



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

NICOLE WATTS
Chairwoman

SPENCER BERG
Deputy Clerk

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES – JULY 21, 2026 CHARLES GARLAND, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Garland, Mr. Ryan, Mr. Knapp, Ms. Block, Mr. McCarron

ALSO PRESENT: Chairwoman Watts, Mr. Bush; also see attached list

Chair Garland called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. and the previous meeting's minutes were approved.

Chair Garland took the agenda items out of order.

1. COUNTY LEGISLATURE: Nicole Watts, Chairwoman

a. DISCUSSION: Proposed ADA Committee, County-Wide Accessibility Standards and Oversight

- Clerk mentioned a couple of meetings ago, new standards being put in place regarding accessibility when it comes to meeting minutes, digital literacy, and so forth, across the county in meetings and otherwise
- County has been talking internally about accessibility, where the county is strong and where there is opportunity, and reviewing the outside boards and commissions the Legislature is responsible for appointing people to
- One board, previously called the Council for the Disabled, has been allowed to fall defunct for quite a few years
 - Looking to reactivate that committee under a new name, in nomenclature appropriate for today, to ensure a council advising the county on accessibility of all kinds
- Accessibility needs covered include physical accessibility for individuals with wheelchairs, the deaf, the blind, and folks with developmental delays, among other needs
- County wants to make sure those services are being provided the way they should; looking to set this committee up in the next session
- Wanted to come to every committee because accessibility is across the board in all the different committees; as the structure is finalized, asked for any input, insights, or thoughts specific to public safety and accessibility to be mindful of in putting this together

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Garland: Personally, I can't think of anything myself. I think we're doing a very good job over the years; it seems everybody's been proactive considering anything that is needed, but of course as technology changes and other things
- Mr. Knapp: I don't think Onondaga County has adopted this, but I've seen several other counties with, I think it's the blue envelope, for folks during a traffic stop
 - A number of counties have instituted a blue card, I think, or something like that, that designates that the person may have some form of autism or something like that, during a traffic stop, so that the officer knows if the person's a little quirky or something like that. So I think that should

definitely be something we think about. I don't think we've adopted it. I know a lot of counties have

- Mr. McCarron: I would like to plus that they have not, because I know Southwood Fire, there's a member that has been working like fire department and police work
- Mr. Garland: That's a great idea, because recently in the news, even nationally, there have been a couple incidents where somebody either autistic or handicapped in some way, shape, or form, if they had something visible, like right on the dash or something, as the law enforcement officer or somebody's walking up, then that would really help. Yeah, that's a great idea
- Mr. Knapp: It's a little bit different situation
- Mr. Garland: Well, if you want to propose that, Legislator Knapp, just let us know
- Mr. Knapp: I think that's something we have to talk with the sheriff and coordinate, but I think it'd be a great idea. And I don't know if that's something we have to do or he can do on his own. I don't know the logistics of it, but that's something we could easily find out
- Mr. Garland: Now this isn't public safety, but when we're talking about accessibility, especially non hearing, can we anticipate maybe having, what, a translator at our legislative meetings or hearings? I know sometimes with wakes and other things we have to have somebody translating. So is that something that we might see
- Ms. Watts: Some of the things that right now we're required upon request to provide translation access, but the process for that is not necessarily clear for people. And so those are some of the things we're hoping that this council could advise on, for braille access, for all these kinds, and there's also other accessibility for languages that are maybe not even disability related as well, that we want to continue to improve access overall
- Mr. Ryan: Chairwoman, can I ask what the makeup of the original committee was, or how that was decided
- Ms. Watts: The previous committee, it's been defunct since 1999, so it's been quite some time. And partially because of the language, since 1999 there's been a lot of changes in this particular field, so we've had one of our interns doing a deep dive on research in regards to language, the things we should be considering, et cetera, so that when we rewrite this we're writing it in the most up to date standards and expectations. We also happen to have an in house expert sitting next to me as well
- Mr. Garland: Does anyone else have any questions? Anything they'd like to ask
- Ms. Watts thanked the committee and noted to contact her and/or Legislator Block if any additional questions or items arise

2. **SOLVAY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT:** Benjamin Winkler, Lieutenant/EMT

a. INFORMATIONAL: Solvay Volunteer Fire Department Project, Water Rescue Improvements

(Attachment No. 1: Solvay Fire Department, Marine Operations Program, Onondaga Lake)

- Roughly 75,000 people can be at the amphitheater at one time, excluding employees and other staff; Photo depicted on slide 1 gives a sense of what is going on in the Solvay Fire District at the time of an event
- Onondaga Lake background: at one point the most polluted lake in the nation, due to Chemtrade waste dumped near the Erie Canal; department members recall seeing different colors and dyes in the lake growing up
- Roughly 2000 to 2017, the county decided to clean up and rejuvenate the lake; since 2017 activity on the lake has really ramped up, helped in part by COVID
- Solvay Volunteer Fire Department is 100% volunteer; handles roughly 1,600 to 1,800 calls a year, with calls increasing every year

- Calls on the lake specifically have increased roughly 500% since 2017; two calls on the lake in one day alone recently, the lake has become so populated
- Marine side of operations implemented since 2017 to help combat what is going on on the lake; department also handles EMS, rescue, and hazard calls
- Four agencies total cover the lake; Liverpool covers the largest section, roughly seven to eight miles; Solvay covers the second largest area, roughly three to four miles, around the state fairgrounds and the amphitheater
 - Coverage area is very hard to get to, especially the remote far side near the amphitheater, without a boat, particularly during concert season
 - Access point improved since the county built the dock and launch, giving a good spot to respond from and operate out of
- Department has trained and educated members in water related incidents since 2017; has a number of career firefighters on staff helping ramp up training and set the department apart in properly responding to and handling calls
 - Multiple swift water technicians on staff, the highest level of water certification; over a dozen members have really dedicated themselves to that training
- Docks installed a few years ago on the back side of the amphitheater allow pedestrians to come in by boat, dock, walk up to a concert, enjoy it, and go back down and take off; boating activity has increased significantly during concerts and even off season

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Garland: Is it free or is there a charge for that right now
- Mr. Winkler: As far as I know, I believe it's free

Presentation continued:

- County has installed additional docks near the visitor center, including a boat wash and a dock used by a lot of kayakers and sailboaters
 - Newer docks and a fishing pier added within the last two to three years further along the district toward the city, bringing in a lot of fishermen

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Garland: Who's installed those? Is that something that you've done or is it the county
- Mr. Winkler: This has been the county. Yeah, the county has really installed the docks. It's been, I think, a group effort

Presentation continued:

- Emergencies prepared for are based on real life incidents the department has responded to, including a vehicle that went into the lake at the dock after someone forgot to put it in park
- If a boat were to catch fire on the far side of the dock, there would not currently be a good way to respond without this boat; no missing person incident yet in the last couple of years
- Boat being purchased will have sonar to help locate and find missing people as fast as possible, as well as FLIR, an infrared heat sensor, to help pick a person out on shore
- Other recent incidents on the lake include a dump truck that went in on the Liverpool side, a van that drove into the lake from 690, and a sailboat capsizing where someone had to be cut free from rigging and removed from the water
- Department has built up training and bought some specialized equipment to mitigate basic incidents, but this plan is really setting the department up for success
- Specifically looking to purchase a dock and a lift; long term goal is to have the boat on the lake 24/7, 365 days a year

- Not the only department that covers the lake; a couple of different agencies work together, and this will help set the department up to work with them and allow them to work with the department as well

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Ryan: Who has boats on the lake
- Mr. Winkler: Right now the city has a boat, and Liverpool actually just took delivery of a boat as well. So right now there's two that we know of
- Mr. McCarron: Used to keep theirs right down at Onondaga Lake Park Marina, with the sheriff's boat there
- Mr. Winkler: Correct
- Mr. McCarron: I did boat patrol for four years. And then Seneca River up on the other side of the outlet
- Mr. Winkler: They're way on the other side
- Mr. McCarron: Is it still based on automatic mutual aid
- Mr. Winkler: It's kind of unique with the lake, because again, Liverpool hasn't had a boat, we haven't had a boat, so it makes it really tough as to what we're dealing with
- Mr. McCarron: The way it works is you get shore to shore jurisdiction, so even the sheriffs could go to Sylvan Beach; because of the lack of resources, mutual aid is almost required for everybody
- Mr. Winkler: Which mutual aid is great, right? We would love working with mutual aid. It sets us back a little bit because Liverpool, again, they have to respond to the marina as well and then come to our side of the lake, which is upwards of 30 minutes that we've waited for them before. So we're just standing on shore waiting
- Mr. Garland: That answers the question I was going to ask about jurisdictional responsibilities, because I saw the map and things like that

Presentation Continued:

- Timeline is ASAP
- Looked at different boats and options; set eyes on a specific boat that fits the department's needs
- Build time roughly eight to nine months; looking at next season, unfortunately
- Some additional equipment still needed for the boat, also need the docks and lift discussed previously
- Sets the department apart from anyone else, since no boat is currently on the lake 365 days a year
 - City and Liverpool both pull their boats seasonally
- Will really set the department up for success
- Need training on the boat itself
 - Can't just put a boat in the water and expect people to know how to operate it and properly respond to emergencies

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Garland: And if you're available and you have that, that might free up some of these other agencies for their resources
- Mr. Winkler: Absolutely. So again, long term, we're looking to have the boat on the water 365 days a year. I keep harping on that because it really sets us apart from every other aspect, and really sets us up for protecting the public, protecting what Onondaga Lake is and what's coming in the future. We talked about putting in a swimming area eventually down the road, so we'd really like to be ahead of the game when it comes to it versus behind. So we're trying to play catch up, and the biggest thing is being ready, because seconds matter
- Mr. Winkler: The breakdown: the vessel we're looking at is 293,000. Some more equipment that we need to purchase to put on the boat, stuff like AEDs, backboards, things like that for medical emergencies. The dock construction we estimate to be roughly 25,000, and then the boat lift, which is

going to be a little bit more expensive because of the weight of the boat and being able to get it up out of the water

