



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

NICOLE WATTS
Chairwoman

SPENCER BERG
Deputy Clerk

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE MINUTES – APRIL 21, 2026 GREGG ERIKSEN, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Eriksen, Mr. Garland, Mr. Kelly, Mr. Meaker, Mr. Thompson
ALSO PRESENT: Chairwoman Watts, Leader Hernandez, Mr. Bush, Mr. Ryan, Mr. Romeo, Ms. Block, Ms. Denton; also see attached list

Chair Eriksen called the meeting to order at 1:19 p.m. The previous meeting's minutes were approved.

1. ONONDAGA COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT: Mark Burger, Executive Director

a. **INFORMATIONAL:** Overview of the Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District

Attachment No. 1: Conservation Quarterly, Winter 2025/2026; Attachment No. 2: 2025 Annual Report; Attachment No. 3: OCSWCD PowerPoint Presentation

- We are one of 58 soil and water conservation districts across New York State; the first district was formed in 1940 in Schoharie County. We were formed and adopted by the Onondaga County Board of Supervisors in 1944; the boroughs of New York City are one soil and water district, and that is how we end up at 58
- Roughly half a million acres of land; one-fifth of that acreage is in agriculture; 295 farms in our state's Agricultural Environmental Management program; agriculture has been steadily our 14th largest employer
- Our vision is to live in a society in which all of our generations will have natural resources to sustain and enrich their life; our mission is to promote the wise use of those resources
- Purpose: Our purpose is that we are the only agency in the county able to administer and apply the state's Agricultural Environmental Management program to address non-point sources of pollution from agriculture
- Staff: 112 years of total combined experience; 12 and a half staff members; three state agricultural planners; three survey, design, and build implementers; six with erosion and sediment control certifications; four with forestry backgrounds; two stream technicians; four certified pesticide applicators
- Mr. Garland: When you say we're the only county implementing, is that by choice?
- Mr. Burger: We're the department in the county that implements that agriculture management program

Presentation Continues:

- Seven-person board of directors; I am blessed to have two boards to report to; we also administer, and have for 32 years, the City of Syracuse Watershed Agricultural Program, which has its own watershed agricultural program review committee that reviews projects in the Skaneateles Lake Watershed
 - If projects are recommended for approval, they roll forward to the next month to the district board meeting, and it is the district board that releases the funding for those projects
- We do a lot with volunteers; we support a lot of our local academic learning institutions, and we are very proud of that and have had very successful results; some of those folks have become full-time employees with us
- There are six main watersheds in Onondaga County and we work in all of them; our three most funded watersheds are Skaneateles Lake, Otisco Lake, and the Tioughnioga River, which flows to the Chesapeake Bay
 - The most underfunded watersheds in the county are Seneca River and Oneida Lake Watershed; farmers in those watersheds frequently come to us and ask how they can get funding to do what their counterparts in the Finger Lakes watersheds get funding for, they say they want to be good stewards of the land as well
- Our workload is half agriculture; invasive species management on both land and water comprises a quarter of our work; the remainder is stormwater management, critical area revegetation, and stream bed and bank stabilization
- The stream work is 2% because it is very technical, very expensive, and very hard to get funding for
- We partner with just about everybody who wants to partner with us; the reason we have a soil and water district in this county is because of Book 52B, Soil and Water District Law, which allows us to go off the public rights-of-way onto private property to plan and implement best management practices to protect water quality
 - We meet the farmers on their land typically working off the hood of a pickup truck or at their kitchen table and that is where we develop conservation plans and, we walk their farms document their stewardship
- Agricultural practices include: covered barnyards, roof water management, revegetation, and rotational grazing systems to keep vegetation filtering water and nutrients in the soil
- We also put up fencing to exclude cows from waterways, provide alternative water supplies, and then let nature rebuild the vegetative buffer around streams
- Cover cropping is huge; in the fall when you are driving around and see a corn field with a lot of green in it, that is a cover crop
 - It keeps nutrients in the soil, keeps the soil on the land, and keeps the water clean; we consistently fund over 10,000 acres of cover crops with our farms on an annual basis
- Buffers are a significant practice, especially in our Finger Lakes watersheds; land is selling for \$30,000 an acre and our farmers are competing one for one with developers
- People ask why there are not bigger buffers, but every ounce of land a farmer owns needs to produce something
 - If we want bigger, better buffers, we are going to have to pay for them, but they make a huge difference in terms of water quality
- Strip cropping is a textbook feature of our Central New York region that is visible when flying into Syracuse, because of the hills and slopes in our agricultural communities
- When you see the green, that's fields of hay and alfalfa; when you see the brown, that's soybeans. We rotate and intersperse strips of hay and alfalfa with corn and soybeans to break up the slope, reduce erosion, and keep soil on the land and water clean
- Stream bank stabilization: very technical, very expensive, 1.2 miles of work completed on Onondaga Creek 20 years ago. The stream is hitting the bank of the slope and grabbing a lot of soil downstream and ultimately to Onondaga Lake

