



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

NICOLE WATTS
Chairwoman

SPENCER BERG
Deputy Clerk

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES – April 21, 2026 ELAINE DENTON, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Denton, Mr. Eriksen, Mr. Meaker, Mr. Brown, Mr. Knapp
ALSO PRESENT: Chairwoman Watts, Leader Hernandez, Ms. Block, Mr. Bush, Mr. Ryan, Mr. Romeo;
also see attached sheet

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

1. **GREATER SYRACUSE PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (LAND BANK):**

Katelyn Wright, Executive Director; Patrick Hogan, Board Chairman

a. INFORMATIONAL: Land Bank Annual Report

(Attachment No. 1: Greater Syracuse Land Bank, 2025 Annual Report to County Legislature)

- New York State Land Bank Act requires to present annually to the foreclosing governmental units or local governments that created the land bank
- Present annually to the city and the county; created jointly by the city and the county in 2012
- Law requires presentations by March 15th; decided to start delaying slightly so audited financials can be shared; audited financials typically not ready until April 1st; presents in April
- Reports on projects undertaken by the land bank during the past year; report covers:
 - Monies expended during the past year and administrative activities
 - Outlines at a high level how many properties acquired, how many properties sold
 - Completed 71 demolitions last year
 - Number of acquisitions still much lower than desired; page 3 contains a table outlining how many acquired per year since started
- Properties primarily obtained through the city's tax foreclosure process; also come to the county for a select list of properties otherwise destined for tax auction, requested to be conveyed instead
- City and county each have separate tax foreclosure processes; both administrative
- City has made the Land Bank the default recipient of all tax foreclosures
 - Mission: take vacant and abandoned properties and get them back into productive use
- Tax foreclosure is an efficient way to get control of abandoned properties
- Partnering with the city has made them better collectors of delinquent receivables, collecting on their own behalf and on behalf of the county
 - Page 2 table shows that since the land bank was created, collections have increased above historical levels: about \$30 million for the city and \$20 million for the county
 - Rely on the city and county for financial support
- Generate through sale of real estate about half of what is needed for operations; other half relies on direct financial support from the city and the county to keep operating

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- By keeping the land bank operating, county makes it possible for this money to keep coming in; funds are outlined in page 2
 - Generated a net positive for both the city and the county
- Almost 1,500 properties put back on the tax rolls, generating about \$2.6 million a year in on-time property taxes
- Table on page 2 shows the Land Bank is helping better collect delinquent taxes and taking properties that don't pay and putting them back on the tax rolls and generating on-time taxes
- Leveraging private investment; selling fixer-uppers to local buyers who are vetted to ensure no code violations or tax delinquencies
- Taking title before selling allows evaluation of condition; listed for sale with a scope of work attached; buyers required to bring up to code generally within a year of taking title
- Unlike auction sales, buyers are vetted on the front end to ensure skills and financing to complete renovations needed
- At closing, buyers sign a development enforcement mortgage requiring them to bring up to code within a year, sometimes 18 months for more complicated projects; scope of work attached to mortgage document
- Front end vetting is working; occasionally a deadline passes with nothing done, option to foreclose and take the property back; has occurred approximately two dozen times; low default rate overall
- If a buyer has made an effort and invested money and time but is not done, work to connect them with available grants and loans to help finish
- Hired a full-time property manager on staff in the past year to provide property management services to buyers
 - Property management support available to buyers to ensure contractors meet deadlines, progress payments are not issued before work is done, and permits are obtained; hoping this will cut default rate even lower
 - Page 7 example: buyer had done nothing and made the house significantly worse; foreclosure initiated; buyer willingly returned the property via deed in lieu of foreclosure once paperwork was filed
 - Property was demolished using state grant funds; now a buildable lot; planning to put a house on it this coming year; rendering on page 7
- Focus has shifted over time; initially processing buildings, doing demolitions, and selling fixer-uppers to vetted local buyers
 - Over 700 demolitions completed; now have a large inventory of vacant land
- Experiencing a housing crisis; severe shortage of affordable quality housing; focus now on taking vacant land and building on it
- Most land is in the City of Syracuse; cost of building exceeds what the house will be worth; primary buyers are affordable housing nonprofits getting significant state grant subsidies to fill the gap
 - Example: Home Headquarters built six single family homes in a row on South State Street this past year on lots acquired mostly through tax foreclosure
- Process involves lot line adjustments and applying to the planning commission for approval to convert narrow, unusable lots into buildable, shovel-ready sites; activity takes time and is not visible to neighbors
- Because of large inventory of shovel-ready sites, have brought in more grant money than any other land bank in the state
 - There are 32 Land Banks across the state
- Proactively take title to abandoned properties and reposition them; other land banks wait until a grant is awarded, might take 9 to 12 months to get title before work can begin
 - Proactively take title so that when applying to New York State for funding, 52 shovel-ready sites are available

