



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

NICOLE WATTS
Chairwoman

SPENCER BERG
Deputy Clerk

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES – MARCH 24, 2026

ELAINE DENTON, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Denton, Mr. Eriksen, Mr. Meaker, Mr. Brown, Mr. Knapp
ALSO PRESENT: Chairwoman Watts, Ms. Blocks; also see attached sheet

Chair Denton called the meeting to order at 10:20 a.m., and the previous meeting's minutes were approved.

1. DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING: Troy W. Waffner, Director

- a. INFORMATIONAL: Overview of Plan Onondaga (*Attachment No.1: Onondaga County Department of Planning Presentation*)
 - Mission, Values, and Departmental Overview:
 - The Onondaga County Department of Planning provides planning services to the City of Syracuse and the 19 towns and 15 villages that make up the county; promotes best practices in public participation and citizen engagement; and works to ensure an equitable and effective planning environment
 - Overall goal is to work with other county departments and municipalities to create communities that are equitable, attractive, and offer what residents want
 - Department work is carried out through two areas:
 - GIS: data and mapping
 - Planning: coordinating zoning, transportation, and housing opportunities
 - 12 total employees: 4 in GIS, 6 planners, 2 in administrative roles
 - GIS Division:
 - GIS is described as the most overlooked yet most exciting part of the department
 - Works with municipalities, other county departments, developers, and businesses; acquires, maintains, and updates a wide variety of spatial data sets, maps, and applications; most of this is made available to the public
 - The county website features a public-facing GIS viewer with layers showing sewer and water districts, wetlands, snowmobile trails, and more
 - Additional GIS functions include:
 - Maintaining the county website
 - Maintaining aerial photography inventory
 - Creating story maps
 - Operating a county drone with a licensed drone pilot
 - Address administration: new street addresses go through a naming and numbering process coordinated with 911 to ensure accuracy for emergency services

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Knapp: The GIS division does significant work with towns and villages, saving money for smaller municipalities that cannot afford large GIS programs.
- Ms. Denton: I love GIS – I'm there constantly. You can draw districts, get addresses. A lot of municipalities have their own zoning maps. Is there any way a zoning layer could be applied to GIS, or is it too challenging given the different zones everywhere?

- Mr. Waffner: Depending on the municipality, we do maintain zoning maps upon request and keep them updated. If there are any special requests for mapping or spatial data sets, let us know and we can produce a wide variety of maps.
 - Also available to the public is the parcel viewer, which allows anyone to look up property ownership, owner address, and contact information.

Presentation continued:

- Planning Division:
 - Focuses on long-range visioning, policy development, and execution of local, countywide, and regional plans; handles implementation of Plan Onondaga and ensures the five themes are incorporated
 - Provides staff to the Onondaga County Planning Board and the county legislature's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board; handles all agriculture-related matters for the county
 - Annual Planning Symposium: held in partnership with the Onondaga County Planning Federation; approximately 350 attendees received required continuing education and training covering topics from site plans to variances; department uses the symposium to advance the themes of Plan Onondaga

Questions/Comments:

- Ms. Denton: When I was on the town board that was very helpful

Presentation continued:

- Partners:
 - Onondaga County Planning Federation: a not-for-profit for which the department provides significant staff support and organizes the annual planning symposium
 - Onondaga County Planning Board:
 - Receives referrals from municipalities under General Municipal Law when proposals are within a certain distance of a county or state highway or property
 - Meets every three weeks; averages approximately 25 cases per meeting ranging from signage to large housing or development projects
 - Two permanent members by county charter: Commissioner of DOT and County Controller; remaining members are appointed
 - Prior to each meeting, partners are convened including county DOT, state DOT, Department of Health, and others to review concerns and identify issues
 - Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) and Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board: department sits on both boards and collaborates on various planning projects
- Plan Onondaga – Five Themes:
 - Plan Onondaga serves as the guiding framework for the department; five interconnected themes forming the foundation of community success across the county
 - Strong Centers: walkable village and town centers; development that connects housing, services, and amenities
 - Housing and Neighborhoods: expanding housing choice; equitable options for all; building to match market demand; avoiding both oversupply and undersupply
 - Community Mobility: ensuring all modes of transportation can thrive – bicycles, pedestrians, e-bikes, trails, and mass transit
 - Greenways and Blueways: expanding and connecting the county's trail network and waterways to make them part of the transportation infrastructure
 - Agriculture: maintaining and growing the county's standing as one of the largest agricultural economies in upstate New York
- Plan On Update – Strong Centers:
 - Goal: strengthen quality of life and economic stability of local communities through the development of amenity-rich, vibrant, walkable communities

