



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

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Chairwoman

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Deputy Clerk

SPECIAL PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES – MAY 27, 2026 ELAINE DENTON, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Denton, Mr. Eriksen, Mr. Meaker, Mr. Brown, Mr. Knapp
ALSO PRESENT: Chairwoman Watts, Mr. Bush, Mr. May

Chair Denton called the meeting to order at 5:06 p.m. on May 27, 2026.

1. INTRODUCTIONS:

- Participants in attendance introduced themselves and, where applicable, their affiliation. Those present included committee members, county legislators, school district administrators and board members, municipal officials, OCIDA board members, representatives of regional economic development organizations, county staff, and members of the public

- ### 2. NORTH SYRACUSE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT: Dr. Terry Ward, Superintendent of Schools; Don Keegan, Associate Superintendent for Business Services at North Syracuse
- a. INFORMATIONAL: Discussion of District Funding & PILOT

(Attachment No. 1: OCIDA Public Hearing)

Presentation by Mr. Ward:

- Misconception that school districts don't support pilots because of financial impacts; we support pilots; we know we have to attract businesses here
- Lost 1,500 students over the past 10 years; want those students back and another 1,500 more; want to build that school we've been talking about, something that doesn't happen in Central New York
- Positive impacts of pilots were already covered thoroughly during public comment; won't re-read them

Presentation by Mr. Keegan:

- Unfortunately, pilots don't support schools
- Rely very heavily on our local school tax levy, about 49% of our budget
- When a pilot is put in place, property comes off the tax rolls; instead of paying property taxes the business makes a pilot payment; concept is great
- When a business like Amazon or Micron comes to town, going to bring lots of families, employees, and students; going to create demand on our school system and additional costs
- Strain on local infrastructure; maintaining roads, expanding sewer lines, police and fire; all of those things will end up costing the community money; may manifest itself in a countywide or town budget that no one votes on; they vote on the school budget

- Energy costs are up; people are paying \$1.50 more a gallon for gas; home heating and oil costs are up; they come to the school budget vote and vote things down
- More no votes here in North Syracuse this past week
- When those other costs hit municipalities that don't have to have their budget voted on, puts a strain on our budgets; that's the concept of shifting the burden to other residents
- This year's levy is \$107 million
 - Micron is going to pay over \$63 million to North Syracuse over 49 years
 - Reality is we have to take that money and lower the tax levy by the amount of that pilot payment
- Next year, going to kick in at about \$800,000; lowering the tax levy by 0.7%
- Smaller illustration: this year had a reduction in a pilot from \$800,000 to \$551,000; when pilot came off the rolls, tax rate went up a quarter of a point just from that reduction
 - Quarter-point is part of this year's levy increase; Lyncourt is a much larger version of this same story
- When the Micron pilot ends in 49 years, property returns to the tax rolls; going to have a significant impact on the district
- Thrilled to have Micron here; excited about the career opportunities for our kids; following are just the realities we're dealing with:
 - DOT took properties via eminent domain to expand roads; removing about \$250,000 in tax revenue from the rolls
 - Increased traffic means bus drivers on the road longer; longer transit times for students; higher operating costs
 - Construction costs have gone through the roof; limited number of tradespeople in Central New York competing directly with the Micron project
 - Hoping Micron brings hundreds of families into the district; going to stretch our staff and resources
 - Fairly large apartment complex in our district with its own pilot tied to Micron's presence; property coming off the tax rolls; money will be paid to us, will be use to lower the levy; have to make investments on top of that
- Whole mission is to make sure kids are college and career ready; do a lot in career and technical education with BOCES and going to do more; keep our kids at a level where they're qualified to go out and work for companies like Micron

Presentation by Mr. Ward:

- 2% tax cap means we cannot raise revenue beyond 2%; pilots don't allow us to raise revenue; they're neutral on that front
- With all the expenses Don just talked about; new kids, maybe a new school building; we don't get any more revenue; where are we going to get the money to do all those things?
- Asking our legislators for two things:
 - Special legislation exempting pilots from the tax cap calculation, specifically pilots like Micron
 - Used to be superintendent in a small rural district where we had a pilot for a solar farm, about a million dollars; this pilot is the largest in the United States and it happens to be in our school district; don't think the same rules should apply
 - Special legislation for schools impacted by Micron to receive 100% state building aid; can't raise revenue beyond 2%; 100% of our construction costs should be paid for by the state

Presentation continued by Mr. Keegan:

- When community is asked to vote on capital projects, renovating Lakeshore Road Elementary School, building an aquatic center, votes yes; might cost 1%, 0.7%, or 0.5% on the levy
- This year our increase was 5.25%: 2.4% related to operations, 0.25% from a pilot coming off the rolls, and 2.7% from projects our community already agreed to in a separate vote
- Renovation in New York State financed over 15 years; taxpayers get to vote on a capital project 16 times through annual budget votes; debt from their original yes vote can't be undone
- Lyncourt is the example of what's coming; should realistically have a 12% tax increase when that pilot property returns to the rolls; no way that's going to get passed; going to have to cut instructional costs; inflation above 2% for six years in a row; every year had to find cuts, eliminate positions as retirements allow, make adjustments; this pilot is just one of those components
- Not opposed to the tax cap; pretty innovative legislation; a lot of taxpayers are comforted by it; needs some adjustments

Questions/ Comments:

- Ms. Denton: When you're talking about the tax cap, that's New York State; building aid also deals with New York State and the New York State education department; but with the local pilots, that's something that's on our level
- Mr. May: What kind of response did you get from the state legislators on the tax cap?
- Mr. Ward: What we have been told is it's not a one-year solution; it's going to take multiple years to get something like that passed. That first bullet, specifically about taking pilots out of the tax cap calculation, is something they're looking at hard. They've had discussions about it. People have reached out to us, asked us follow-up questions. The conversation's happening, but nothing changed this year
- Mr. Keegan: We're not lobbying for the tax cap to go away. The tax cap is pretty innovative legislation and a lot of taxpayers are comforted by it in that it controls the increase of the tax levy. We're not opposed to the tax cap, but after all these years, it was put in place in 2012, it just needs some adjustments. As Terry said, it's sacred ground right now to talk at the state about doing something with the tax cap. It's like a third rail
- Mr. May: You're not really asking for the tax cap to change, you're asking for Micron-related special legislation?
- Mr. Keegan: Exactly, and that'll require some special legislation and it'll take years
- Mr. Ward: I want to be clear, we're not asking for money from Micron. We're asking for the pilot money to go directly to the school district, not spread out amongst the rest of the taxpayers, because we have costs associated with Micron being in our community. Don has been doing this job longer than anyone in the county and is considered an expert, if you ever need to reach out and go through the calculations, Don picks up the phone and he'll talk to anyone

3. DISCUSSION:

- Discussion ensued among committee members, school officials, municipal representatives, OCIDA board members, and community members regarding PILOT agreements, OCIDA's mission, and regional economic development
- Themes raised included:
 - The inverse relationship between PILOT agreements and school district tax levy capacity under the state tax cap formula, and the financial strain this creates for districts both when PILOTs commence and when they expire
 - The importance of including school districts and municipalities at the table during PILOT negotiations

- Questions regarding OCIDA’s evolving mission and whether housing projects align with its core purpose of stimulating permanent job creation
- The need for greater transparency and accountability in how PILOT agreements are evaluated, monitored, and enforced, including clawback provisions
- The regional housing shortage and its relationship to anticipated economic growth, including the Micron project; and the importance of benchmarking best practices from other regions and states
- Members and attendees expressed broad support for continued community engagement on these topics
- Ms. Denton noted that the discussion and recording would be shared with OCIDA, and that this meeting represented the beginning of an ongoing conversation

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

Meeting adjourned at 6:07 p.m.

A recording of this meeting is available on the Onondaga County Legislature’s YouTube page.



Respectfully submitted,
SPENCER BERG, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature