



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

NICOLE WATTS
Chairwoman

SPENCER BERG
Deputy Clerk

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE MINUTES – JUNE 16, 2026 GREGG ERIKSEN, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Eriksen, Mr. Garland, Mr. Kelly, Mr. Meaker, Mr. Thompson
ALSO PRESENT: Chairwoman Watts, Leader Hernandez, Mr. Bush, Ms. Denton, Mr. Romeo

Chair Eriksen called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m., and previous meeting's minutes were approved.

1. NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION: Dereth Glance, Regional Director for Region 7

a. **INFORMATIONAL:** Update Regarding Mercury Findings in Inner Harbor

New York State Conservationist on file with the Clerk; (Attachment No. 1: DEC Updates in Onondaga County)

- Region 7 covers nine counties
- New York State is divided into nine DEC regions; Region 7 runs from Oswego down to Broome County, primarily along the I-81 corridor
- DEC lands in Onondaga County include wildlife management areas in the northern part of the county, boat launches, public fishing rights, and state forest lands in the southern part of the county (Labrador Hollow), as well as a unique area in Camillus; DEC lands are generally more rustic than State park lands
- DEC's mission is broad; one of the original tier-one agencies in New York State, formed as the Conservation Department and reorganized in 1970 into the Department of Environmental Conservation, combining several departments
- Mission is to conserve, improve, and protect natural resources and the environment; to prevent, abate, and control water, land, and air pollution; and to enhance economic and social well-being
- For natural resource conservation, protection, and improvement in Onondaga County, DEC maintains wildlife management areas, which are funded by federal dollars from ammunition sales and are managed for preservation of hunting and fishing, with limited logging or motorized vehicle use
 - State forest and unique areas allow somewhat more relaxed recreational use, since they are more working forests
 - DEC also handles freshwater wetlands protections, threatened and endangered species protections, public fishing access sites, public boat launches, and education and outreach; DEC recently took over running the Onondaga Lake Visitor Center across from the State Fair/Crucible, and also operates a boat launch there

- On the pollution prevention, abatement, and control side, DEC handles environmental permit and project review; air emissions from stationary sources (both Title V permitted facilities and those subject only to registration); and water programs covering point sources (e.g., a pipe from Metro), diffuse sources (e.g., confined animal feeding operations, municipal storm sewer systems), and construction storm water permits for disturbance of more than an acre, where the property owner is responsible for maintaining sediment on site
 - DEC also handles flood resiliency and dam safety; materials management, including solid and hazardous waste, recycling, and pesticide oversight; and environmental remediation, including significant brownfields work for housing redevelopment, getting blighted sites back onto the tax rolls (Superfund Onondaga Lake is the best local example), ongoing site management, and spill response
- DEC has two full law enforcement agencies: the Division of Law Enforcement (environmental conservation officers) and the Bureau of forest rangers; both are full-fledged police officers
 - Forest rangers handle wildlands management, are often deployed to other states for forest fires, conduct prescribed burns, and respond to natural disasters; the regional emergency response coordinator, Dr. Jen Smith (also an engineer), is the single point of contact for any environmental response
 - Forest rangers also do education and outreach, swiftwater rescues, and assist the county sheriff with missing persons cases; environmental conservation officers enforce the environmental conservation law, including prohibitions on harboring dangerous animals, rabies vector species, and illegal poaching, and work to inspire the next generation of conservationists
- DEC has a significant role in environmental permitting and review for the Micron project, reflected in materials prepared for the groundbreaking in January
 - Approximately 63 DEC staff were intimately involved in the environmental impact statement review, totaling roughly 32,000 staff hours; as of December, 10 permits had been issued, with more issued since. A dedicated website allows one-stop tracking of every Micron-related permit and its status
 - It took 140 days between issuance of the draft environmental impact statement and the groundbreaking; compared to Micron's facility in Idaho, New York was 52 days faster in issuing the full Title V federal air permit

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Meaker: Is there a representative from your office that's dedicated to Micron?
- Ms. Glance: No, there are multiple people working on this all the time; there isn't one single person, but I have people in each of my programs, and overall my regional permit administrator, Kevin Balduzzi, is the project manager watching the timing of where everything is
 - It's too much for one single person, is my short answer
- Mr. Meaker: I meant, is there one person responsible for a department that's just overseeing the Micron project?
- Ms. Glance: We all have a variety of issues in our portfolio, and there is a dedicated Micron team, but we also have other things we're responsible for; it's very big
- Mr. Thompson: There was a point where you could reach out to a person with questions
- Ms. Glance: You can always ask me, and I can get you an answer
- Mr. Garland: Considering that permits were issued prior to the lawsuit that a small group recently filed, did you have a chance to look at the lawsuit itself, since I believe some of it was environmental, to see if there was anything that might have been missed?

- Ms. Glance: I am not going to comment on any active lawsuit. That lawsuit was also filed following issuance of the initial permits

Presentation continued:

- A lot of people have questions about the wetlands that were disturbed; the wetland mitigation ratio is 2.24 to 1, meaning for every one acre of wetland disturbed, 2.24 acres must be mitigated, on average
 - Every type of wetland has a different ratio; a forested wetland has a higher ratio than a lower-quality wetland

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Kelly: One of the things I hear a lot is people asking how the mitigation supports the species in place; are there active efforts made to relocate species, or is it left to nature?
- Ms. Glance: There were two main species of concern. A Part 182 threatened and endangered species take permit was issued concerning grassland habitat for the northern harrier; that permit requires mitigation properties to be protected and monitored, along with specific research and monitoring requirements over time, in close coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 - With bats, the concern is that the bats have a fungal infection and a hard time surviving; there is a bat window so trees can be cut when there are no babies in them, and trees cannot be cut after April 1, so the next generation can grow and the population can evolve out of the white-nose syndrome. The overall bat population is otherwise okay, and displaced bats will find another place to live
 - With wetlands, much of the mitigation is located in Oswego County, but that is because the water flows downstream toward Lake Ontario, and the watershed needs to be able to absorb and manage that water; the law requires the mitigation to be in proximity for that reason
- Mr. Meaker: Did you say northern harrier? Is that a bird?
- Ms. Glance: Yes, it's a bird
- Mr. Meaker: Is the Indiana bat's main usage here locally to battle the mosquitoes?
- Ms. Glance: That is a very important role in the ecosystem
- Mr. Kelly: Mosquitoes kill more than any other animal, right?
- Ms. Glance: You want to have the entire ecosystem functioning, and you want to have bats
 - They provide food, they also keep pests in check, and you really want to have a functioning ecosystem
 - We want to be able to have economic development and maintain a functioning ecosystem, and we think we can do both, and that's what the mitigation calls for here

Presentation continued:

- The Micron tracking website is dec.ny.gov, under environmental protection, facilities in your neighborhood, Micron; searching, "DEC in your neighborhood region 7 Micron," will show current permits, notices, and status, since the information changes frequently given the number of coordinated actions
 - A few other connected actions include OCWA's waterline extension, the Oak Orchard expansions previously discussed in Committee, and water withdrawal changes for OCWA
- At the SU Steam Plant, an updated Title V permit was issued earlier this year to replace two 70-year-old boilers, resulting in a more efficient, cleaner facility that will continue to provide reliable energy to the Hill

- The East Adams redevelopment projects are important housing initiatives consistent with the Governor's budget priority of building on already-disturbed sites; the Brownfield Cleanup Program has been very successful, offering tax credits to developers and incentives for affordable housing and renewable energy integration
- Other brownfield work includes West Fayette-area sites requiring removal of underground tanks and vapor mitigation to allow safe housing construction; several affordable housing brownfield projects were completed in Region 7 at the end of 2025, as developers rush to secure tax credits before year-end
- Solar projects are underway on several Onondaga County remediation sites, including the old landfills in DeWitt and Van Buren, the LCP site in Solway, the Salina landfill, and other Onondaga Lake-related facilities
- Many Onondaga County communities participate in the Climate Smart Communities program; some are bronze certified, making them eligible for additional funding for cleaner, greener infrastructure
 - There is significant momentum around restoration of the Onondaga Creek watershed
 - There are significant opportunities to build new housing and revitalize communities along the creek, including toward the City of Syracuse's need for roughly 1,400 housing units per year over the next decade, while using the creek as a resource for recreation, food, and walkable community-building, and avoiding the kind of disruption to communities that has historically resulted from large government projects
 - Several meetings have already been held, including one at the Bob Cecil Center with over 100 attendees; the effort is expanding watershed-wide to include the Town of Onondaga, Lafayette, the City of Syracuse, and the Onondaga Nation. The 2022 New York State Bond Act provides resources for flood resiliency, and the goal is to align State, federal, and local resources to benefit these communities
- Ms. Glance is also a member of the ESF Board of Trustees. One of the natural resource damages projects under the Superfund (CERCLA) cleanup, which required Honeywell to recognize the economic damages the community bore from the environmental damage, was the removal of the Amboy Dam on Nine Mile Creek, resulting in a significantly improved fishery
 - The Onondaga Lake Visitor Center has been part of an amazing transformation, working closely with Commissioner Kelly, since the parks surround the lake and require continual education about which soil cannot be disturbed and where liners must be used; ongoing stewardship and site management, and close collaboration with the County, remain important as more people visit the lake
- Regarding the marina update: the County is expanding the marina basin, and sediment samples ranged from approximately 0.031 to 5.7 milligrams per kilogram of mercury
 - Eight of the 17 samples exceeded the action level established in the record of decision governing the Onondaga Lake cleanup; that record of decision has guided the entire marina remediation process, consistent with how the rest of the lake bottom was addressed

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Thompson: One of the things I'd like to dive into is the 2.2 figure; is that in micrograms, not milligrams?
- Ms. Glance: It is milligrams per kilogram; that is the standard developed as part of the record of decision for the overall lake cleanup
- Mr. Thompson: As a layperson, can you explain what that means? I understand it relates to bioaccumulation, where little fish are eaten by bigger fish and so on up the chain, and that the fish are still not safe to eat and likely won't be in our lifetime because of the bioaccumulative nature of mercury; is that accurate?

- Ms. Glance: The overall concentration of mercury in Onondaga Lake fish has generally been on a downward trajectory, but it remains elevated, and there are still fish consumption concerns, as there are in many other lakes
 - Atmospheric deposition of mercury remains an ongoing source affecting Onondaga Lake and other lakes
 - The 2.2 level was determined through the remedial investigation and feasibility study and was presented in the proposed remedial action plan published in 2005; it was the trigger level adopted in the preferred alternative, with State and public support
 - Anything exceeding 2.2 would be excavated and capped; anything at or below 2.2 would not trigger additional treatment or action. This was based on extensive soil sampling and analysis of how mercury moves up the food chain
- Mr. Thompson: Is it considered impossible to remove all of it?
- Ms. Glance: For the scope of Onondaga Lake, removing everything would have been incredibly challenging simply from a storage standpoint; over two million cubic yards of sediment were removed as part of the lake-bottom cleanup and placed in Wastedbed 13, the sediment consolidation area
- Mr. Thompson: So the practical consideration is that there isn't enough storage for the amount of contaminated soil
- Ms. Glance: That was one of the key considerations when the decision was made over 20 years ago
- Mr. Thompson: How about for the marina? One of the points raised in the feedback was that only 1.9 acres are being remediated there, compared to 475 acres for the entire lake, and that the plan still involves capping within the marina rather than fully removing the material. Is that also a storage issue?
- Ms. Glance: It's consistent with what was already determined for the rest of the lake; the cap is an isolation cap that prevents mercury from upwelling back into the soil, so the benthic layer above it is not sitting in mercury-laden soil. The worst material (the 5.5-plus readings, the hot spots) would be removed
- Mr. Thompson: It was anticipated, and has happened, that there are periodic cap failures elsewhere in the lake requiring remediation of the cap. Are there still cap failures in the larger lake, and would something similar be anticipated in the marina, or is that less likely given conditions there?
- Ms. Glance: The site is regularly monitored. Under CERCLA, the responsible party remains on the hook indefinitely, with no expiration date, and EPA requires a five-year review as a transparent way to confirm things are working; the cap has continued to work, with some movement reported early on but none reported in some time
 - If a cap issue does arise in the future, it can be fixed, and the responsible party, not the taxpayer, remains liable, which is one of the strengths of the Superfund/CERCLA framework
- Mr. Thompson: The response materials mentioned community air monitoring during remediation, since the marina will apparently be drained so the soil can be removed; is that accurate, and is the air monitoring specifically during the removal?
- Ms. Glance: That's accurate; the details are included in the permit application the County submitted to DEC, and the marina will be drained so the soil can be removed. I can get you the specific air monitoring plan; I don't have it off the top of my head
- Mr. Thompson: Do you know whether that's only during removal, or whether there will be ongoing live air monitoring afterward?
- Ms. Glance: I can get you the full plan; generally, that type of monitoring happens only where there would be exposure, such as during excavation, but I don't have the specifics with me
- Mr. Thompson: You mentioned the mercury trend in fish is downward; can you elaborate?
- Ms. Glance: In general, yes, though I can't give exact numbers off the top of my head; I can get you the fish reports, and our fisheries staff can speak to that data in more detail