- What we did was install toe protection, the stream was given a floodplain, and it was revegetated with trees and shrubs; that site looks tremendously different and stable today
- Additional work at Route 20 on Fabius Brook, where in-stream structures were used to redirect the energy of the water back to the center of the stream, with toe protection and replanting on the outer bank to hold that stream in place
- Our staff is emergency stream intervention certified; when a major storm event hits Onondaga County
 - Highway departments can call us, and we can go out and establish references for their streams
 - Tell them how wide, how deep, and how much to excavate to get the stream flowing again and road infrastructure back in operation
 - We can expedite permits with the DEC, which is one of the biggest saving graces in those situations
- We do over 50 miles of road ditch hydroseeding per year; as highway departments clean those ditches, we put hydro mulch with seed and tackifier down behind them, which holds the seed and mulch to the bank and gets vegetation growing again to filter the water flowing in those ditches
- We just took delivery of a mini hydroseeder, which will allow us to do a better job of finite work around cemetery stones at the Veteran Cemetery every spring, making sure we're the most respectful
- We also just took delivery of a straw blower, already getting used two weeks ago at a job site
 - For remote areas where the 800-gallon hydroseeder cannot reach, allowing us to do hand seeding and still get vegetation established
- Stormwater management services: we inspect over 400 outfalls for Onondaga County, help with data management, prepare the two preliminary six-month reports that go to the Office of Environment for completion, and participate in complaint investigation
 - Just got one of those driving down from the Town of Salina; I think there is oil in a catch basin heading to the stream
- We do good housekeeping presentations at the various county departments, we teach the New York State DEC four-hour erosion and sediment control class to contractors, codes officers, engineers, and architects
 - We have been doing that for over 16 years and have taught over 4,300 students
 - It is part of our earned income program and it has actually made us better at our jobs, because if you teach it you have got to know it and you have got to apply it
- Tree and shrub sale just completed and we had a tremendous response
 - It is the second year of a really tremendous response; people want to plant trees and shrubs and put up bird habitat
 - The project at Oneida Shores County Park used a dwarf variety of Streamco willow near the campsites and boat trailer parking, it bushes out, does not regenerate itself, and makes a nice windbreak, wildlife habitat, and visual barrier
- Emerald ash borer program:
 - Administering this program for over 10 years for the county
 - Started with inventory, then a management plan, then marking removals and bidding them out in winter to tree contractors
 - In the spring we do tree planting; we do a lot of our removal work in the dead of winter when contractors are not in high demand, which is how we get our best prices
 - We provide essentially year-round work for them
- We also do ash tree injection using a systemic pesticide that is translocated through the tree
 - As beetles come and try to eat the leaves, they succumb to the pesticide and die
 - We reserve this for high-value trees in parks and areas where shade, stormwater, and habitat functions need to be maintained
 - Not for roadside trees, which are hazards and are removed

- Treatment is every three years and the tree must be healthy enough to receive it
- We also do hemlock woolly adelgid treatment on large tracts of land for farmers and other large landowners
 - Hemlocks grow in the ravines at the south end of the county and if we lose them we will lose the ravines and the water quality
 - The roots hold the soil together and keep it out of streams and lakes
- We do tree risk assessments for municipalities to identify which trees are at risk and when they should come out, and to plan for replanting in the community
- Water chestnuts:
 - Spend the whole summer on the Seneca River system
 - We have summer crew that hand-pulls water chestnuts
 - Just opened bids for mechanical harvesting
 - This will be our second year of chemical applications through a private contractor, and we work with private landowners and associations to help them remove chestnuts as well
 - Big trucks, trailers, and other resources to support their efforts

Questions/Comments

- Mr. Kelly: On the water chestnuts, there is a cyclical nature to it; where are we in that cycle?
- Mr. Burger: This is our 11th field season; for the last two years we have noticed a decline in the number of stems and the density of stems growing in the Seneca River system
 - I did not want to say anything two years ago in case it was an anomaly, but our contractors are saying it is really starting to work
 - However, these plants are pervasive, one nutlet can produce 300 new stem
 - We have to be persistent and focused in our attack on them

Presentation Continued:

- Road salt management:
 - We have done a lot of road salt management programs with regional planning, cooperative extension, and state DOT, done a lot truck calibration clinics
 - The latest tool is the live-edge blade, a 12-inch sections that can move up and down independently, as opposed to a straight 12-foot blade
 - It works well in most settings, though not perfectly in areas like the City of Syracuse with manhole covers or country roads with bridge joints where its not 100% effective yet
 - for approximately 75% of our highway departments it has been a real successful tool, a better scrape means less salt and sand, and that has been a tremendous savings

Questions / Comments

- Mr. Eriksen: Is there any movement toward salt alternatives among municipalities in the county?
- Mr. Burger: We have not heard that, because of the state regulations on ice- and snow-free roads; we think the state is going to have to take the first lead on that and then it will trickle down because of the legalities

Presentation Continued:

- We are the only soil and water district in New York State to have an agricultural spill response program
 - Agriculture, like any other industry, can have accidents,
 - Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year to assist farmers, fire departments, and other first responders with spill response

- Some years there are no spills, some years there can be up to six, but it has been a very successful program for protecting water quality

Agricultural Spill Response



- Notice the fertilizer that's on the right-hand side, a bolt broken and a wagon hauling fertilizer
 - The farmer didn't know it until a few miles down the road
- We can't spray it with water because that would send it down the road
- Our newest tool is a Super vac sweeper from then Senator, now Congressman Mannion, who helped fund the sweeper and the building it's stored in
 - First season, the sweeper will be available, paramount to help water quality
- Help the county emergency management department get their large and small animal response team program off the ground
 - One of the most successful programs in the state of New York
 - A part of the county's emergency management disaster preparedness committee and emergency operation center
 - Public sector liaison; supporting highway department when they need it; make sure the agricultural industry can keep produce even during the worst weather events
- We rent conservation equipment; the no-till drill program was so successful that farmers liked the equipment so much they went out and bought their own; we put ourselves out of business there
 - We now only maintain the small no-till seeder for smaller farms
 - Equipment was originally funded by the City of Syracuse; we encourage farmers to try the technology
- Envirothon: We need to keep our 9th through 12th graders interested and excited in environmental opportunities
 - Do that through supporting Envirothon, an environmental education competition across New York State
 - If you win at the state level, you can go to the national and then international competitions
 - Tremendous participation over the years
- We provide technical assistance to all who call, flooding, drainage, and erosion
 - Town of Salina recently called about oil in a catch basin, probably headed towards a stream
 - Always available for whoever needs us in our areas of expertise
- Onondaga County agriculture is something to be really proud of:

- We are in the top 4% for total pounds of milk produced of all dairy-producing counties in the United States
- Recognized as a farm-friendly community and in the top 10% of best places to farm in the United States
- The county's agricultural council has been instrumental in supporting our agricultural producers and in helping us get the best management practice work done
- When we nominate farms to statewide or national peer review committees and they agree with us, that is a testament to the quality of our farms
 - Three farms in Onondaga County have won the Leopold Conservation Award over the last 20-some years
 - At the national level, two farms have been recognized with US Dairy Sustainability Awards
 - McMahon's Easy Acres in the southern Skaneateles Lake Watershed and Young's Twinburg Dairy
- All of our work requires partners, the City of Syracuse, OCWA, WEP, the County Farmland Protection Board, the Ag Council, emergency management
 - Everybody working together is what makes our work happen
- Our funding:
 - 36% state grants, 2% federal grants
 - Our contract with the City of Syracuse to administer their agricultural program over the last 32 years
 - The work we do for Onondaga County such as water chestnuts;
 - Earned income work; and a few other smaller local sources
- I like to get 100% of the grants we apply for; last year we fell just below the 50% mark
 - We still brought in \$2.6 million in grant funds; for every dollar of county funding invested in us, we have been able to return \$14.66
- Proud that a lot of the money that comes into our organization goes right back out
 - Last year, we supported over 220 local businesses with the funding that came through our doors; we are part of the ripple in the pond and part of the economic engine of the community
- There are two million farmers across the United States, making up 1.3% of the labor force; these are the people feeding us three or more times a day, and we need to be very grateful for their hard work and dedication
 - 21 different groups that have some say in what a farmer does each morning when they walk out the door
- Farmers are one of the smartest groups of people walking this planet; there are over 26 different types of business expertise wrapped up in being a farmer, one of which is being a robotics engineer
- We owe a lot to our farmers

Question / Comment:

- Mr. Thompson: I have the pleasure of serving on the Soil and Water Conservation District Board alongside Legislator Bush; I have only known Mr. Burger for a couple of months, but can speak to the important work being done and how much I have learned in that time
 - Can you speak to the contamination of mercury in Onondaga Lake?
- Mr. Burger: We were part of the Onondaga Lake Watershed Partnership for many years, working in the headwaters with farmers and rural landowners; being at those meetings, I remember the discussions about contamination
 - When the marina enhancement project was about to kick off, and we are supporting it with storm water and erosion control inspections on a weekly basis, it probably should have resonated with me that there was potential for some migration of contaminants in those areas

- Especially in the slow-moving embayment where the marina is, which would be a natural deposition zone
- In some ways not surprised, but I know it was quite a bit removed from the major focus areas early on
- Mr. Thompson: The reporting from April 2nd says there is no direct threat to the population; can you speak to the seriousness of finding mercury in the marina, how concerned should people be?
- Mr. Burger: Just last night there was a television program at the national level about bioaccumulation in aquatic organisms; every organism participates in the food chain, and being at the top of the food chain and eating fish that consume all the other organisms in the water supply does make sense as a concern
 - From my understanding, there was quite an amount of natural encapsulation (sediment settling out through gravity)
 - That probably contributed to encapsulating the mercury to a point where it may have been less of a concern on the north or east end than on the south and west side
 - I am very happy to reach out to our counterparts and get more of that information for you
- Mr. Thompson: The proposed solution involves removing some sediment from the basin and capping with gravel and sand, similar to what was done more broadly throughout the lake during remediation; can you speak to that process and how it can improve the environment in the marina?
- Mr. Burger: Anytime we can get contaminants out of the system it is a win for everybody; that is definitely not my area of expertise, but I can follow up and get more information back to you through folks who spend their days solely working on those topics
- Mr. Thompson: And when that soil is removed, in terms of storage and dealing with it once it is out of the lake, what are best practices?
- Mr. Burger: Encapsulation is what has been used in the past and I understand that to be the solution going forward, but we can certainly get more information on that for you
- Mr. Garland: When you say finding mercury in the marina, that almost implies there was none at all, was it actually finding some, or finding mercury at a level that was not acceptable?
- Mr. Burger: I believe the mercury was found during the permit application process; the DEC had requested testing to determine if there were any contaminants, because that was going to determine what would happen with where the excavated material would go
 - Beyond that we have not been any part of that project, we are just doing the erosion and sediment control inspections to make sure the contractor is doing their best work
- Mr. Garland: It was my understanding there was always mercury in Onondaga Lake itself, and obviously the marina is an extension of it
- Mr. Garland: Regarding the agricultural spill response team, that is a great thing; we are the only county that has it?
- Mr. Burger: We are the only county in the state to do that; it is something DEC would like to see across the state, but it has to be a drive and a commitment
 - A lot of us who have worked at soil and water are first responders in our communities with fire departments and ambulance corps, that is where the spill response program came from
 - There was a spill in 2000 at our board chairman's farm and it was a catastrophic failure of a few redundancies, we were able to prevent it from getting into Fabius Brook
 - It on one of our best-managed farms and we realized we needed to be prepared; our funding agencies.
 - City of Syracuse, Department of Water, OCWA, the county, have all been very grateful, and we work closely with DEC and the 911 center
 - A real example of stewardship, it is something we should be very proud of in central New York

- Mr. Garland: We cannot help every county out there, but are we able to help local ones like Madison County if anything happens?
- Mr. Burger: Yes, absolutely, we are always available and we want the same thing everybody else wants, and that is good water quality all the time
- Mr. Garland: As the grandson of farmers, what is your assessment of the overall health of agriculture in the county?
- Mr. Burger: I think we are on the cusp of something really big; we are motivated to be the top dairy-producing county in the state, and with our yogurt plants and other milk ingredient plants that are in place and about to be built, there is going to be something really exciting for agriculture
 - What we will probably see is some of our farmers age out and retire and their farms get absorbed into existing larger farms
 - Our farms are going to get a little bigger, but the great part is that if somebody says they want to sell and retire, there are at least six farms bidding for that land, so we are going to maintain our open space and those beautiful vistas we get to enjoy every day
- Mr. Garland: That is a whole other conversation; thank you
- Mr. Kelly: I know a lot of your work lives and dies with the grant process; could you speak to the overall grant environment as it stands today and how much that affects the workload you take on annually?
- Mr. Burger: We are finding the grant process to be extremely competitive
 - If we fell below a 75% success rate on grants, it used to feel like we needed to retool
 - Now it is closer to 50%; the pressure is really on to have the best applications, and part of that is being the most cost-effective application
 - We are asking more of our local farm producers in terms of financial contributions, just yesterday we sent in seven grant applications to the State Environmental Protection Fund, and some of those were only asking for 50% cost share
 - We are trying to be lean and mean and make our applications as attractive as possible
 - We are also looking to alternative sources of funding where the juice is really worth the squeeze, where you write the application, get the funding, and the administrative work is low so all time and effort goes to getting the projects built and closed out
 - We need to keep making sure we have really good grant writers and that we are supporting them at the highest level
 - That means keeping distractions down so they can focus on the moment of writing
- Mr. Kelly: And how does that impact the work itself? Do you find you have to pivot quite a bit as funding fluctuates from year to year?
- Mr. Burger: We do; when I look at my staff, I think about who pays for that person. Some of our people are solely on grant dollars, and if we do not get those grants, it is up to me to find alternative sources of funding to keep them employed
 - It is not uncommon for us to write 30 grant applications in a year
 - That is why we also do fee-for-service work with local municipalities
 - This winter, we took on quite a big workload and are just finishing that up
- Mr. Meaker: In regard to the ash trees, where are we?
- Mr. Burger: We are getting close to the end. In our conversations at the office, there are about three more years to complete the original workload that was in the management plan
 - We have been able to do it under budget; we have generated a little revenue through some timber sales; and we do a lot of our removal work in the dead of winter
 - Which is how we get our best prices, we are providing essentially year-round work for tree companies and getting strong bids for winter work
- Mr. Meaker: So, you're thinking three more years on this project?
- Mr. Burger: Yes

