



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

NICOLE WATTS
Chairwoman

SPENCER BERG
Deputy Clerk

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES – AUGUST 19, 2026 ELAINE DENTON, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Denton, Mr. Eriksen, Mr. Meaker, Mr. Brown, Mr. Knapp

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

Chair Denton called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m., and the previous meeting's minutes were approved.

1. OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE: William Barlow, Deputy County Executive for Economic Development

a. INFORMATIONAL: Introduction of William "Billy" Barlow, Deputy County Executive for Economic Development

- Has met and worked with most to some degree
- Known as a former mayor of Oswego
- Did a brief stint, about a four-year stint, with Oswego Health, in a leadership position in healthcare
- Was approached with the opportunity to come to Onondaga County, a great opportunity given the positive developments happening in the county
- One of the newest residents of the Town of Cicero
- Started as new Deputy County Executive to County Executive McMahon, also Executive Director of OCIDA; started in early July, replacing Mr. Petrovich; about a month and a half in, this will be the third week since Mr. Petrovich retired
- The transition period has been productive
- Offices overseen both have great staffs, welcoming with open arms and helping get up to speed on the many successes, issues, and challenges the agency will face
- Looking forward to working with all the folks in the room and the community to tackle those issues
- Micron has been at the forefront of focus; joining calls with Micron to understand the project, watching from afar it was a little hard to take in the scope of the entire project, but has gotten arms around that
- Supply chain companies are looking to locate in Onondaga County, some as close to Micron as they can be, others further away; coordinating with them and trying to promote the community to make them feel comfortable to locate here; those conversations are going quite well
- There are still some other areas outside the Micron realm to work on; housing is definitely on the mind of the County Executive, who has made clear that more housing is needed for those who will move here for Micron and those who already live here
- Understands Chairwoman Watts and the County Legislature see it as a top priority as well; there have been some meetings and discussions about that, with more discussions expected later today
- OCIDA and the economic development department look forward to participating in those discussions and getting those projects off the ground

- There are many more projects outside the two top priorities mentioned, but looking forward to getting to work
- Appreciates the opportunity to be here today and to serve the people of Onondaga County; thankful for the warm welcome received so far

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Brown: Thank you for coming here, I am excited; the potential you represent gives me hope. My question is about the Inner Harbor area, there's a lot of different things happening over there; I wanted to know if there's a plan or a vision, where do we see that in 10 years, have we thought that far?
- Mr. Barlow: The Inner Harbor's definitely come up in several conversations; are you familiar with the ACHIEVE grant application we just recently submitted?
- Mr. Brown: Sort of
- Mr. Barlow: What I'll do is I will send you that application; Onondaga County partnered with the City of Syracuse to put forth that submission, it also includes some surrounding counties, so it's quite a comprehensive vision, but our local focus was the Inner Harbor, with some projects, some housing mixed in there, some recreational opportunities; I can get you up to speed on that application, but we definitely have a comprehensive plan for that area
- Mr. Brown: The grant outlines that plan?
- Mr. Barlow: Yep; there's renderings included
- Mr. Meaker: Thank you, Mr. Barlow, thank you for joining us here in Onondaga County. I've had the privilege at one point in life to reside in Oswego, before you were mayor; my wife still works in Oswego, I frequent Oswego often, and to see some of the changes that came under your belt are nothing short of tremendous, some of the transformative change in a positive way your administration brought to that city; I'm just glad that Onondaga County is now going to have a chance to have you here to move us forward with your assistance and your experience in what you did out there. So welcome aboard, it's going to be a fun ride
- Mr. Barlow: I appreciate that. I try not to celebrate past success too much because we have so much work to do; but I will say if you look at the challenges we faced in Oswego and how we executed those challenges, it's eerily similar to some of the challenges and success that Onondaga is currently going through. If you look at Plan Onondaga, you can see the parallels between the two communities; we had some great success with the state's help with grant funding to bring affordable housing to Oswego, market rate housing to Oswego, plenty of waterfront development, and some downtown revitalization among some other successes. Looking forward to replicating that success here; it'll certainly be a team effort, and looking forward to working with our departments and the legislature on accomplishing those

2. **HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD**: Nicole Watts, Chairwoman, Co-Chair; Darrell Buckingham, Senior Program Officer for Strategic Initiatives, Central New York Community Foundation, Co-Chair; Jared Shepard, Director of Planning and Research, CenterState CEO

a. INFORMATIONAL: Board Task Force Presentations

- Housing and Transportation Citizen Advisory Board established early in the year as an ad hoc committee of the legislature
- Followed by community engagement, starting with a municipal housing summit, that formed the citizen advisory board
- Housing in New York State has municipal home rule; zoning decisions fall at the most localized level
- Funding and overarching housing law take place at the state level

- County doesn't have very much direct authority over housing, but has a lot of opportunity for influence, especially from a regional perspective
- Set up conversations with municipalities around their pain points and what they'd like to see the county do
- Followed up with six community listening sessions, one in the city, five outside of it
- Launched the citizen advisory board with Derrell Buckingham as co-chair
- Community meeting will be held September 1st at Inspyre Innovation Lab, open-house style, with formalized versions of the final draft proposals
- Advisory board bringing draft proposals to the legislature and county executive on what the county should and could do on housing
- Came back to this committee first before going to the public, since it helped set up the ad hoc board
- Four task forces ultimately landed; started with five, two merged
- First group: housing supply and development
 - Six-county area needs approximately 3,000 units per year for the next 10 years
 - Current supply is already low; homelessness and housing instability are on the rise
 - Rents becoming untenable for folks of all income levels; vulnerable being made more vulnerable
 - Expecting more people to move to the area, so expecting to need more supply
 - Merged with funding and incentives, since the two can't be separated
 - Group filled with voices of developers, impact investors, and people in actual housing development
 - Proposal: a zero to low-interest revolving loan fund, housed at a new LDC
 - LDC would be formulated by the legislature and county executive in partnership, focused wholly on Onondaga County's housing needs
- Would start with two programs
 - First focused on simply increasing supply, with maximization of affordability as a key
 - Second more focused on local ownership, addressing and stabilizing the housing stock we have now
 - Working families are at risk of displacement as more people move to the area
- Second program also focused on building capacity, equitable access, and BIPOC developers, given the racialized economic realities in Onondaga County
 - Investment amount not set yet, still in negotiations, but expected as a significant one-time investment
 - Likely an executive initiative piece, in tandem with this year's budget
 - Setting up the LDC makes the county a seed investor
 - Also opens the door to state funding and impact investors
- Recently met with impact investors from New York City, the state, and national contacts, who are keenly interested
- These are not speculators, but investors who want to prevent displacement and ensure access to resources
- Hopefully the county's investment gets at least doubled by impact and state investment
- County being first to invest has a big impact in drawing that additional investment
- Other three task forces have focused on where housing can be built
- First of those: zoning and policy reform

Presentation continued (Jared Shepard, Director of Planning and Research, CenterState CEO):

- Work builds on Plan Onondaga's strong centers concept
- Strong community centers are essential to Onondaga County's economic competitiveness
- Companies increasingly choose locations based on quality of life amenities for employees

- Strong centers also contribute to fiscal health and regional competitiveness
- Accommodate new workers and changing demographics, including a need for more senior living
- Preserving open space is also an important part of this type of development
- Plan Onondaga's Goal 2 is to provide tools, resources, and partnerships for strategic new centers
- Municipalities are asking for this; they want to do comprehensive plans and see strong centers as terrific, walkable places to live
- Proposal: county-funded model overlay zoning language municipalities could optionally adopt
- Would make it easier for municipalities to create strong-center zoning without starting from scratch

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Eriksen: Could elaborate on the process for how that could get implemented?
- Mr. Shepard: We've had a few conversations with the county planning department to start to outline some of that; ultimately what we're really doing with the draft proposal is putting into motion the resources so that the county planning department, together with municipalities, could start to examine some more of the logistics
- Mr. Eriksen: It's up to municipalities whether and how to adopt something like that, but this would be an opportunity to start those conversations; the advantage to something like that is municipalities have those conversations among themselves, each town deciding this is where they think this zoning code might be appropriate, so it's happening at the most local level and individual communities can figure out where something like that would work best for them; is that the encouragement you're trying to achieve here?
- Mr. Shepard: Yes, absolutely. The concepts and the discussions, and what he would expect the outcome to be, is not that the county planning department would be prescriptive about where these overlay districts go; more that this is really about making that process easier, creating the language, so that a municipality that is interested has the resources to speed up their process, they don't have to start from zero on how they would do this overlay
- Ms. Watts: Could we use ADUs as an example, just for those who might not quite know what a zoning overlay is?
- Mr. Shepard: Sure. An ADU, which is an accessory dwelling unit; a few municipalities in the county have passed ordinances permitting an ADU, this could be a detached, smaller unit on your property. If a municipality wants to pass an ordinance that says this is a permitted use in a given area, there's language around that, and a model overlay district would put together some of the best versions of that language that would help the municipality get to a point where they're passing an ordinance that meets their goals
 - The best test for any zoning ordinance is really what happens when developers and property owners start kicking the tires on it, and if you see those things getting done the way the municipality intended
- Ms. Watts: These would also assist with developers who are working across municipalities, that if the model code, the zoning code, is getting implemented, it becomes easier for them to work in multiple different municipalities. Correct?
- Mr. Shepard: That's a very good point; part of the discussions, which have included developers, and that's also part of what he hears in his role at CenterState, is that they've actually made a lot of progress from what he's hearing on permitting and speeding up that process
 - But early clarity on that process, the ability of a municipality to communicate in writing here's what we want to see, by itself is beneficial, and helps produce what the municipality wants, and helps the developer get more clarity and start to design a product that will ultimately get approved
 - If there was consistency throughout the county, in the places that picked up this overlay district, that would continue to simplify the process, because developers who see the growth

- in the area know the communities, and know we have a lot of great communities, and they're interested in a variety of places where that could go.
 - Having some of that model language shared would reduce cost and help speed up the process for the kind of development that we're increasingly hearing that municipalities want, the market wants, and a lot of other folks in the planning community want
- Ms. Watts: So now municipalities are equipped to do the development, the money's there; who is going to get to do the work?
 - Likely to see developers, already see speculators coming in, likely to see developers coming in from other places; hearing that people want to come to Syracuse
 - While there's some excitement that people want to come, it is a significant concern to the advisory board that county people get jobs, access, economic opportunity as a priority in all of the opportunity that is before us
 - One of the task forces focused on housing stability and equitable access, and Derrell is going to share a bit about what they have been up to

Presentation continued (Darrell Buckingham, Senior Program Officer for Strategic Initiatives, Central New York Community Foundation, Co-Chair):

- Task force focus: housing stability and equitable access
- Recognizes it will be a multi-year process, but most concerned about year one
- Important to make sure residents are involved and preventing displacement
- Centering those who have historically been disinvested in
- Not just building new housing, but maintaining current housing for those who already own homes
- Want to tap into current workforce development infrastructure and existing local pipelines, like On-Ramp, Jubilee Homes, and SUNY EOC
- Goal is to protect, prepare, and get participation from residents
- Protect means reinvestment into homes and neighborhoods, plus education and financial literacy
- Some residents want their homes properly repaired and safe; others aspire to own and want proper education to get there
- Train, build, own model: invest in small contractors and those with skills, so they can train, move into building or repairing homes, and eventually ownership
- Some residents don't want to own homes; also want to set them up with safe, affordable living conditions
- Ownership ultimately helps create wealth for families
- Visited Push Buffalo recently, who identify and purchase land so homes that become available can be made and kept affordable
- Land acquisition isn't this committee's particular focus, but is where the committees begin to align
- For year one, will track how many people move through training, not necessarily how many homes get built
- New homes should consider green, net zero development, an opportunity to make homes more affordable long-term
- Also an advocate for decreasing lead poisoning; weatherization work helps remediate homes dealing with the lead crisis
- Ms. Watts noted that she was grateful to Push Buffalo, who have 20 years in the community doing this work and hosted the board for a full day on Monday; they are ready to partner in implementation, whether through coaching or otherwise, to do this work in Upstate New York

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Knapp: Number one, wherever possible, we copy shamelessly, where these things have been successful

- Also have a very successful program to look at in our community development department; had a major shortage of lead-certified contractors, had all this money but only a few contractors qualified to do the work and certified by the state; implemented a training program that's been very, very successful, and added a huge number of contractors now certified to do that. That could be something, again not exactly the same but similar, that could be looked at

Presentation continued (Nicole Watts, Chairwoman, Co-Chair):

- Fourth task force: transportation and connectivity
- On September 1st, will see maps of county roads connecting to places of density, for example City of Syracuse to Village of Liverpool, or out to Baldwinsville
- County-owned roads form a spiderweb connecting the city and communities, currently only safely accessible for cars
- Centro is working on regional public transportation plans, but also need to think multi-modal: pedestrians, bikes, e-bikes, and scooters
- County roads currently don't have infrastructure to support that
- One task force member biked to the Baldwinsville listening session and needed a ride home, the road wasn't safe
- Task force is putting forward an SMTC study; SMTC is the region's federally funded Metropolitan Planning Organization
- County has access to SMTC services and can put forward a certain number of projects per year
- Legislator Denton and Chairwoman Watts both sit on some of the SMTC decision-making
- On September 1st, community will be able to suggest roads to look at, in addition to ones the task force already identified
- SMTC would study the viability of using existing right of way for safe bike and pedestrian access, alongside cars
- Proposal: legislature would only approve funding for county road projects that implement complete streets
- Would prioritize that on county roads connecting density

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Brown: As far as the overlay districts; know we're going to make it available for municipalities to opt in, will there be any incentive other than their desire to have a strong center?
- Mr. Shepard: The initial draft proposal, discussed that; the first step is simply getting this model language written so it's available as a resource, with the goal being how do we get some of these strong centers done and make it easier for the municipalities that have already been asking for it
- Ms. Denton: I also sit on the zoning committee, and it's definitely something talked about; what can we do in 2027 is create the zoning first, create that model zoning first, and then go from there
- Mr. Brown: Darrell, you mentioned specifically around Push Buffalo, where they purchased the land, thus making it more affordable; was Push Buffalo the actual entity that purchased the land, or did they work with someone themselves?
- Mr. Buckingham: Yes
- Mr. Brown: Would we be creating a similar entity to purchase the land, or would the county, or have we not thought that far through?
- Mr. Buckingham: That is the hope; don't know if we've gotten much further than that, but that is the desire, to create an entity that could do that
- Mr. Knapp: I have a family member building a home, and the cost of materials is just absolutely ludicrous

- Ms. Watts: Some kind of collective purchasing power is one of the things that have been talked about related to that, some of the grant funds to come alongside. Mentioned in the beginning that by setting up the LDC, can not only create the revolving loan fund but also bring in some grant dollars; that's not a very sustainable model on its own, and so the LDC could house different programs, including collective purchasing power, to be able to get supplies at lower cost, etc. What's exciting about setting up the LDC is it can create a whole swath of tools that are really made readily available to solve for some of these problems
- Mr. Knapp: Any discussion about infill construction? We have a lot of vacant lots, not just in the city, but in other developments too, that would be prime target
- Ms. Watts: That's part of that second fund, kind of. When we look at housing, there's obviously a whole bunch of different types, new build housing, especially large structure units, apartment buildings, condo buildings, etc.; but then there's also modular, an increasing opportunity, with some people actively exploring the modular option here locally, seeing that as a especially strong potential when it comes to infill, the ADUs Jared was mentioning, that overlay is another option around some of that infill potential; and then also light rehab, and gut, like a land bank gut rehab kind of option, trying to ensure within this that all four can be addressed
- Mr. Knapp: With infill, the utility, everything's already right there, so there's no extra cost to trying to bring it in or anything like that; lots of advantages there
- Mr. May: Good stuff, good ideas, good intent. I attended the meeting in Baldwinsville, and I know there's a process to everything, so I don't want to say we're doing it wrong, I'm not saying that at all.
 - One concern, or interest better stated, that I have is the interplay of everything we're talking about with current county initiatives; it seemed kind of silent at the meeting, and I know there was a focus to what was being accomplished
 - The purpose of my comment is I want to understand how this initiative plays with initiatives already in play, we don't seem to be talking about them
 - \$30 to \$32 million for housing incentives; I know that's kind of a different track. Legislator Knapp mentioned the extraordinary effort over the past few years certifying contractors to address the lead issue in this area; within that process, there's got to be a ton of best practice and process that can be leveraged into some of the things we're talking about, to bring contractors along to actually contribute to this process
 - The other thing is, we're talking about making local comp plans better; let's not forget that 20-plus comp plans have been updated as a result of the housing needs in this community, are we talking about that, are we considering it?
 - The fact that we're going toward an overlay model implies to me that yeah, we are considering it. The point of my comments is, again, I think this is all good stuff with great intent, but I just encourage some synergy, not to say that you're not, but with the efforts the county is strategically already employing, rather than something that may go in a different direction and leave us with something that's perhaps either competitive or counterproductive; I don't want to see that happen. This is good stuff, and the more we're synced up, the better this will be
- Ms. Watts: Thank you, and thank you for bringing it up, because it's actually been very intentionally done together, and that wasn't highlighted, and should be
 - Troy Waffner, sitting over here, has been very active, showed up at every municipal session, every community listening session, every advisory board meeting, has been very engaged; runs point on the comp plans referenced, is in the department that deals with the OCHIP monies, has been adjacent to some of the lead work; certainly all of that is part of this conversation, this is like what isn't being done yet that can be, but those things being integrated

- Met with the county executive about halfway through this process, with some of the folks on the advisory board, and there's some opportunity, if this LDC stands up and is successful, for it to actually be able to house some of those programs as some of the tools and be even more effective than they already are; there's definitely been those conversations, will continue to be those conversations, and it's necessary for it to be successful
- Ms. Watts: The community meeting is September 1st at 5:30 p.m. at the Inspyre Innovation Lab; it's going to be an open-house style presentation of this to the public. Want as many people from the public to come out and see this; this is for the entire county, whether Clay, Lafayette, these are folks that were with everyone in some of the listening sessions, and if they signed in on the sign-in sheets, they're going to be invited, but encourage anyone else who wants to be there to come too
 - The point of that gathering is to poke holes and ask questions before moving forward; it's a testing phase, these are draft proposals, and welcome the opportunity for community members to engage with this and say what they think is helpful and what they would like to see change

C. Adjournment

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

The meeting was adjourned at 11:49 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



HASSINA K. ADAMS, Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: **PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**
DATE: **AUGUST 19, 2026**

NAME (Please Print)	DEPT/AGENCY/ORGANIZATION
Rebecca Morgan	Comptroller
Billy Burt	PELWS (Clerk) EXCUSED
Darrell Buckingham	CNYCF
Jared Shepard	Center State CEO