- The house at 402 Avery, shown on page 7, is an example of this
 - Applied to New York State under the new Move in New York program to build 52 single-family homes; board voted last week to award that funding
 - Opened up waiting list for potential buyers; vetting income qualifications
 - Funding will support 52 single family homes, manufactured homes; all single story;
 - Went through inventory trying to find places where they will fit in
 - To be sold to low to moderate income owner occupants
 - Serve buyers between 50 and 120% of area median income, divided into four categories of 13 houses will be sold to buyers at or below 60%, another 13 at or below 80%, 100%, and 120%
 - Vetting buyers for income qualifications, mortgage pre-approval, and monthly payments for mortgage, insurance, taxes, and utilities not to exceed 30% of monthly income
 - Once criteria met, buyers put down a \$500 deposit to reserve one of the 52 addresses, listed on the website, including models and estimated completion dates
 - Shovels in ground in June; completions expected between September of this year and September 2027
 - All hands-on deck approach given severity of local housing crisis; New York State putting more money toward housing than ever before
 - Groups like Home Headquarters and Housing Visions buy lots and build, but have limited annual capacity; land bank now entering new construction directly for the first time
 - Homes will appeal to those wanting single story living; large number fully ADA accessible; floor plans modified to include 36-inch wide doors to primary spaces for ease of future retrofitting
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- Mr. Meaker: Has any research been done on the long-term value of the manufactured homes and what will be the value of that home in 25 or 30 years from now?
 - Ms. Wright: Design standards have changed dramatically in recent years; crossmod homes are built to look and feel like a stick-built house; built to HUD code, governs mobile homes and manufactured homes; New York State Building code governs stick built homes
 - 25 years ago, the manufactured homes looked more like trailers with plastic; interior wall panels would not have been sheetrock, more like plastic-like panel panels; exterior looked more like an RV
 - The steel chassis of the trailer is integral to the structure (serving as floor joists), but everything above uses 2x6 exterior studs, 2x4 interior studs, standard siding, windows, and sheetrock interiors
 - Very well insulated and all interior surfaces are sheetrock
 - Test case built last year on Maxwell Avenue in the Valley, appraised at \$250,000; costs about \$312,000 to build; sold at \$175,000 to a low-income buyer
 - There's a gap between the cost to build and appraisal and even more between the appraisal price and the sale price for an affordable price
 - Homes carry an MH Advantage designation, which allows appraisers to use stick-built homes in the surrounding area for comps; expected to hold value just like a stick-built house
 - Does not have a 25-year-old home to use as an example to show how it holds
 - Lustron home in the Salt Springs neighborhood (post-WWII, steel-frame manufactured houses were built), built in the 1940s, sold for \$210,000, and appreciating alongside stick-built neighbors; appraisers expect the same for these home
 - Mr. Meaker: There was a time when I was a real estate broker. There was a time when Sears used to ship homes to this area. I know it's possible. Is there any specific research on the specific units to see what that long-term will be?
 - Ms. Wright: Crossmod homes have not been around that long

- No historical data to point to yet, but the homes are projected to hold value and appreciate like a stick-built house
- New York State Homes and Community Renewal, which is funding the program, chose crossmod manufactured homes because they look and feel like stick-built homes and can appraise compared to stick houses
- Mr. Meaker: So, they are called crossmods?
- Ms. Wright: Yes, which is confusing because they are not modular
 - Manufactured and built to the manufactured code
 - Looking at modular homes, built to New York State Building Code
 - Difference: manufactured homes arrive with the trailer as part of the structure, backed onto the foundation, joining the two pieces together
 - Take away the axles and tongues, steel frame is part of the structure
 - Modular homes are built as boxes in the factory and lifted by crane off a flatbed onto a site-built foundation
 - Come with a one-year factory warranty plus extended warranty for a total seven-year warranty on all parts of the house
- Ms. Denton: They are permanent?
- Ms. Wright: They are permanent, affixed to the foundation
 - When in a trailer park, you may own the home but lease the land; buyers own both the home and the land
 - New York State has up until recently has not had a process to convert houses into real property; title issued by the DMV, era when they were mobile homes
 - Unit sold last year, the buyer received both a DMV title and a deed to the land, and the lender filed a lien against the land and lien with the DMV
- New York State passed a new law last year enabling an administrative process with the DMV to convert the home into real property, so future buyers will receive a deed just as they would for any regular house, expected to make lenders significantly more comfortable
- For many years, manufactured housing was not allowed in the city
- Manufactured housing was not allowed in the city for many years; good option for single story homes only
 - Cannot stack due to steel incorporated into the trailer; also looking at modular options for two-story homes
 - Partnered with Jubilee Homes; looking at 35 lots on the near west side; working with architect and builder to dial in pricing; plan to apply for two HCR programs:
 - Affordable Housing Opportunity Program: up to \$200,000 subsidy per house; sold to buyers at or below 80% of area median income
 - Block-by-Block Program: looking at applying for the other 10 houses
 - Block-by-Block Program provides \$300,000 for a single-family house or \$400,000 for a two family house; looking to build 10 two-family houses sold to owner occupants; owner lives in one unit with rental income from the other unit to help meet mortgage payment
- Pursuing both HCR programs; Home Headquarters and Housing Visions also pursuing modular and stick-built options
- Focus shifting more toward new construction but will continue demolitions and selling fixer-uppers
- Increased stabilization prior to sale in past five years; previously sold as-is at time of foreclosure
- Clean out all trash and debris; approximately \$500,000 spent annually on trash and debris removal; necessary to assess true condition of house and draft renovation specs for buyers
 - Focus shifting to assembling shovel ready sites

Mr. Hogan Presentation:

- Land Bank is the most effective vehicle there has ever been in terms stabilizing and renovating neighborhoods
- Does things other neighborhoods cannot do, including acquiring and improving property for large-scale projects
 - Seeks to tackle the housing crisis, and this is the way to do it
- Any kind of money that can be garnered from different partners and government will certainly be accepted

Presentation Continued by Ms. Wright:

- Sometimes houses are occupied at foreclosure; tenants get first right of refusal to buy; most living in unfit conditions; contract with Catholic Charities for relocation assistance, first month's rent, security deposit, moving expenses
- Sometimes heirs living in house without settling estate; work through legal situations to ensure heirs get clear title
- New York State Land Bank Initiative stabilization funds used for foundation repair, siding, windows, roofs to help tenants get house up to code to so that they can buy it