- Mr. Thompson: Even in general terms, how optimistic should we be about the health of the lake with respect to these fish, given the bioaccumulative concern? I've heard from community members, including new Americans and others, who fish in the lake; there is signage in some areas, and some have argued for more. How safe are the fish?
- Ms. Glance: Fish consumption advisories are issued by the health department, which is responsible for chemicals in sport fish; I'd encourage the Committee to talk to the health department about consumption specifically
 - Safety depends on individual factors, such as being a woman of childbearing age, and on how the fish is prepared; signage and education, especially for new American populations, are helpful, and there are real benefits to eating fish as long as people know which fish are safer to eat
- Mr. Thompson: The feedback also referenced sampling done in 2000 and 2021 that did not exceed the criteria; was the 2021 sampling done in anticipation of this project, or was it prompted by something else?
- Ms. Glance: I don't know what prompted the 2021 sampling specifically; I would need to know whether it involved sediment cores or another method, and I was not in a position at that time to speak to it
- Mr. Thompson: A citizen suggested it might be worth pursuing what's called a ROD amendment to test further in the shallows around the lake, based on the marina findings; is there anything that warrants that kind of action?
- Ms. Glance: I'd want to understand exactly what area is meant by "the shallows." The areas most actively dredged and capped, with the highest mercury levels, were the sediment management units (SMU 1 through 8) adjacent to Wastebeds 1 through 8 and the in-lake waste deposit; for those areas, the ongoing five-year reviews are the appropriate mechanism for confirming remediation objectives are being met
- Mr. Thompson: I think the question grows out of the fact that people were surprised to find mercury in the marina, since it wasn't anticipated there; it stands to reason there could be other places where mercury might be found if sampling is only prompted by a specific project. I don't want to suggest a broad fishing expedition, but should we be looking for more areas of concern?
- Ms. Glance: The five-year reviews are helpful for identifying whether trend data is moving in the right direction and where else it may be worth looking; those community conversations are important
- Mr. Thompson: The response also indicated that sediment sampling was tested for a range of compounds, including VOCs, SVOCs, pesticides, PCBs, and metals, and that mercury was the only contaminant exceeding the Onondaga Lake ROD criteria; does that mean the others are present but below a level of concern, and if so, at what levels?
- Ms. Glance: Most of those other issues were found in the upland areas, largely from groundwater; there is a groundwater barrier wall in the deep-water fishing area owned by the County that pushes that water back for treatment, so it is not entering the lake. Significant upland remediation addressed legacy contamination around, rather than in, the lake, so what was primarily removed from the lake itself was mercury
- Mr. Garland: As far as mercury, can we be assured that no new mercury is being added or introduced?
- Ms. Glance: The primary ongoing source of mercury is atmospheric deposition, largely from coal burning in western states; a strong federal Clean Air Act is important for New York
- Mr. Garland: Was there historical dredging or dumping in the marina itself, at the scale of what happened in the rest of the lake?
- Ms. Glance: The marina was not part of the historical dumping areas, unlike the sediment management units and in-lake waste deposit, which explains why finding mercury there was unexpected
- Mr. Garland: What about boats and other vessels using the marina; could their discharge be adding mercury?

- Ms. Glance: I'm not clear on boats being a source of mercury, and I'm not certain about the historical aspects of that question
- Mr. Eriksen: A couple of quick questions: does DEC have a timeline for the marina work?
- Ms. Glance: The County is doing that work; DEC issued the permits, so I'd encourage the Committee to ask the County about timing
- Mr. Eriksen: To the extent the marina work mirrors what happened in the rest of the lake, should we expect similar results?
- Ms. Glance: The work is being guided by the design standards in Appendix D of the 2017 draft final OM&M Plan, which set the specific standards the dredging and capping program had to meet
- Mr. Garland: Is there any hope we might be able to swim in the lake at some point
- Ms. Glance: Water quality for swimming is primarily driven by pathogens (avoiding illnesses such as cholera or dysentery), which is the same goal served by investment in wastewater treatment plants; looking at ambient water quality data, the water quality is generally good
- Mr. Garland: Is there a designated open swimming area, or is one anticipated?
- Ms. Glance: That is up to the County; there has been a beach study, and I believe the Legislature has discussed this several times

Presentation continued:

- The long-term operation and maintenance phase is underway, but there are still interim remedial measures (IRM) in place; the project is not finished. Capping and dredging in the main part of the lake is complete, but significant ongoing work continues, including sheet pile work at Solvay Wastebeds 1-8, groundwater collection system work on Nine Mile Creek, and work on the sediment residue ponds and associated pipes
 - DEC and Honeywell continue investigation and remediation work at Willis Avenue and Wastebed B/Harbor Brook; this is ongoing investigation of system performance, including whether pumps are working properly or are undersized, as interim measures continue toward a final long-term remedy

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Thompson: On the second picture in the slide, showing what appears to be a chalky, greenish effluent: starting simply, what is that?
- Ms. Glance: It is likely Solvay waste, a sodium bicarbonate byproduct; the color is related to its pH.
- Mr. Thompson: Has that been tested? Were there concerns about whether it could contain mercury, lead, arsenic, or PFAS?
- Ms. Glance: Not PFAS, since this material predates that concern; this is legacy material, and while the investigation and cleanup work is active, this is not the source of the largest concentrations of the compounds that have been removed elsewhere. It is relatively inert but still needs to be addressed
- Mr. Thompson: So it's being investigated and tested?
- Ms. Glance: Yes, it is being investigated to determine how to keep that material where it needs to be and prevent it from interacting with the lake
- Mr. Thompson: Are there any public postings about these findings? I know you're getting a lot of phone calls, and I'm getting messages too, since it's visibly concerning. Is there any public notice or education effort underway?
- Ms. Glance: DEC answers questions as they come in and is engaging through the Onondaga Lake Visitor Center; there is an interim remedial measure in place now, and when a formal, final remediation is developed, there will be a formal public process similar to what occurred during development of the original record of decision

- Mr. Thompson: Framed differently: if you were a citizen who didn't have this background and saw this, what would help you understand whether to be concerned? Does it suggest a larger failure, is it something serious, or is it ordinary? People don't have a frame of reference for how concerning this is
- Ms. Glance: This is not a wholesale failure like a 1943 failure; it is not on the scale of a historic containment failure. It is something that needs to be addressed: an interim remedial measure needs to become a final remedial measure, and DEC is actively investigating the best permanent solution. The sky is not falling, and the investigation is ongoing
- Mr. Thompson: Would an area like this benefit from live air monitoring?
- Ms. Glance: I don't think air is the primary issue here
- Mr. Thompson: As a layperson, I understood that air monitoring is used specifically when mercury is being moved; if that's not warranted here, why not?
- Ms. Glance: Air monitoring is typically used during excavation or when there is a land/water interface being disturbed; here, it appears to involve a groundwater collection system and a pipe or pump that may be underperforming, rather than a situation calling for air monitoring. That is not a recommended step from the remediation team at this time, but I can bring the question back to the team for further input
- Mr. Thompson: Who is responsible for fixing that?
- Ms. Glance: Honeywell, as the responsible party
- Mr. Eriksen: I was wondering if you would be able to speak to the role that the industrial wastewater treatment plant is a design-build project, could you speak to the role that DEC, whatever role DEC has, in that process, and elaborate on that?
- Ms. Glance: DEC is responsible for protecting the waters of New York State, and so we issue and consider any discharges that are going into waters of the state; that's our SPDES program, State Pollution Discharge Elimination System, not your sandwich, just in case anybody's curious.
 - The Oak Orchard outfall is to the Oneida River, and there was a permit issued for the updated outfall; we expect that's likely to be amended by the county as they go through selecting their contractor and going through their design process
 - DEC reviews the basis of designs; engineers are carefully reviewing all of the engineering designs, and are regularly in communication as the county decides what direction they're going to go for the industrial and municipal treatment trains, and DEC engineers are reviewing those
- Mr. Eriksen: Is your team at DEC reviewing the designs as they're being put together, or at appropriate intervals?
- Ms. Glance: As part of the development of any permit, that's done to make sure the designs are consistent with the SPDES permit and with protecting the waterways
 - The goal is to protect the health of the Oneida River at that outfall; the permit has to comply with protecting aquatic life in low-flow conditions, so we have to do some worst-case scenario planning, and there's a range of flows that need to be considered
- Mr. Eriksen: Can you speak to the extent to which DEC will monitor PFAS use at the wastewater treatment plant? Has DEC had communication with Micron and/or others that gives you an awareness of the range of PFAS-type chemicals used, given that new compounds come out regularly?
- Ms. Glance: DEC has a comprehensive approach on PFAS; we were pretty cutting edge as a result of the 2016 Hoosick Falls crisis, and just did a ten-year retrospective on that work
 - Engineering PFAS out of the waste stream is the most efficient approach; there are policies adopted by the legislature, additional standards on what's allowed in our technical guidance for discharges, and requirements to report using standard acceptable methods
 - EPA's standard methods capture about 40 compounds and change regularly as methods evolve; there's a pre-treatment requirement, special requirements for wastewater treatment plants, monitoring and sampling in the biosolids, source tracking, and end-of-pipe limits

- Mr. Eriksen: Does DEC have a mechanism, maybe independent of the EPA, to keep up with what new compounds may be used?
- Ms. Glance: DEC works with research academic partners, including SUNY ESF, the Water Research Institute at Cornell, and Stony Brook, on the fate and transport of PFAS chemicals
- EPA recently eliminated its Office of Research and Development, which was responsible for a lot of this work; it's important that New York State can continue that research during this time

Presentation continued:

- DEC has several compliance orders beyond Oak Orchard, including work at Freeman Avenue trunk sewer; a basis-of-design report for Freeman is due in 2027, and Meadowbrook Limestone wastewater treatment plant work is moving forward, focused on infiltration and inflow (I&I) abatement so that sewage, not extraneous water entering the pipes, is what gets treated
 - The overall framework governing Onondaga Lake's legacy of industrial and sewage contamination is now referred to as the post-Amended Consent Judgment (post-ACJ), reflecting the earlier federal Clean Water Act settlement that required upgrades to Metro and drinking-water-standard discharge; this includes the ongoing combined sewer overflow long-term control plan and continuing technical discussions. DEC and WEP speak by phone multiple times a month, and the working relationship between the two agencies' technical staff is good

