Pickleball courts at Onondaga Lake Park, A brand new boardwalk at Beaver Lake, the boat launch at Oneida Shores, Roofing on all major buildings at the Zoo, Repaving the East Shore trail at OLP, new playground structure at Highland Forest, replacement of the penguin filtration tank and boilers in the main building at the Zoo.

Projects underway-Super field at Hopkins Road and Marina renovation at Onondaga Lake Park.

Planned projects-RFP is out for the construction and redesign of Oneida Shores camp bathhouse, restrooms, and beach buildings. The Willow Bay Parking lot at OLP, and a storage facility/garage at Beaver Lake Nature Center.

Other planned projects, after we receive bonding in February include:

Carpenters Brook Fish Hatchery-Engineering study to design a new Hatchery building. Total-\$120,000

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Beaver Lake Nature Center-Pave the overflow lot, Engineering and design for a reconfiguration of the Visitor Center restrooms and classrooms, and do repairs to the gift shop roof and ceiling Total-\$265,000

Highland Forest-Replace Sawmill Roof. Total-\$215,000

Jamesville Beach-Installation of a splash pad, relocation of Volleyball Courts, Blue-green algae mitigation. Total-\$780, 000

Pratts Falls-Reroof Camp Brockway. Total \$100,000

NBT Stadium-Concrete repair and replacement. Total-\$250,000

Rosamond Gifford Zoo-We do not have any projects planned as we are in the middle of a Facilities assessment study being done by PGAV. This study is a comprehensive approach to identifying major infrastructure and mechanical system needs and replacements. This is a systematic approach to identifying where our most problem areas are at the Zoo and will let us know when items need to be replaced and what priority to place on repairs and replacements. Once this study is complete, these items will be incorporated into our CIP plan based on need. This will start in the 2027 CIP plan.

Onondaga Lake Park-Construction of Willow Bay parking lot-Redesign because of drainage issues. Total-\$1,500,000

Southern District-Land survey of 3 properties (Highland, Jamesville and Pratts). Total-\$100,000

Park wide emergency repairs-\$250,000.

Q-What are the most significant maintenance and capital needs.

A-Aging infrastructure and mechanical systems of our buildings and facilities. These items are being addressed systematically through our CIP plan, Engineering studies and a Facility assessment plan at the Zoo. Through these avenues we will address priorities of aging mechanical systems and infrastructure and put together a comprehensive plan for the replacement of these items.

Q-What policy changes, resources, or legislative actions would assist the department moving forward.

A- We are pleased with the County Executive's direction in terms of leading the Parks department and feel very positive moving forward.