- Mr. Meaker: The property on Avery Ave, I am assuming it was built in the early 1900s, so there is probably a basement there. Is the capability there to set this new structure and use the existing basement or does the basement get filled in?
- Ms. Wright: No, they are gone now. After demolition, excavate down to at least three feet below grade; foundation reuse has only been done once; sold property on Green Street to a Tiny Home for Good (local nonprofit); it was on a very narrow lot with the house almost right up to the lot lines
 - Chose to keep and reuse the foundation because to do otherwise they would have had to apply for area variances, bring it into compliance, and they wouldn't have been able to fit a house there
 - Stripped the existing building down to the foundation and rebuilt on top
 - Typically, foundations are not in great shape or nobody is ready to build right away and an open pit cannot be left for any length of time
 - Move in New York homes built on a slab, excavate down to three feet below grade, bring hard fill in, slab floats above
- Mr. Hogan: As far as housing, flexible to work with many crossmodal people to create a house that would fit on something like that not only as far as density but on populating neighbors, which is critical
- Ms. Denton noted that when she was on the town board, she learned more about the land bank and she does not think a lot of people realize that it's countywide
- Ms. Wright: Yes, it is. County has a tax auction every fall; city chose to make us the default recipient of all tax foreclosed properties after stopping auctions in the 90s due to bad results; then doing lien sales which caused problems; in 2011 the state passed the land bank act and made the land bank the default recipient of all tax foreclosures
 - Foreclosure notices went out to 4,000 tax delinquent properties and most paid, generating the return on investment outlined on page 2

- County auction means the threat of foreclosure is already there so opportunity to increase delinquent collections is limited; would take the auction list, meet with local officials, and request a select list of properties be conveyed to the land bank instead
- Development enforcement mortgage requires people to bring property up to code within 12 to 18 months and can apply other conditions on the sale such as owner occupancy requirements through Home Ownership Choice Program
- County tax law updated in 2024 just as the city did due to a Supreme Court case, has not dealt with that since then; eager to explore with county staff how to replicate that process under the new law
- Ms. Denton: You would work with local municipalities and then potentially come to the County?
- Ms. Wright: That's the way it's been done in the past; curious if the county wanted to do the same thing the city has and convey all tax foreclosed properties to the land bank; unsure if there's any interest in that
- Ms. Denton: Do we know what department that is?
- Mr. Knapp: Real Property
- Mr. Hogan: It could be a hybrid
- Ms. Wright: Local elected officials were excited about demolition funding; properties frequently go to auction in such bad shape that buyers walk away and three years later it's back in the auction again; able to intervene using grant funding to demolish and either sell as a side lot to the next door neighbor or make it into a building site that somebody could buy or build on
- Ms. Denton: when I was on the town board, we had a property and if the town demolishes it, it goes on the tax, there's a lien on the property and then potentially that just sits there or potentially not paid, it's a big process
- Mr. Romeo: To answer your question, yes, there is interest in doing that. Elaine, I can follow up with you. I know that you have a lot of non-buildable lots due to the required width of the property; I believe it's 35 feet right now. If that were to be moved to say 30 feet, would there be opportunity to build on those based on people wanting to build or whatever programs are available to you?
- Ms. Wright: It used to be that a lot had to be at least 40 feet wide to apply for a building permit; when the city adopted the new zoning ordinance, any existing lot is legally buildable, but most people don't want anything narrower than 40 feet
 - Groups like Tiny Home for Good building very small structures are interested in those and under the new code can build without applying for an area variance; neighborhoods with 33 foot lots were built when people didn't have cars so no room for a driveway was needed
 - State building and fire codes now require building at least six feet off the property line otherwise the exterior wall has to be fire-rated by the time you lose 12 feet for a driveway and six feet for a sideyard setback, most people just don't want lots that narrow
- Mr. Romeo: Do you think that reducing that would have any impact on demand, availability, or people's willingness and desire to build?
- Ms. Wright: Not necessary because any existing lot that is narrower is legally allowed to be built on now; new zoning ordinance also allows for rowhouses, in a single family zoning district, 20 foot lots in a row with zero setbacks because you're going to have attached walls, has to be fire rated because it is right on the property line; haven't seen a lot of demand for rowhouse construction due to limited long stretches of contiguous land; 1500 block of South State Street in the Blueprint 15 area has about 400 feet of frontage where 16 units could fit, way more than detached; Fitch Street and Delaware Street also have long contiguous stretches; not everybody wants an attached house because of noise from neighbors, but it is one method
- Mr. Bush: I want to emphasize that this is a countywide program; there's been a lot of discussion about the city of Syracuse but the land bank has done a lot of work in the 13th district and I really

appreciate all your efforts; I know you're trying to do more but the state isn't cooperating in some cases; thank you for being there for the folks in the 13th