- Mr. McCarron: Do you have dimensions of the boat? How long is it
- Mr. Winkler: This is actually the replica that we're planning on purchasing. It's a 26 foot boat (Referencing Slide 15)
- Mr. McCarron: Is that open bow or is that
- Mr. Winkler: You can kind of see in the back is where the cab is, and then the front is all open, which is going to be great for us to allow working space. Biggest thing is having a cab as well with heat and AC; obviously emergencies happen all year, so with ice, we want to get the victim in where it's warm and start warming them while we're en route back to an ambulance or wherever needed
- Mr. Ryan: What kind of motors are those
- Mr. Winkler: It's going to be twin 150 Mercury. We put two motors on it for redundancy; if we're out in the water and one of them breaks down, luckily we have something else to get us back to shore. So a lot of redundancy that we've built into this for our safety as well
 - Total project cost is 363. We were lucky enough to get the Crest grant, but unfortunately that's been like a two-year process, so the price keeps escalating with the boat with the yearly annual uptake. So we're looking for roughly 200,000
- Mr. Garland: Are you looking at anything else from the state or anything like that
- Mr. Winkler: Not at the moment. Again, the check hasn't actually cashed from the Crest yet, so we're still waiting for that to deposit. We are looking at some other things as well
- Mr. McCarron: Can you tell me what the Crest grant is
- Mr. Winkler: That was actually through Senator Manion's office
- Mr. McCarron: It's a federal grant
- Mr. Winkler: Yes
- Mr. McCarron: New York State Office of Parks and Recreation used to do grants for law enforcement marine patrols; so that just might be another avenue to look at for fire and rescue as well
- Mr. Garland: And would this boat be primarily used just on Onondaga Lake, or if there was a need for like another municipality emergency, taking into Seneca
- Mr. Winkler: Onondaga Lake is connected by the Seneca River, so if we needed to go respond there, we 100% are willing to work with our neighbors and allow our neighbors to come work with us hand in hand. Mutual aid is really important
- Mr. Ryan: What's up with the county's boat? County has a boat on the water
- Mr. McCarron: We do, but the waterways we're responsible for are Oneida Lake, Onondaga Lake, Cross Lake, all the rivers in between, then Jamesville Reservoir, Otisco Lake, and Skaneateles Lake. They don't have the staffing or the boats to cover all of that; if one's out on Oneida Lake or Skaneateles Lake, you're talking hours. From the law enforcement perspective, it's always the fire department that gets there first, unless we happen to be lucky and on the water when something happens. But we were always mutually dispatched if we were anywhere along the canal system, because we have to write a boat accident or incident report. It was always back in the day Liverpool Fire who got there first
- Mr. Garland: That's why I asked, because it just makes a lot of sense if your boat is there, then the other municipalities, if they have boats, it makes it easier for them
- Mr. McCarron: A lot of times we get there faster by vehicle; we would dock our boat, jump in the car, and drive down to their boat, because the canal system, you can't get through quickly
- Mr. Ryan: And then you talked about year round. Does it freeze over
- Mr. Winkler: Last year was the first year in five years that we've actually seen it freeze over. As far as thickness, it wasn't all that thick, but there is that potential; that's why we want the lift, to be able to get the boat up out of the water for that time
- Mr. Ryan: Can that boat go through ice

- Mr. Winkler: Certain depths, yeah, it'll break ice
- Mr. Garland: But as you said, normally with Onondaga Lake, normally
- Mr. Winkler: Very seldom does it freeze; last year we had that cold snap and it froze over, and we were able to do some awesome training on it, believe it or not
- Mr. Garland: One of the things we had talked about with the legislator, we did have a meeting last year where the county is expanding Onondaga Lake Park, that marina, but there's also interest in expanding something near the amphitheater and the inner harbor; driving by, it seems like there are tournaments there almost every weekend with the boats
- Mr. Winkler: It was two weeks ago they had the speedboats ripping around the lake, which is really neat but very dangerous
- Mr. Garland: When we're finally able to swim there, who knows

3. **COUNTY LEGISLATURE:**

a. **DISCUSSION:** Review of Justice Oversight Committee Candidate (Bonnie Gail Levy)

- Justice Oversight Committee candidate application from Bonnie Gail Levy; resume is very accomplished
- Ms. Levy spent decades as a defense attorney, then moved to the New York State Attorney General's Office for almost 20 years, and is now in private practice
- Would be an asset joining the board; looking to get agreement to advance the appointment

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Garland: Does anyone have anything they'd like to ask? Are you sure about Bonnie before we take the vote
- Mr. Knapp: Great resume
- Mr. McCarron: A really good resume; there's nothing to argue with

A motion was made by Mr. Knapp, seconded by Mr. McCarron, to advance the appointment; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

C. Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned at 11:59 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



HASSINA K. ADAMS, Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: **PUBLIC SAFETY AGENDA**

DATE: **JULY 21, 2026**

NAME (Please Print)	DEPT/AGENCY/ORGANIZATION
DAVID SKENAR	CLE ONONDAGA
Benjamin Winkler	Sheriff's Department
Sean Dean	Finance