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Kelly: We covered a lot of topics today, which I think is great; I'd like to make a formal request that the agenda language be more transparent; the agenda listed this item only as an update on mercury findings in the inner harbor, so legislators can be adequately prepared with questions on all the subjects actually being covered in the future
 - On the topic of Oak Orchard and the industrial wastewater treatment plant, is it true that there are enforceable PFAS limits in the SPDES permit?
- Ms. Glance: Yes
- Mr. Garland: When new compounds are used by places like Micron and other industries, aren't they required to submit material/safety data sheets listing everything they use, so DEC has that information?
- Ms. Glance: There are SDS sheets (formerly called MSDS sheets); some information is available, but some is proprietary and not subject to FOIL
- Mr. Meaker: Thank you for the wealth of information today. I periodically get questions about whether people should consume fish from the lake; you mentioned that falls to the health department; is that the State or County health department?
- Ms. Glance: The State and County health departments work closely together, but it is the State health department that issues fish consumption advisories
 - Anyone getting a fishing license also receives the chemicals-in-sport-fish guidance, which lists, water body by water body, what fish are safe to eat and for whom; that information is also available online, and varies depending on factors like the age of the fish

2. ONONDAGA COUNTY OFFICE OF THE ENVIRONMENT: Elizabeth Bough Martin, Director

a. **INFORMATIONAL:** Overview of the Office of the Environment

- The Office of the Environment is a small department with a large scope; it exists to develop and coordinate programs, activities, and policies to reduce the County's environmental liabilities, incorporate sustainability into County culture and programs, and promote responsible stewardship of the natural resources for which the County is accountable.

- The mission is to protect and restore Onondaga County's natural resources, ensuring a healthy and sustainable environment for all, with a broader vision of establishing the County as a leader in environmental stewardship and green innovation.
- The Office's work falls into five umbrella categories: watershed management, invasive and nuisance species, waste management, compliance, and climate change; on any given day the work can range from invasive species like water chestnuts and curly pondweed, to solid waste, to storm water.
- Under watershed management, the Office administers one-time, usually grant-funded projects, and also works with partners and stakeholders on nine-element watershed plans, including the Skaneateles Lake 9E plan (in the implementation phase) and the Oneida Lake nine-element plan (in the planning phase)
 - The Otisco Lake watershed management plan is funded by a New York State grant and aims to build on 20 years of planning work to address phosphorus loading; Otisco Lake is a drinking water source (OCWA uses it during outages), making it an important watershed to protect
 - The Winding Way Pilot Project on Skaneateles Lake, funded by a DEC grant, is a model project working with an existing road association to restore swales and tributaries into the lake; it is intended as a model for bringing neighborhoods together for tributary restoration, informed by lessons from the Onondaga Creek workshops
 - The Office is also working with a consultant on a design concept to address phosphorus loading from the lower end of Butternut Creek into Jamesville Reservoir, both to help the reservoir and to address the harmful algal blooms that have closed Jamesville Beach; the plan is to seek a State grant this year to move the design into implementation
- Under invasive and nuisance species, the Office administers the ash tree management plan addressing emerald ash borer impacts, and administers Soil and Water Conservation District funding for work on Otisco Lake, Seneca River, and elsewhere in the county
 - The Office also coordinates with regional partners, since impacts like water chestnuts move upriver and affect neighboring counties; it administers the mechanical harvesting program on Otisco Lake, the deer and tick program to reduce Lyme disease occurrence, and provides technical assistance to County departments on invasive species management
- Regarding waste management, the most recent local solid waste management plan was completed in 2016; as the State shifts focus toward the circular economy, diversion, and new recycling approaches, the Office expects to bring forward a new local solid waste management plan with OCRRA to get ahead of solid waste issues as the county grows
- Regarding compliance, the Office oversees the County's MS4 general storm water permit, ensuring compliance wherever storm water falls on County property, including procedures for street sweeping and construction-related storm water; the Office coordinates compliance across departments and prepares the required annual and biannual reports
- Regarding climate change, the Office is leading the County's application for bronze certification under the Climate Smart Communities program, submitted a couple of weeks before this meeting; certification would make the County eligible for additional funding and support towns and villages in taking on climate challenges as well

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Kelly: That's as a whole county?
- Ms. Martin: Yes, the certification would cover the whole county; Madison and Broome Counties are the only other bronze-certified counties in the region, so Onondaga would be third
- Mr. Eriksen: Does bronze certification improve our ability to qualify for certain grants or programs? What are some of those?

- Ms. Martin: I don't have the specific list off the top of my head, but I know we are currently in the CFA process; the County took the Climate Smart Communities pledge in 2009, and once bronze certification is achieved I will be sure to highlight it in future grant applications for the additional points it provides.
- Mr. Kelly: Could you speak to the level of impact certification has had for Madison and Broome Counties?
- Ms. Martin: I don't know that offhand; they are very different kinds of counties, and each municipality can achieve certification in its own way by focusing on different measures, so a Hudson Valley county might approach it very differently than we would. I'm happy to follow up on that
 - The Office is also actively working on the County's next climate action plan, based on the latest greenhouse gas inventory, which is available on the Office of the Environment webpage
- Mr. Eriksen: On the deer and tick program, can you elaborate on what that program involves?
- Ms. Martin: There are five participating municipalities; final numbers from participating municipalities are expected by July (still waiting on two)
 - The program tracks spending and the number of deer culled, but does not collect data on the actual impact to deer or tick populations
- Mr. Eriksen: Is it primarily a culling program, or are there other elements?
- Ms. Martin: There are no other elements at this point
- Mr. Kelly: How is the Office doing on its 2026 budget? Everything in line with expectations?
- Ms. Martin: Yes, that one is on track, and the Office has everything it needs

3. ONONDAGA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE: Dan Mulvihill, Administrative Officer, Department of Finance and Director for Capital Improvements

- a. **BOND:** A Resolution Authorizing the Issuance of \$320,000 Bonds of the County of Onondaga, New York, to Pay Costs of Certain Improvements for the Onondaga County Sanitary District in and for Said County (\$320,000)
 - Mr. Mulvihill, appearing in place of Commissioner Dyer, presented the proposal for a \$320,000 bond resolution for the Wetzel Road comprehensive asset renewal plan, under the CIP project for comprehensive asset renewal at Wetzel Road (engineering phase, rehab, and CBS improvements); CBS refers to chemical bulk storage
 - The item was originally proposed to the Committee at \$400,000, which remains the maximum project cost; the original plan was to request full bond authorization and offset it with cash as authorized under local finance law, which led to some confusion in Ways and Means, so the item is being re-proposed at a modified amount

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Kelly: So the \$320,000 bond is \$80,000 short of the \$400,000 total cash figure; is that the proposal?
- Mr. Mulvihill: The maximum cost is \$400,000, consisting of a \$320,000 bond and \$80,000 in cash; the cash could come from existing cash funding in the capital fund, or from cash-to-capital in the operating budget
- Mr. Eriksen: I believe this was originally in the CIP at \$320,000, with the \$80,000 cash also listed separately; that may have been the source of the confusion
- Mr. Mulvihill: Yes; under local finance law, the County can authorize the full amount and use cash in lieu of debt, but rather than overcomplicate it, this was modified to \$320,000 to keep it consistent with the CIP
- Mr. Kelly: What has been the extent of the County's use of cash for capital recently, in terms of where things stand?
- Mr. Mulvihill: Are you asking about WEP specifically, or the entire capital plan?

- Mr. Kelly: Let's start with WEP
- Mr. Mulvihill: WEP is the largest component of the CIP; its cash use can range from about \$1 million to \$6 million in operating funds in a given year, and cash is often used to offset engineering costs
 - Bond resolutions include a period of probable use (PPU) in Section 3, which sets the repayment maturity clock under local finance law, as interpreted and provided by bond counsel; when the PPU is five years or less and the County has the capacity, cash is generally preferred over bonding, since low-PPU debt service can spike engineering-related costs
 - For 2026, the County intended to use existing capital fund cash that had not been allocated to older, since-closed-out projects; a new WEP team completed significant cleanup identifying and closing out those old projects, which is reflected in the 2026 budget's capital provisions anticipating use of existing cash. Additional cash use is expected to appear in this year's operating budget as those figures are finalized