- Mr. Meaker: You mentioned ash tree injection in your presentation. I have never heard of that before. Can you tell me what that is?
- Mr. Burger: We use a systemic pesticide to inject the ash tree; that material gets translocated through the tree, and as the beetles come and try to eat the leaves, they will succumb to the pesticide and die
 - We do not use it everywhere, just in key areas like parks or other places where we want to maintain the high function and value of those trees for shade and storm water management
 - Roadside trees we are taking down because they can be a hazard
 - We focus on places like the trees around the board of elections and the county parks
- Mr. Meaker: So that injection actually protects the tree?
- Mr. Burger: It protects the tree, yes. But the tree has to be healthy; a tree is like a human, it has to be healthy enough to receive the treatment
- Mr. Meaker: Regarding funding, you mentioned receiving some funding from the City of Syracuse for a piece of equipment; what was that for?
- Mr. Burger: That was for no-till planting equipment, a no-till drill and a no-till planter; about 17 years ago
 - What the City of Syracuse wanted, particularly for the Skaneateles Lake Watershed, was for farmers to try this modern technology
 - What it does is combine plowing, disking, and planting into a single pass
 - You are saving soil because you are disturbing less, saving carbon emissions because you are only running the tractor across the field once instead of three times
- Mr. Meaker: And the reason the City of Syracuse funded that project is probably because their water source comes from Skaneateles Lake?
- Mr. Burger: Absolutely
- Mr. Meaker: You mentioned receiving funding from the federal government for another piece of equipment. What was that?
- Mr. Burger: That came from Senator Manion, who was a state senator at the time, so it was actually state funding, for the street sweeper for agricultural spill response; if there is a fertilizer spill, we are able to go pick that fertilizer up and take it back to the farm for reuse, rather than having it wash into a road ditch and down into a lake
- Mr. Meaker: Understood, so that was state-funded
- Mr. Burger: That was state-funded
- Mr. Garland: With your funding and grants, you said you get around \$2.5 million, but how much is the total you are applying for so we can see the proportion?
- Mr. Burger: The \$2.6 million was last year's number; yesterday when those grants went out I believe we applied for \$3.2 million, and the farmers were contributing anywhere from 40 to 50% cost share on top of that, so it was probably around a \$6 million total ask between the farmers' money, the State Environmental Protection Fund money, and contributions from the Ag Council and OCWA
- Mr. Garland: And in the ash tree injection, how long have we been doing that?
- Mr. Burger: That started around 10 years ago
- Mr. Garland: Because it started 10 years ago, is anybody following that to see if the ash borer beetles are developing resistance generationally?
- Mr. Burger: We are not finding that they have resistance; we are finding that if the tree can stay healthy and not get struck by lightning or suffer wind damage, trees receiving an injection every three years have been able to ward off the beetles
- Mr. Thompson: Since we are talking about the tree injection, one small question: does that injection specifically only target the emerald ash borer
 - Is any other wildlife at risk if they were to consume the leaves?

- Mr. Burger: We have not found any other wildlife to be at risk; that was one of the early concerns, and that is why the governing body of the county, about 11 years ago, took over a year to research and review the decision to make sure we were targeting the pest but protecting the rest of the natural environment

2. **ONONDAGA COUNTY WATER ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION (WEP):** Cydney Johnson, Deputy County Executive; Odean Dyer, Commissioner
- a. INFORMATIONAL: WEP Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Updates

Mr. Dyer Presentation:

- Meadowbrook-Limestone WWTP Rotary Drum Thickener Replacement:
 - Project is consent order-driven; being done to reduce odors and improve reliability of the system
- Mr. Eriksen: Do you know what consent order that is?
- Mr. Dyer: I couldn't tell you from the top of my head

Presentation Continued:

- Wastewater Transportation System Improvements (trunk sewer improvements)
 - Consent order driven; based around overflow prevention
 - The consent order resulted from past overflows
- Baldwinsville-Seneca Knolls and Oak Orchard Oxygen System
 - Built around increasing operational efficiency and cost savings
- Comprehensive Asset Renewal at Wetzel
 - Renewing aging infrastructure
 - The Wetzel facility is approximately 40 years old
- Metro Wastewater Treatment Plant 1978 Annex Renewal:
 - Focused around the Harbor Brook Pump Station
 - Updating aging infrastructure
- Department-Wide Building and Site:
 - General repairs, roofs, paving, drainage, structural elements
- Department-Wide Mechanical and Electrical:
 - Replacing critical mechanical and electrical components throughout the department
- Comprehensive Asset Renewal at Metro:
 - Replacing obsolete systems critical to the disinfection process, systems we do not want to fail and put us at risk
- Overall, the department is focused on consent orders, making sure all timelines are met;
- WEP is on track with all consent order timelines and is proud to report that

Questions/Comments

- Mr. Kelly: With the CIP, I am glad to hear we are on schedule with the consent orders; would you say the remainder of the projects are on schedule as well?
- Mr. Dyer: We'll say that
- Mr. Kelly: And from a budgetary standpoint, are those coming in on budget?
- Mr. Dyer: Yes

- Mr. Thompson: You said you are on the timetable. Can you give us a sense of that timeline specifically?
 - I am interested in the Wastewater Transportation System Improvements because I think that speaks to something we discussed approximately two months ago, when I was inquiring about the Town of Geddes and the Bronson Road trunk line
 - At the time, you said there would be an August flow meter study; can you speak to the timetable?
- Mr. Dyer: The timetable still stands; we are on track; all of our studies have been receiving very close attention because, at the end of the day, we want to make sure we are staying true to our word on our timelines
- Mr. Thompson: And so that study will be done in August, can you speak to what it entails?
- Mr. Dyer: The study puts flow meters inside manholes and pipes; it tracks the water as it goes past and gives us a reading; that reading is raw data that is taken by an engineer, put into a report, and used to advise us
- Mr. Thompson: And would that confirm or validate one way or the other the findings that residents are talking about, sewer backup in their basements and similar issues; and if a problem is found, what would be the next step?
- Mr. Dyer: The next step would be our capital improvement projects; we use facts now to build our CIP, but this is just another layer of facts we would utilize to build out our CIP with more data
- Mr. Thompson: If you get that data in August and find a problem, what is the timeline for remedying it? Does it depend on how bad the problem is? Availability?
- Mr. Dyer: Yes, I believe that would fully depend on the type of project necessary, how bad it is, and what level of risk we have
- Mr. Thompson: How do you prioritize?
- Ms. Johnson: There would have to be a scope developed; the engineers would need to take the data, really look at it in terms of scope, evaluate choices for how to resolve it, and determine next steps for the project, but the data is the critical part
- Mr. Thompson: How do you triage and prioritize where the focus needs to go?
- Ms. Johnson: We try to take into consideration the area and impact on residents; that said, it is hard to assign priority without knowing how long the analysis and report will take, what the engineering recommendation will be, and where that falls in CIP planning. But obviously, if it is an emergency, it becomes a priority
- Mr. Thompson: I recognize that an emergency is always relative, countywide there is one perspective, and if you have material coming up in your basement, it is an emergency to that resident; I just want to make sure those folks are heard
- Mr. Eriksen: Just for a little more detail, Meadowbrook was a consent order-driven project; was it the basis of that consent order odor?
- Mr. Dyer: It was consent order-driven, and yes, odor-driven
- Mr. Eriksen: Can you describe the project a little more, how it is going to address that concern?
- Mr. Dyer: Basically, we have some tanks that when they were built, it was common engineering practice to leave them exposed with grates on top rather than a hard cap
 - Part of the project is to put in hard caps to keep the odors down
- Mr. Eriksen: And on the Wastewater Transportation System, could you briefly describe what caused the consent order, and how this project is addressing it?
- Mr. Dyer: That discusses our pipes, the conveying systems; the consent order resulted from overflows in the past; we have gone through and pinpointed specific pipes that need to be taken care of, and we are either putting in new pipes or building in redundancy
- Mr. Eriksen: For Wetzel, you said this was age-driven; how old is the equipment and can you speak to the need for replacement?

- Mr. Dyer: The age of Wetzel is escaping me off the top of my head, but if I remember correctly, it is somewhere in the 40-year range; it really is time; and at the end of the day it helps with efficiency as well
- Mr. Meaker: The exact age was discussed at the last meeting
- Mr. Dyer: Correct
- Mr. Garland: The meters you are installing in the manholes, can we assume those will help you read and monitor flow in areas where past overflows occurred, and that the flow data, or lack thereof, will help identify areas that need attention?
- Mr. Dyer: Yes, 100%; it will track what is going through the pipe and the level of flow, whether it is February with snow and infiltration, or spring with rain; the reason it takes so long is that we need a full year's worth of data because flows are different in different parts of the year
- Mr. Thompson: This is a question beyond the immediate scope, but I wonder if either of you can shed additional insight on the mercury found in Onondaga Lake, you heard me asking Director Burger about it; how it was discovered, how much, how it is being remedied?
- Ms. Johnson: It really should be our Office of Environment, Elizabeth Martin, who is director, and Parks, as they have been the people directly involved and have worked closely with the DEC
- Mr. Eriksen: I believe she is coming to either our May or June meeting; we can talk about who else we may want to include
- Mr. Thompson: You said Commissioner Kelly of Parks and Recreation?
- Ms. Johnson: Yes, because it is the marina and it is part of that project
- Mr. Thompson: I believe I will see him in my next committee meeting, so I can bring it up there

Ms. Johnson Presentation:

- For Oak Orchard, we have to be careful, all four components of the project are in the RFP stage, so we will not get into detail while those are still in process;
 - All projects are pretty much on schedule; the four components are the substation, the outfall pipe, the bridging project which we refer to as the MOPO
 - And the true upgrades component of the project, which is about 80% of the total project and involves the infrastructure upgrades; the Oak Orchard plant was built in 1981
 - So these are aging infrastructure
- All four are on pace to where we thought they would be; all four are in the progressive design-build process, which was part of the amendment through the New York State budget last year; that process will guide us through the RFP process
 - At this point there are no concern points as we go through the Oak Orchard project

Questions/Comments

- Mr. Kelly: Do we have dates on getting those RFPs back to the county?
- Ms. Johnson: All are in process and all will occur hopefully throughout 2026
- Mr. Ryan: Can we speak to PLAs or design-build language at the state, or any of those aspects of this project?
- Ms. Johnson: I cannot speak to the PLA as part of the RFP because those are in process; if you read the amendment, we are required to do a feasibility study that will tell us about the PLA, and that is part of design-build
- Mr. Ryan: There are a few things in the state budget that are getting worked on, has there been any movement on any of that?
- Ms. Johnson: I am not aware that is in the New York State budget, but I do not deal with the New York State budget, so someone else would need to weigh in on that

- Mr. Eriksen: On permitting, can you go over the Speedy's permit that we recently went through?
- Ms. Johnson: The renewal of the Speedy's permit at Oak Orchard came through about a week ago; we are still going through it, it is a renewal of an existing permit; the air permit also came through for the project; we are waiting for one more series of permits from DEC, but that is all on schedule

Mr. Dyer Presentation:

- Sludge Dryer: The dryer went active at the beginning of March and has been running well; he noted a big shout-out to his team, who have been learning on the fly, keeping the building optimized, and staying on top of it
- The department has realized some savings; due to pending litigation, specifics cannot be disclosed at this time; things are going well so far

Questions/Comments

- Mr. Kelly: Not on the money piece, but in terms of raw weight, do you have any percentages or a sense of how effective the machines have been?
- Mr. Dyer: The weight is going in the right direction; it is less
- Mr. Thompson: So savings are up, and weight is down?
- Mr. Dyer: Correct
- Ms. Johnson: In general terms
- Mr. Thompson: Are you still monitoring air quality outside the facility? If I remember correctly, that was the red flag previously
- Mr. Dyer: Air quality monitoring is going to be a constant and continuously monitored situation; we want to make sure we are taking care of our employees and being as safe as possible; it is not a one-time situation
- Mr. Thompson: Wait is down, savings are up, air is safe. Can you be more specific about the overall quality of the air and how well the filtration is working?
- Mr. Dyer: Before we opened the building, we went through a series of engineering fixes and mechanical fixes; the data showed we did a good job making it safe to open. Since then, we have focused on making PPE available to staff, continuing to pay attention, listening to staff and employees, hearing what they have to say, and making sure we are being good stewards
- Mr. Kelly: These things are being monitored in real time, everybody is wearing monitors; have there been any alarm bells going off on any of those devices?
- Mr. Dyer: Thankfully, no alarm bells have gone off on any of our devices; they are continually monitoring; each person who goes into the building is required to have a monitor, that is normal across our entire department; we have different buildings that have that requirement
- Mr. Kelly: That is just best practice
- Ms. Johnson: Commissioner Dyer has done a good job throughout WEP of studying the process and making safety a priority, attention to safety practices and standard operating procedures across the department; there is a lot of attention being put there
- Mr. Kelly: Was there a newer safety oversight position created in the department? Has that position been filled?
- Mr. Dyer: Yes, the position has been filled, with good results; I have been in close contact with our health and safety director
- Mr. Kelly: I think we all mutually agreed at our last meeting that we need to continue to make safety the utmost priority; I am glad to hear that steps are being taken on that front

b. A Resolution Calling a Public Hearing in Connection With Proposed Improvements for the Onondaga County Sanitary District

(Brewerton WPCP and Meadowbrook-Limestone WWTP Rotary Drum Thickener Replacement – Map, Plan and Report on File with the Clerk)

- Mr. Dyer: The resolution calls for a public hearing in connection with the proposed improvements for the Onondaga County Sanitary District, referring to the 2026 CIP projects mentioned earlier; related documents were sent to members and are on file with the Clerk
- Mr. Eriksen: And the public hearing is proposed for May 18, 2026 at 3:00 p.m. in Room 407; related documents were sent to members and are on file with the Clerk

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

3. NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION: Scott Butler, NYSDOT's I-81 Special Assistant

a. INFORMATIONAL: Overview

Attachment No. 4: NYSDOT I-81 Viaduct Project PowerPoint

- Ms. Parmley introduced the team: Elizabeth Parmley, Regional Director; Mike Ryan, Deputy Director of the IDON project; Scott Butler, Special Assistant for the I-81 project
- The project is currently in construction; in construction since 2023; over \$1 billion worth of construction is ongoing across five contracts under construction; two more contracts are in procurement; nine total contracts; this is the largest infrastructure project in New York State DOT history
- The overview will cover where things stand today, what is wrapping up, what is still in process, what is coming, and then take questions

Mr. Butler Presentation:

- The nine contracts are broken into two phases: five in phase one, four in phase two; phase one is currently underway
- Contract 1 (Cicero/North Syracuse area): converting I-81 and I-481 to Business Loop 81 and I-81; on track;
 - The South Bay Road Bridge, which has been a pain point, is expected to open in mid-May, just before Memorial Day
 - The full contract is expected to be done and dusted this summer
- Contract 2 (Valley area, parts of DeWitt, CSX bridge area): on track; several pieces of infrastructure have already opened, 481 South to 81 South is open and operating; both roundabouts at Brighton Avenue are in full operation, with pavement markings coming shortly
 - The new interchange at East Glen Avenue in front of Loretto is open on all four legs
 - An additional lane was added heading eastbound on Route 92 toward Manlius
 - Southbound traffic was consolidated from weaving across the bridge into one exit at Exit 86 with a triple left heading eastbound
 - The CSX bridge is expected to be complete this fall; the former 81 South to 481 North connection is expected back online in June
- Looking at the fully built-out configuration heading south, when traveling on current I-81 heading into the city of Syracuse, there will be two choices:

- Heading left takes you southbound to 481 South, and heading right takes you to the future business loop heading into downtown
- North and southbound travel will be underneath, heading toward what is now 481, which will soon be 81
- 481 will be taken up and over 81, heading toward Solvay, Fulton, Clay, and Route 31



- The South Bay Road Bridge is not yet open; the photo shown is from over the winter when it was in two lanes to help traffic flow during that period
 - As part of this contract, Mud Creek was brought back to its natural size
 - When the highway was originally built it was condensed and put through corrugated pipe; it has been restored to its original size to help with flow, flooding, and resiliency, and to improve habitat
- Contract 2: the new connection from 81 northbound to 481 northbound is complete;
 - The former connection from 81 South to 481 North, which will become future 81 North, is expected back online in June
 - The East Glen Avenue interchange is a full new interchange reconnecting the Valley neighborhoods to Brighton Avenue and Loretto and helping traffic find its way more easily
 - The Brighton Avenue bridge was replaced using a staged approach, the skew of the bridge was moved to one side so Brighton Avenue could remain open throughout construction of the new bridges to reduce traffic
- Contract 3 (Inner Harbor, 81 southbound):
 - Three bridges being replaced: Bear Street, Court Street, and Spencer Street; Spencer Street is currently open; Bear Street is expected to open by Memorial Day
 - Court Street is currently out; it used to skew across but is now being straightened and put through between Harborview Liquors and Cedric Furniture to connect to North Clinton Street; North Flint Street is being completely reconstructed as a new city street, moving cars from Bear Street to eventually connect to Buttermilk Street
 - A shared-use path (the T-line) is being constructed along North Flint Street and will be completed under Contract 7
 - New on and off ramps in the southbound direction connecting to Clinton Street eliminate the old slip ramps at Genesee, Spencer, and Catawba; a new signalized intersection will connect Clinton Street, the mall service road, and Bear Street
 - Improvements are also being made along Bear Street to improve the connection to 690 east and west
- Contract 4 (Crouse and Irving Avenue area):

- Creating new on and off ramps at Crouse and Ruben Avenue
- This contract focuses on the Crouse side; a new on-ramp heading eastbound from Crouse Avenue is open today, replacing McBride
- A future off-ramp to Crouse Avenue on 690 West will replace the Townsend exit; Crouse and Irving are being converted to two-way from 690 all the way to Adams Street
- Contract 5 (South side, Van Buren roundabout):
 - Building a new roundabout, this is the first contract in the process of actually removing the viaduct
 - Removal of the Findley Bridge will facilitate bringing the business loop down to grade, starting at Calvin Street and traveling into the city
 - The contract also includes closing Red Wick Creek, removal of the Findley Bridge, moving a railroad track, new sewer and water, and creating new road infrastructure
 - Removal work and traffic mitigation are currently underway

Mr. Ryan (Mike Ryan) Presentation:

- Contract 6 (690 replacement, currently in procurement):
 - This is the replacement of 690 from Leavenworth Avenue all the way out to Irving Avenue, picking up where Contract 4 leaves off
 - 690 eastbound will need to be detoured for approximately a year and a half
 - There are multiple 3,000-foot bridges to be replaced and additional 1,000-foot bridges for ramps
 - Connections from Business Loop 81 southbound to 690 eastbound and from 690 westbound to 81 northbound remain the same
 - Pearl Street ramp will be modified; Oswego Boulevard will be constructed to connect into Erie Boulevard for access to downtown; the Buttermilk Street bridge will also be worked on for connectivity
- Contract 6A (storm water infrastructure):
 - Approximately one mile of underground culvert, 8-by-12-foot, starting at Almond Street and running along the project corridor to carry all storm water collected from the new roadway infrastructure
 - Many streets are also being reconstructed during this work with a complete streets approach

Mr. Butler Presentation:

- Sewer separation: across all contracts, wherever the project crosses the combined sewer system in the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County, the sewer is being separated
 - New trunk lines carry storm water out and remove it from the combined system, all told, approximately 85 million gallons of water that currently enters Metro for treatment, which could be defined as clean or just runoff, will be removed from the system
 - This will also improve the quality of area creeks and Onondaga Lake
- Air quality: over nine air quality monitors are installed; quarterly reports will be posted publicly on the project website

Questions/Comments

- Mr. Eriksen noted there was additional ground to cover and asked DOT to move through to the final slides
- Mr. Meaker: That was very informative, even though it was cut short; is there a way to have the presentation emailed?
- Mr. Butler: Of course, we can share it with the Chair and follow up on any questions afterward
- Mr. Eriksen: I am terribly sorry to cut you off

- Mr. Kelly: I am going to continue to plug, as I have throughout this process, there are a lot of words with old 81 and loop and old and new 81, if I could get this in virtual reality or video game form so I can see it from my windshield, I think that is going to be the thing that makes the most sense
- Mr. Garland: On air quality, I was working with someone from your team who mentioned a public website where we could view air quality monitoring data
- Ms. Parmley: Yes, we currently have over nine air quality monitors installed, and we will be putting quarterly reports up on our website; that is in process
- Mr. Garland: The other thing, have you done any computer modeling around the Van Buren/Renwick roundabout for move-in day? Those of us who live in the area know that double-parking is significant, and it is right at the bottom of that roundabout; did you do any modeling or speak to SU about that?
- Ms. Parmley: Yes, we work with SU and meet with them biweekly and monthly to talk about how traffic flows, both during construction and in the final layout; they are prepared, we are prepared; the models show different traffic patterns, but it will work

C. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



SPENCER BERG, Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
DATE: APRIL 21, 2026

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
SCOTT BUDGEN	NYS DOT
BETSY PARMLEY	NYS DOT
MIKE KYLE	NYS DOT
TENESHA MURPHY	NYS DOT
JOHN PERVENS	NYS DOT
KYUE MADDEN	LEGISLATURE
MARK BURGER	SWCD
DON HUGHES	Public - Sierra Club
Lisa Druke	Public
KARSTEN	Fryman County
CHRISTOPHER	WEP
PAUL DOODY	SELF - PUBLIC
John Przepiora	Public - GreeningUSA
John Przepiora	FOZZ