- Ms. Wright: Thanks Ken; we very interested in what more can be done to serve the surrounding towns and villages

2. **VISIT SYRACUSE:** Danny Liedka, President & CEO

a. **INFORMATIONAL:** Overview

(Attachment No. 3: Visit Syracuse PowerPoint; Attachment No. 4: Visit Syracuse 2026 Annual Report)

- 2024 visitor spending in Onondaga County: \$1.294 billion; estimates that 2025 to come in slightly higher; national tourism trends down close to 2.5%; Syracuse and Onondaga County saw growth of about 1%
- Roughly one in 11 jobs in the county are in the tourism industry; about \$500 million in labor income; approximately \$86 million in federal, state, and local tax revenue generated; bed tax collections between \$13-14 million, \$6.95 million up from 2017
- Partnerships with local festivals, Syracuse University athletics, the Crunch, and the Mets; Visit Syracuse advertisements air on SNY countywide; direct link to Visit Syracuse website through Syracuse athletics ticket purchasing portal to capture visiting fans and extend their stays
- Partnered with the Buffalo Bills last year to capture Western New York traffic; reached target markets including LA and Toronto through World Series and League Championship programs
- Partnered with Wheel the World to audit tourism assets and grade accessibility; Syracuse more advanced compared to other cities
- Backed many events; hosted the first Pride Organizers convention in New York State in Syracuse, grew to New York City due to success
- Over 1.6 million views, up from 780,000 three years ago; average time on page one minute five seconds compared to competitors at 40 seconds; transitioned to heavy video content featuring real people
- Visitor guide, printed 50,000 copies in 2025, expanded to 75,000 for 2026; produced in-house; shifted from advertising-heavy to storytelling focus; digital views over one million
- Double digit growth across platforms; TikTok following has grown significantly since hiring a recent college graduate to manage it; over 2 million video views; audience growth up 30%
- Partnered with Belesai Communications, Nikita Jankowski; coverage from Travel and Leisure, National Geographic, Yahoo News
- Over 50,000 rooms booked last year; approximately \$38 million impact; 87,000 room nights in tentative funnel; grown about 85% over eight years
- Hotel room shortage a significant challenge, lost the Sheraton, Crown Plaza, and half the Genesee Grand, approximately 1,000 rooms lost; making it difficult to attract large conventions; transporting groups to suburbs as a stopgap; need downtown hotel rooms
- Mr. Meaker: I know that in years past, it used to be called the Syracuse Herald Bowling Tournament, right? But that is not here anymore, is it?
- Mr. Liedka: That would be the USCB Bowling Tournament; we had it over a few times; roughly 50,000 hotel rooms and \$75 million economic impact; county invested about \$4 million to attract it; Las Vegas and Reno have built permanent facilities and now hold two of the three years in rotation; trend is moving away from temporary lanes like the OnCenter; working to replace it by making up room nights across multiple events rather than one large one; we have dart tournaments too
- Mr. Meaker: What else is growing? Wiffle ball has taken on a big following, it's even on ESPN now. It'd be nice to see something like that come here

- Mr. Liedka: You're going to hear some stuff about sports and you're going to like what I say
- Mr. Brown: You mentioned Toronto. I'm worried about tourism slowing with everything happening at the federal level. The Comptroller of New York State put out a report saying that tourism was down 21% from Canada. Are we feeling that in Central New York? Syracuse University is feeling similar pressure with international students. I imagine less of their parents are coming which falls to us. Are we feeling that?
- Mr. Liedka: Volume of Canadian tourism here is different compared to Buffalo which is a gateway, they feel it harder there; estimating about 13-14% of business lost from Canada; constantly testing that market through channels and the reception is not great; doubling down in other markets, New York City has moved from sixth to number one, Philadelphia number two, Western Massachusetts also growing; numbers continue to climb despite the loss; sentiment from Canada isn't very good right now but somehow found a way to fill in those holes
- Goals for 2026:
 - Visitors guide expansion to 75,000 print copies; digital views over one million
 - Wheel the World accessibility initiative: continuing to expand; major LGBTQ sponsorship of Pride and Prosperity event at Inspire Innovation Hub in October
 - Partnered with Emmy award-winning writer Avita Robinson for a BIPOC-focused video series highlighting minority-owned businesses and the Haudenosaunee; produced by Blackhub Productions; launching in June; goal of at least three earned media placements; available on YouTube channel
 - Website, \$120,000 investment approved in fall budget; switching to Tempest, more user friendly and cost effective; 12-month buildout underway; CRM side, customer-facing complete in June
 - County parks video series highlighting all county parks including a push for the aquarium; will expand to city parks and suburbs next year; outdoor recreation continues to be the number one draw post-COVID
 - Syracuse Uncovered continuing partnership with PBS series Spatchcock Funk to highlight local businesses through YouTube channel
 - Salt City Sports manages Hopkins Road and Carrier Park; Visit Syracuse handles marketing; Carrier Park projected at close to \$12 million economic impact this year; Hopkins Road when complete projected at \$20 million economic impact and 10,000 new hotel room nights; facilities are versatile for all outdoor sports

3. **DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING:** Troy Wafner

- a. Calling for a Public Hearing on the Inclusion of Viable Agricultural Lands within Certified Agricultural Districts Pursuant to Section 303-b of the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law
 - Onondaga County has four agricultural districts; January 1st to January 30th allows for inclusion of viable agricultural land into those districts; first resolution requesting authorization of the public hearing
 - This year four farms want to include approximately 251 acres mainly in District 4: Pompey, Lafayette, Fabius, and Tully
 - Mr. Denton: The first one, is adding to specifically district 1?
 - Mr. Wafner: The first one is for any agricultural district outside of District 1 because we are doing the eight year review
 - Ms. Denton: We can add at any time every year?
 - Mr. Wafner: January 1st through January 30th; what you can't do is remove at that point; it's the eight year review where you can remove plans

- Mr. Brown: You mentioned the eight year review of District 1, is it just every two years that a different district is reviewed?
- Mr. Wafner: A different district is reviewed every other year; next year there will not be an eight year review

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

- b. Calling for a Public Hearing on the Modification of Agricultural District No. 1, County of Onondaga, Town of Otisco and the Towns of LaFayette, Onondaga, and Tully (West of I-81)
- Next related resolution, every eight years agricultural districts must be reviewed; this year is the review of Agricultural District 1; full review, reach out to all land owners currently enrolled to see if they want to enroll more land or take land out; goes before the Farmland Protection Board for their vote
 - District 1 review inclusion of just shy of 121 acres; removal of around 10 acres, most removals are from landowners who didn't realize they were in an agricultural district and are not actually doing agriculture

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

- c. Adopting the Onondaga County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan 2025 Update
- Every five years the hazard mitigation plan must be updated; originally adopted in 2013, updated in 2019; this is the latest update
 - First time ever includes Onondaga County Aqua and every municipality, towns and villages; all worked together on a joint basis and made up a good part of the steering committee
 - Projects identified in the plan will be eligible for federal funding when it comes up
 - Mr. Eriksen: Will the next update be in five years?
 - Mr. Wafner: Yes
 - Ms. Denton: Do local municipalities have to approve this as well?
 - Mr. Wafner: Each municipality has to approve it on their own; the county will approve it and each town and village will approve it as well
 - Mr. Brown: What hazards typically come up in this plan?
 - Mr. Wafner: On the county level mostly climate and weather related, drought, earthquake, heat wave, flooding, harmful algae blooms, invasive species, infestation, severe weather, winter weather; municipalities can identify specific problems such as flooding that overtakes roads and bridges in the spring and then apply for funding to correct them when it becomes available
 - Mr. Meaker: Is that where the Water Chestnut Program would fall under. Would there be funding for that program?
 - Mr. Wafner: Conceivably, yeah

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

4. **COUNTY LEGISLATURE:** Nikita Jankowski, President & Founder of Belesai Communications; Ally Spongr DeGron, Director of the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center; Sage Hamilton – Hazarika, Byway Coordinator
- a. Resolution in Support of the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad New York Scenic Byway Nomination and Corridor Management Plan Adoption

(Attachment No. 4: Letter from Ms. Ally Spongr DeGon; Attachment No. 5: Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway Map)

Presentation by Ms. Jankowski:

- Byway is primarily a tourism product; Maryland started a Harriet Tubman byway years ago generating millions for state and local communities; New York State, Delaware, and Pennsylvania followed; New York's byway is 550 miles from New York City to Niagara Falls across 22 counties, the largest expansion of the byway

Presentation by Ms. Spongr DeGron:

- Being done in two phases running in parallel:
 - Phase 1 from Auburn west to Niagara Falls
 - Phase 2 from Auburn east through Seneca County to Albany and south to New York City
 - Started going for the full 550 miles a couple of years ago; New York State DOT has been a major partner and must approve the corridor management plan before designation; DOT could not commit to mapping the full route for a 2026 designation; split into two phases in early 2025 for effectiveness and feasibility
- Phase 1: all resolutions from every municipality obtained; corridor management plan complete; bill in the Senate and Assembly; on track for governor sign-off by June and official designation this year; Phase 1 designation brings momentum to finishing Phase 2
- Onondaga County on Route 5 serves as the gateway to Phase 2 from the existing byway; getting Phase 1 passed keeps the push toward a statewide end-to-end byway and one step closer to national recognition connecting New York State with existing byways in other states
- New Jersey and Pennsylvania Departments of Transportation working on similar plans to connect the history from Harriet Tubman's birthplace in Dorchester County, Maryland to her first site of self-emancipation in Niagara Falls
- Phase 2 progress: approximately 130-140 of 173 municipalities acquired; working in Albany, Schenectady, Westchester, and Herkimer counties
- Here today to advocate for the resolution from Onondaga County to keep moving Phase 2 forward

Presentation by Mr. Hamilton – Hazarika:

- Phase 1 required 65 resolutions from municipalities at the county, town, and village level, got 65 out of 65; Phase 2 out of 173 municipalities is in the 130-140 range
- A scenic byway requires a contiguous route end to end easy for travelers to follow; helps tourism partners, state agencies, and local organizations work together
- Benefits of byway designation: proven economic impact, travelers linger longer in areas they might not always stop; creates opportunities for historians and local cultural organizations to apply for grant funding or match other grant programs to help preserve history

- Main focus is getting a historic byway designation; future option to incorporate recreation into corridor management plans for both phases; opportunity for overlap with other recreational trails such as the Empire State Trail and Erie Canal Way National Heritage Area
- Initial route based on National Park Service Network to Freedom sites; paired with further historical mapping of where Harriet Tubman may have traveled; Harriet Tubman used the train on a number of her journeys so historic communities along the Erie Canal and train tracks were included to justify the historic nature of the route

Presentation by Ms. Spongr DeGron:

- Route follows loosely the waterways and train routes Harriet Tubman and others utilized; goes through key areas including Syracuse and Onondaga County
- Importance of doing this envisioned by community stakeholders, leaders, and historians advocating for Black history, culture, and Harriet Tubman’s legacy
- Focus on the Underground Railroad, freedom seekers, resilience, and resistance

Presentation by Ms. Jankowski:

- Working directly with descendants of some of these groups to add authenticity; a lot of personal stories this year as well
- Folder was provided with more information about the trail
- Circles back into tourism, bringing people to communities and investing back in local businesses
- Active partners in Canada, first site Harriet Tubman sought refuge in St. Catharines, Ontario including the church where she worshiped; hoping to connect to the international Canadian Harriet Tubman Trail; fostering a tourism market of people who would cross the border to engage with that history

Presentation by Mr. Hamilton – Hazarika:

- Current byway route goes along Route 5 through Onondaga County; Onondaga County would be the gateway to Phase 2 from the existing byway
- Getting Phase 1 passed lets partners in the area continue the push toward a statewide end-to-end byway and one step closer to getting recognized as a national road that would connect New York State with existing byways in other states
- New Jersey and Pennsylvania Departments of Transportation working on similar plans to connect the history all the way from Harriet Tubman’s birthplace in Dorchester County, Maryland to her first site of self-emancipation in Niagara Falls

Questions/ Comments:

- Mr. Brown: Looking at the map, how are the towns chosen? Why these specific towns, Vernon is much smaller than others. Is it places Harriet specifically visited?
- Mr. Hamilton – Hazarika: Initial route based on National Park Service Network to Freedom sites; paired with further historical mapping of where Harriet Tubman may have traveled; Harriet Tubman used the train on a number of her journeys so historic communities along the Erie Canal and train tracks were included; geography also requires a contiguous end-to-end route easy for travelers to follow
- Ms. Spongr DeGron: Some towns may not have a direct connection to Harriet Tubman but the road passes through, still required for resolution; towns along the route are discovering their own underground railroad history through this process; in Herkimer County nearly everyone asked said: “I didn’t know we had this history here,” librarians and town historians following up with new research; even the smallest towns have residents coming forward saying they believe there is underground railroad

history in their family or community; gives reason to work together across town and county lines to uphold the story and pursue new research and preservation

- Ms. Denton: Have all municipalities in Onondaga County signed off?
- Ms. Jankowski: Not all, Manlius and DeWitt most recently signed; currently working on Elbridge and Camillus
- Ms. Hernandez thanked presenters; noted this has been a two-year journey; confident Onondaga County will be on the trail in Phase 2 representing the rich history held here

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

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

- a. Review of Submitted Resumes and Candidates for Board and Commission Vacancies
- Regional Planning and Development Board: one vacancy, non-ex officio position
 - Regional Market: two spots needing renewal or filling; one upcoming at end of year; three candidates interested in the two open spots, two currently serve on the board, one new member would be Maura Ackerman with SOFSA; resumes to be sent to committee members for feedback
 - CNY Works Board of Directors: one legislator recommended by county executive
 - OCDC: vacancy not until October but seeking candidates now
 - Economic Development Advisory Board: two appointments open; can be non-legislators
 - OCIDA: opening forthcoming right away
 - Strongly encouraged members to speak with Legislator Denton with any suggestions; vacancies to be filled in session; items not requiring a vote to proceed by early June
-
- Mr. Knapp: Joanne Delaney on the Regional Market board stepping down at end of year, additional opening forthcoming

C. Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 11:41 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: **PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**
DATE: **APRIL 21, 2026**

Respectfully submitted,



HASSINA ADAMS, Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
DAVID SKEJAL	CCE ONONDAGA
Troy Waffman	OCDCP
Robert Petrivich	Dys CE
Katelyn Wright	Land Bank
Pat Hogan	Land Bank
KYLE PRADEN	Legislature
Nikita Jankowski	Harriet Tubman Byway
ALCY SPONCE DEGAN	11
SAGE HAMILTON HAZARUKA	11
Jarlen Dabulis	Community Link