- Town and Village Planning Grants:
 - 15 communities have updated their comprehensive plans to date (7 villages, 8 towns); several more in progress
 - A typical comprehensive plan costs \$150,000 or more; county funding has made this achievable for municipalities that previously lacked the resources
 - A county planner sits on each steering committee to help guide conversations around density and housing; ultimately, each plan belongs to the municipality
 - Focus is on producing actionable plans rather than documents that go unused
- Housing Study Phase 2 – Strong Centers component:
 - Consultant examining how to revision underperforming shopping plazas/centers as mixed-use communities (housing, stores); example cited: former Kmart Plaza in Mattydale
 - Analysis includes what type of zoning would be needed to implement the vision; findings intended to be replicable across similar plazas countywide

Questions/Comments:

- Ms. Denton: Many of these are privately owned. So the goal is for municipalities to lay the groundwork and create a vision for what they want to see built, but ultimately it depends on the private sector to take the initiative?
- Mr. Waffner: Yes – you provide the vision, hope the municipality gets behind it, and ultimately hope the property owner comes on board. All privately owned for the most part, and the goal is to get them there
- Mr. Brown: Thank you chair. The study that should be released in the second quarter – what is the status? Is it on schedule?
- Mr. Waffner: The consultant is currently writing the initial draft for final edits; most towns are already aware of what will be in it
- Ms. Denton: How does the process work – is there a public comment period, or is it more just sharing what has been learned?
- Mr. Waffner: Extensive public outreach has already been done with municipalities, planning boards, zoning boards, and elected officials, with follow-up meetings as more information came in. The first draft is really for editing and wordsmithing to some extent; most towns we have worked with are already aware of what’s in it
- Mr. Brown: On the comprehensive plans – are there any trends or continuity between them? Are we saying they should include X, Y, Z, or are we just funding them?
- Mr. Waffner: We try to take an active part in each one – a planner sits on the steering committee. Density and various types of housing are always issues we steer conversations toward. At the end of the day, it is still their comprehensive plan; “we’re not going to go in there with baseball bats”
- Ms. Denton: Can a town create a comprehensive plan that doesn’t follow the county’s plan?
- Mr. Waffner: We get a level of buy-in and understanding by virtue of funding the plans – not 100%, but more than we would otherwise. Most municipalities understand the need to do something.
- Ms. Denton: So the county’s comprehensive plan is really like a master plan, and then the local municipalities have their own?
- Mr. Waffner: Yes – the county has no control over municipalities, but does make recommendations through the county planning board when proposals come in, referencing the county comprehensive plan

Presentation continued:

- Plan On Update – Housing and Neighborhoods:
 - Housing Study Phase 1 provided a 10,000-foot view of the housing market, where things stood, and the anticipated impact of Micron on housing demand
 - Housing Study Phase 2 takes a more micro view: examining zoning, envisioning what specific places could look like, and assessing how “stuck” the housing market is and how to address it
 - Expected to be released in the second quarter of 2026
 - 2025 building permit data:
 - 1,700 housing unit building permits released in 2025
 - Represents a 400% increase over two years ago and a 200% increase over one year ago

- 10-year average is 925 permits; the trend is expected to continue growing as Micron's opening approaches

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Eriksen: On Phase 2 of the housing study – is it going to get into different types of housing that may be over- or undersupplied?
- Mr. Waffner: Yes, it addresses typologies of housing – what we may be missing, such as townhomes, condos, and other alternative housing types. It also reflects the changing trend away from large family homes toward smaller households and smaller homes; younger people are looking for different housing types
- Mr. Brown: You've mentioned oversupply five times. I've never heard of this concept for Central New York – I understand what it means, but this is really foreign to us. Is there a fear of this?
- Mr. Waffner: We probably did hit a point of oversupply in some areas – like Cicero – back in the 2000s and 2010s. It's not a fear, but we want to balance the market as closely as we can. Part of why I raise it is because people often say we're 6,000 houses behind, and I'm not sure that's accurate – it's more about looking at how many people are moving in and how supply is responding
- Mr. Eriksen: As far as phase two again, there's a note on the Housing and Neighborhoods slide about financial gaps in getting new types of units built.
 - Can we expect to see something in this report about incentives to attract developers to build townhouses, starter homes – things that can help prevent people from getting priced out or prevent young people who want to move back from being unable to afford it?
- Mr. Waffner: Yes – there will be a piece in the report that addresses how to bridge that financial gap to get more of that type of development done
- Mr. Knapp: I saw an article about our neighbors to the north – Oswego County – receiving a grant from New York State to run water and sewer lines in Southern Oswego County within a few miles of the Micron site. Do you coordinate much with your counterpart up there?
- Mr. Waffner: Absolutely – we talk with Oswego County's planning and economic development departments on a fairly regular basis, exchanging ideas and information. That particular project is expected to start around 2028

Presentation continued:

- Plan On Update – Community Mobility:
 - The goal is not to eliminate car travel, but to ensure every other mode of transportation can also thrive
 - Safe Streets for All Strategy Plan:
 - Department received a federal grant covering 90% of the cost
 - Will conduct a town-by-town look at roads – state, county, and local – to identify areas with an unusually high number of accidents
 - Will propose novel, implementable interventions to reduce crashes and fatalities involving pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles
 - Completion of the strategy plan makes the county eligible to apply for federal funding to correct identified problems; substantial federal funding has historically been available for this
 - Bicycle Commuter Corridor: implementation of a prior study is beginning; road owners and stakeholders will be brought back together to advance the identified ideas
 - Route 31 Transportation Assessment:
 - Examined all transportation modes from light rail to standard bus service along the Route 31 corridor, which runs through the northern towns most affected by Micron development
 - Identified the density needed at each hub to support various modes; light rail was found to be prohibitively expensive and density-dependent
 - Enhanced bus service seen as an attainable near-term goal, with eventual bus rapid transit as density continues to grow along the corridor
 - Provided renderings and density information to each municipality along the Route 31 corridor
 - Food Access and Transportation Study: working with SOFSA and SMTC on a study analyzing transportation gaps as they relate to food access barriers in low-income communities; in early stages but expected to produce important updated data

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Knapp: Is the Safe Streets for All plan just county roads?
- Mr. Waffner: No – it covers state, county, and local town roads. It will be great for municipalities that don't typically have the engineering capacity to assess all of their own roads
- Mr. Brown: How did Route 31 come about for the transportation assessment?
- Mr. Waffner: It runs along the northern towns that will be most affected by Micron development – and it is already very congested

Presentation continued:

- Plan On Update – Greenways and Blueways:
 - Greenways and Blueways Master Plan: being developed with Colliers Engineering as partner
 - Will inventory existing greenways and blueways, then engage municipalities, landowners, the agricultural community, and the general public to identify new opportunities
 - From there, a prioritized list will be developed to guide applications for state and federal grant funding
 - Emphasis on both expanding the network and ensuring connectivity between trails so they function as part of the transportation infrastructure
 - Greenways and Blueways Grant Program:
 - County Executive committed approximately \$1.6 million for an initial grant program; available to not-for-profits and municipalities
 - Approximately \$935,000 awarded so far; majority going toward planning, design, and engineering needed before construction; some going directly to construction dollars
 - Grants awarded across the county, from Baldwinsville through the majority of municipalities
 - A follow-up grant round focused on implementation is planned once the master plan is complete
 - Bear Trap Creek Trail:
 - Working group initiated with SMTC to plan a connection from Salina to the Regional Market on Park Street
 - Would open much of Salina to the existing Bear Trap Creek trail network
 - Empire State Trail – Phase 2:
 - Narrowing down to specific implementable projects in each municipality touched by the trail
 - Grant awarded to the Village of Camillus to connect the Empire State Trail to the Hamlet of Martisco at the railroad station
 - Next phase: connection from Martisco to Otisco Lake; identifying property owners and developing the plan

Questions/Comments:

- Ms. Denton: When you release the grant program, is that still through Planning? How do community development and planning work together on incentives like that?
- Mr. Waffner: They are different departments, but we work closely together. Greenways and Blueways are primarily a planning initiative, and we coordinate with community development on a regular basis
- Mr. Knapp: Are you seeing more state and federal grant money becoming available for Greenways and Blueways?
- Mr. Waffner: Yes – definitely on the state level, more funding is coming available through the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and other sources. This positions us well. Grant applications also typically require a level of engineering to already be completed, which is why we are helping municipalities get to that point – so they are ready to apply when the funding is available

Presentation continued:

- Plan On Update – Agriculture:
 - Onondaga County is one of the largest agricultural economies in upstate New York; both in direct agriculture and in processing capacity
 - Agritourism Grant Program Phase 1: county committed \$790,000; matched by \$4.7 million in private investment across various agritourism operations

- CNY Regional Market – County Executive pledged \$3.75 million toward improvements:
 - Gateway entrance: a visible, notable entrance to make the market easier to find and enter
 - Improvements to the shed
 - Construction of shared commercial kitchens: available to caterers, ghost kitchen-style restaurants, and individuals looking to produce and market food products
- City of Syracuse received approximately \$3 million to fund sidewalk and street improvements around the Regional Market
- Assemblyman Magnarelli has funding for additional improvements to the a-shed and other areas at the Regional Market
- Farmland Protection Board: works with the department on adopting the farmland protection plan, agricultural districts, and county agriculture policy

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Knapp: Commercial kitchens at the Regional Market are already booking up even before construction is complete, and that the Regional Market board is now considering expanding from a couple of kitchens to four or five given the strong response.
- Mr. Waffner noted that the new Americans living on the north side bring significant diversity of food culture, which these kitchens can help grow, and that this represents an opportunity for the county to develop as a food destination.
- Ms. Watts: I've seen the maps and keep hearing about a big sign as we enter. Could you speak to which pieces of those improvements the county is responsible for, and who is responsible for the other elements?
- Mr. Waffner: The county is responsible for the gateway entrance, improvements to the a-shed, and construction of the shared commercial kitchens. The City of Syracuse received approximately \$3 million for sidewalks and street improvements around the Regional Market. Assemblyman Magnarelli has funding for improvements to the a-shed and other areas.
- Ms. Watts: And the gateway will be on Carbon Street or Park Street?
- Mr. Waffner: The initial one but everyone recognizes the need to improve the other entrances going forward.
- Mr. Meaker: Centro announced about two months ago that they were going to reduce service on the Route 57 corridor. Are there any plans to talk more about that with Centro?
- Mr. Waffner: Centro still has to go through an entire public hearing process before any changes are finalized; they have not completed that yet. They are conducting what appears to be their first comprehensive review of routes in about 20 years. There is still plenty of opportunity to engage, and we can certainly help facilitate that conversation.
- Mr. Meaker: According to my research, they are planning to remove the route that runs along Route 57 down Gaskin Street. That services a large part of my constituents, including the Madison Village trailer park on Gaskin Street, which has two entrances – one on Route 57 and one on Gaskin – with most residents preferring the Gaskin entrance as it is closer to walk from.
 - This is something we should advocate to preserve, or have it incorporated into whatever they are doing along Route 31, given how close that route comes to the Route 57/31 intersection.

Presentation continued:

- Farm Fest: coming soon; approximately 12 farms participating; organized in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension; features a wide variety of agriculture including Texas Longhorns, apples, pumpkins, and more; intended to highlight the breadth of Onondaga County's agricultural economy beyond dairy
- Lafayette Apple Festival: described as the largest event in New York State

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Waffner: Absolutely – they are reducing service in other areas as well, but the point about Route 57 is well taken. We can certainly facilitate the discussion with Centro and advocate for some sort of reasonable bus service up there.
- Mr. Brown: My question is about Plan Onondaga. I've been asking this of many different entities – how do we define success? What metrics are we using to determine if we're doing well or poorly?
- Mr. Waffner: That could be a much longer discussion, but at the basis, we go through each of the five themes, list out what we are doing within each theme, and assess whether we are actually making progress.

2. 2026 TRANSFER RESOLUTION (LAND BANK): Katelyn E. Wright, Executive Director, Greater Syracuse Land Bank

- Ms. Wright noted she will return next month to present the full annual report and offered the following context:
 - Onondaga County has provided \$250,000 per year to the Greater Syracuse Land Bank in financial support for the past few years
 - Each September, the budget places those funds in contingency; the Land Bank must return to the Legislature to have them released
 - Historically, this has occurred in April during the annual report, but last year the contract was not signed and funds were not released until October
 - The funds are required to be spent within the same calendar year, creating a compressed timeline
 - Requested that the funds be released earlier this year to allow for more orderly use of the funds

Questions/Comments

- Ms. Denton: This will be part of the broader budget process discussion about why certain funds are placed in contingency rather than others
- Mr. Knapp: And next month, they'll come with their full annual report so we can ask them questions
- Ms. Wright: I'd also appreciate it if the funds were not placed in contingency in future years, as this would allow the process to move faster

A motion was made by Mr. Knapp, seconded by Mr. Brown, to approve this item; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. APPOINTMENT:

a. Confirming Reappointment to the Onondaga Community College Board of Trustees

- Mr. Donnelly: I'm here to present on the re-appointment of Paul Mello to the Onondaga Community College Board of Trustees
 - I've confirmed with college management that they are very pleased with Mr. Mello, who is a good source of financial information for the board.

A motion was made by Mr. Brown, seconded by Mr. Knapp, to approve this item; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. DISCUSSION OF CORRESPONDING OUTSIDE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS: Nicole Watts, Chairwoman

a. Review and Discussion of Appointments to Outside Boards

- Ms. Watts presented:
 - Goal is to address all outside board and commission appointments by the May legislative session, per practice
 - A link has been set up by staff to collect resumes and candidate suggestions; distributed via the recently launched legislative newsletter and available on Basecamp; members encouraged to share the link on their social media channels
 - Members who have not yet spoken with a potential candidate they would like to suggest should send the person's name and contact information to Ms. Watts or the clerks so staff can follow up and collect their resume
 - Next month's committee meeting will review submitted resumes for corresponding boards
 - Noted the particular importance of OCIDA: two appointments coming up in July; strongly encouraged the committee to begin deliberating on nominees now, well in advance of the July opening

Questions/Comments

- Ms. Denton: We have two appointments for the Regional Market Authority. I believe they have to be vendors.
- Mr. Knapp: Those individuals listed are currently board members. I will speak with them about whether they wish to continue or whether new candidates should be sought, and will have an update before the next committee meeting.
- Ms. Denton: Are we still working toward the Community Development Steering Committee?

- Deputy Clerk: Yes. The Chair of Planning is typically part of that board. So it was Legislator Knapp previously, and now it would be you as planning chair,
- Ms. Denton: And OCDC terms are set until the end of the year.
- Ms. Watts: Correct.

A motion was made by Mr. Brown, seconded by Mr. Knapp, to adjourn the meeting; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:05 a.m. The committee will reconvene on April 21, 2026.

Respectfully Submitted,



SPENCER BERG, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: **PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**
DATE: **MARCH 24, 2026**

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Tom Waffner	OCDC
John Przepiora	Public
KYLE W. MADDEN	County Leg.
Brian Dinnelly	CECF
Katelyn Wright	Greater Syracuse Land Bank