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

4. COUNTY LEGISLATURE: Nicole Watts, Chairwoman

a. INFORMATIONAL: Discussion of Budget Schedule and Responsibilities

- Chairwoman Watts advised that this year's budget process will be approached more like the resolution process, with greater committee involvement; as with resolutions, budget items would come through committee first rather than going straight to Ways and Means
- Committees have already become more invested and involved this year through departmental presentations and updates; the goal is to build on that by giving committees a program-level role, since committee members are closest to what is happening in the departments matched to their committee and can develop a sense of departmental needs heading into the 2027 budget
- In the budget process, each program committee will be given a dedicated half day for a joint committee meeting with Ways and Means to hear budget presentations for departments under that committee's purview; for Environmental Protection, this covers a small number of departments
 - These joint presentations are not intended for departments to present their general programs (unless something new is included in the budget); they are purely focused on the budget itself. Members were encouraged to continue asking programmatic questions before the budget season, so the joint presentations can stay focused on budget questions
- Following the joint presentation meeting, each program committee will hold a second meeting that month covering both its regular business (e.g., resolutions from the County Executive's office) and a discussion of the budgets for departments under its purview
 - In preparation, each of the 17 legislators will be asked to serve as the point person for one department's budget, to field questions and make suggestions; for Environmental Protection, a legislator has been matched with the Office of the Environment
 - As an example, on tick-borne illness funding requests, the matched legislator (or, more likely, Legislator Kelly for health department matters) would be the point of contact; the goal is for special requests to be routed to whichever legislator's purview fits, to help the Legislature navigate proposed cuts, contingencies, or other budget considerations throughout the year
 - At the committee-level budget discussion, the committee would collectively weigh in on departmental requests (for example, a new initiative) and decide whether it supports any amendments, cuts, or contingency designations; the committee chair would then bring the committee's recommendations to Ways and Means, which would incorporate them into the Ways and Means report before the matter goes to full session for the back-and-forth of budget season

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Kelly: I'm always happy to share my perspective and talk with legislators, but this makes it feel like I'd become a middleman, and I'll never be as qualified to answer questions as the department staff themselves; I'll do my best, but my natural inclination is to defer to the actual experts. Has that been a consideration?
- Ms. Watts: To clarify using the tick-borne disease example: rather than five of us separately approaching the department, it would be all of us agreeing this is something we'd like to see funded and asking the point person to work with the health department on what that might look like; it's about being the conduit to the department, not becoming the department, and lightening the load by having each of us take a piece of that responsibility
- Mr. Meaker: Can I use that as an example? If a department wanted more money in the budget for something like the tick program, and they come to, say, me as the point person, but we're all individual legislators from different districts with our own votes
- Ms. Watts: Absolutely, yes
- Mr. Meaker: We each have the right to vote based on what we believe is best for our constituents; putting any one legislator in a position where they feel obligated to advocate for something they may not personally support seems like an awkward position
- Ms. Watts: If someone doesn't want to take that on, it can be a team effort; most of these requests are expected to be general, countywide requests rather than something one legislator is personally championing or that is specific to a single district
 - Where a request is district-specific, the hope is that legislators keep each other informed, for example, looping in Legislator Kelly on a health-department-related request specific to someone's district, to stay in communication, not to seek permission, since all legislators remain independent. The goal is simply to move more of this discussion to the committee level earlier in the process, rather than waiting until session to raise amendments
- Mr. Eriksen: To build on Legislator Meaker's point, would it be fair to describe this as more about reporting back on proposed changes, rather than requiring the point person to take a position or advocate one way or the other? Is that the overall concept?
- Ms. Watts: Yes, and this doesn't prevent anyone from advocating if they choose to
 - No one should feel it is mandatory to advocate for or against something; the concept is closer to reporting
- Mr. Kelly: That has historically been part of the role of departments' written budget statements, especially for departments that haven't had the opportunity to speak directly to Ways and Means; it sounds like this is being accomplished in one fashion or another. I'll do my best to navigate the new process. Do you have a tentative draft schedule?
- Ms. Watts: Yes; the schedule is being built around the availability survey members already completed, and will be emailed out. The County Executive must present his budget by September 15, which sets that date; presentations would then run as half days on weekdays through the week of September 15 and the following week, ending September 28, with regular committee meetings following immediately after each
 - The charter-required public hearing is planned for Thursday, October 1, with the regular October session set to consider the budget shortly after, followed by the County Executive's review period for any vetoes of adopted amendments
- Mr. Kelly: So to summarize what you described: there will be the budget presentation, the joint Ways and Means/program committee meetings, and then it moves on from there to Ways and Means
- Ms. Watts: Correct; for this Committee specifically, there would be the full Legislature's County Executive budget presentation, then a joint Ways and Means/Environmental Protection committee

meeting for EP department budget presentations, and then a regular Environmental Protection committee meeting that month with budget discussion as one of its agenda items

- Mr. Kelly: And that discussion is simply discussion, since the Ways and Means report remains a product of the Ways and Means Committee
- Ms. Watts: Correct; the Committee chair would then represent the Committee's interests to Ways and Means, conveying what the Committee discussed and any requested amendments
- Mr. Kelly: There has historically been some concern about the Open Meetings Law; has that been clarified as it relates to non-committee members speaking during Ways and Means meetings?
- Ms. Watts: Non-committee members may speak during Ways and Means meetings at the chair's discretion, provided they are members of the Legislature who have been recognized to speak; the joint committee meetings themselves will be formal joint meetings with both committees' roll called
 - The hope is that there will be ample opportunity for all legislators to be involved in the budget process; if something a member wants to advocate for doesn't come up in a particular meeting, it remains up to the chair's discretion to yield the floor

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

Meeting adjourned at approximately 2:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



HASSINA ADAMS, Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature