



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

NICOLE WATTS
Chairwoman

SPENCER BERG
Deputy Clerk

WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE MINUTES – AUGUST 25, 2026 **MAURICE BROWN, CHAIR**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Brown, Leader Hernandez, Leader May, Mr. Burtis, Mr. Bush, Mr. Romeo, Ms. Denton

ALSO PRESENT: Chairwoman Watts, Mr. Thompson, Ms. Block; also see attached list

Chair Brown called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m., and the previous meeting's minutes were approved.

1. DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE: Kristi Smiley, Chief Fiscal Officer

a. Approving and Directing the Correction of Certain Errors on Tax Bills (*Sponsored by Mr. Brown*)

- One correction requested out of Skaneateles; clerical error involving a duplicate parcel
- Property taxes had already been paid in full

A motion was made by Ms. Hernandez, seconded by Mr. Romeo, to approve this item; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

2. ONONDAGA COUNTY WATER ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION: Odean D. Dyer, Commissioner

a. A Resolution Calling a Public Hearing in Connection with the Proposed Adoption of an Amended Schedule of Sewer Rents for the Onondaga County Sanitary District (October 1, 2026, 4:00 p.m.) (*Sponsored by Mr. Eriksen*)

- Proposed changes to sewer unit rents continue work undertaken over the past five years to make the sewer rate structure more equitable and reflective of actual usage
 - Reduce the assumed annual usage from 85,000 gallons to 70,000 gallons per sewer unit
 - Better aligns costs with usage
 - Ensures customers placing the greatest demand on the system bear an appropriate share of its cost

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. May: We've moved this threshold a few times over the years. This seems like a pretty substantial jump down. Do you have a forecast of what percentage of users may be impacted by this change?
- Mr. Dyer: What I can say is that this change will not impact residential users. It will have an impact on any user that was utilizing two or more sewer units throughout the year. Residential users get one unit, and all this does is adjust the definition of what one unit is

- Mr. Brown: We've moved it a couple times. Is this just every year we'll be moving it a little bit, or is there a five year plan?
- Ms. Smiley: So that's exactly it. What we've been trying to do is incrementally reduce it down so that an average unit is about what an average household has been using. We've been moving it down in increments between five and 15,000, same amount we did last year; we went from 100,000 down to 85,000 last year, taking it down to 70.
 - There's probably maybe one more year in the plan to get it down to where it should be; it's been a plan of about six or seven years now. We've been trying to incrementally do it so that we're not impacting those users in one year
- Mr. Brown: The goal is to get it near where the households are?
- Ms. Smiley: The goal ultimately is to make sure that the largest users of our wastewater system, our commercial and industrial users that are putting the most into the system, are those bearing the cost of it, so it's taking away some of the cost bearing from the residential users and putting it onto the industrial and commercial users; they are the ones putting the most into our wastewater system
- Mr. Romeo: Two questions. Do we know how many units this will increase our unit?
- Ms. Smiley: I don't have it at my fingertips, but I can certainly get that. We have an estimate; we're still working through identifying all the units as we're completing the budget, but I can get that information to you
- Mr. Romeo: And then the number of units impacts the rate, correct, because it's divided by the number of units?
- Ms. Smiley: Absolutely, that is correct
- Ms. Denton: I just had a question on process. This referenced a commissioner hearing on August 27th. Can you speak about that a little bit?
- Mr. Dyer: The commissioner's hearing is an opportunity for individuals to come out and have a conversation or be heard. We have it on August 27th. We posted it in the Post-Standard; we have an affidavit that shows the different town halls where we posted it, as per the law that states where we post it, and we followed that to the tee
 - We start off opening the floor with my blurb, just to be very standard, and then if anyone shows up, they can be on the record for what they want to say regarding that
- Mr. Bush: We're talking about changing the minimum usage; is that what you charge?
- Ms. Smiley: What we're talking about here is one unit equates to a certain number of gallons, so it's bringing that down to 70,000 gallons equals one unit. If a commercial industry is using 140,000 a year, they're going to be charged two units. It's just bringing what one unit equates to in terms of gallons
- Mr. Bush: Do you have a graph or a chart about how this dollar amount changes?
- Ms. Smiley: This isn't a dollar amount we're talking about right now; it's just what equates to one unit. Through the budget process, we'll be talking about what the sewer unit charge will be, as we're still finalizing the budget. That will be brought to you and we can discuss what the cost per unit has done over the years; we will be going through that during the budget process
- Mr. Bush: Are you expecting to come back at some point and change that unit again, the number?
- Ms. Smiley: It may come down one more time in the out years as we continue to bring it down, but probably only one more time, because we're getting very close to what an average household is

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

- b. Authorizing the County Executive to Enter into a Utility Work Agreement with the New York State Department of Transportation for Highway and Bridge Improvements (*Sponsored by Mr. Eriksen*)
- Agreement is WEP allowing New York State DOT to move a piece of WEP infrastructure, the Erie boulevard storage structure, as a result of the I-81 project
 - Portion conflicts with part of the structure
 - Work to be completed by New York State DOT
 - WEP will have the ability to review all drawings, plans, and documents and give final sign-off
 - WEP inspectors will be on site inspecting the NYSDOT contractors' work
 - Involved throughout the process in progress meetings to make sure its checkpoints are met
 - WEP providing final sign-off on completion

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Romeo: Do you have any idea how much money this is saving us by them doing it, and what that would cost if we were to do it?
- Mr. Dyer: I haven't paid too much attention to the dollar amount because we're not paying for it, but what I can say is that none of the costs to change it will come from the county
 - It's also not something that is going to increase the life cycle of the overall structure, which is very important when it comes to these utility agreements
- Mr. May: I think the savings are obvious; we know how much these projects tend to cost. This is a practice, whether they're going in the ground or we're going in the ground, we're making arrangements to create these types of efficiencies; it kind of cuts both ways, and I think everybody wins. I'd encourage us to keep doing this whenever we possibly can.

A motion was made by Mr. May, seconded by Ms. Hernandez, to approve this item; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION: Mark Nicotra, Deputy Commissioner

- a. RESOLVED, that Onondaga County applied for financial assistance from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation ("OPRHP") under the Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act of 2022, Article 58, Title 5 of the Environmental Conservation Law for the purpose of funding of the Beaver Lake Nature Center Boardwalk Replacement Phase 2 (\$1,000,000) (*Sponsored by Mr. Ryan*)
- Legislature accepted a \$1 million grant from the state in December for the second phase of the Beaver Lake boardwalk
 - State requesting something more specific in a resolution to better identify the grant it's being paid out of
 - Resolution is identical to what the state wants; adds that the funding is under the Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act of 2022, Article 58, Title V of the Environmental Conservation Law
 - No change required to meet the threshold; just a matter of presenting the exact resolution the state wants, in their format
 - Last piece of the puzzle for this grant; once approved, the state will release the funds and the project can go out to bid

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. Brown: Do we have to change anything in order to meet that threshold, or is it just a matter of presenting information they previously didn't have?
- Mr. Nicotra: Just a matter of presenting the exact resolution they want; a formality and last piece of the puzzle for this grant. Once this is approved, they will be able to release the funds, and we can get this project out to bid
- Mr. May: This is great; it's great to even be talking about it again. This is a project that has cost significantly more than planned, for natural obstacles out there in redoing the boardwalk specifically. Being a member of the Friends of Beaver Lake board, I know firsthand that the impact of some of those cost overruns were a major concern to the Friends in terms of what it was going to cost them in terms of a contribution
 - This grant, which was pursued by the former director of the park and successfully received, is saving both the county and the Friends quite a bit as a result of this combined effort
 - So this is great, because otherwise this would have been a project that probably ran 50% over anticipated costs, again just because the ground is really soft and you've got to go way down for each post to make the boardwalk stable
 - Ms. Hernandez: I do second it. I just want to say I'm glad that we caught that language, because in New York State the language really does matter, and it was great for them to allow us to change it now, rather than doing the work and not getting the grant because of the language

A motion was made by Mr. May, seconded by Ms. Hernandez, to approve this item; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. COUNTY LEGISLATURE:

- a. Consideration of Appointments to Justice Center Oversight Committee

Chair Brown requested that Item 4.a. be withdrawn from the agenda; hearing no objection, it was so ordered.

- b. A Memorializing Resolution Reaffirming that Armed Federal Immigration Enforcement Officers May Not Intimidate Voters or Access Non-Public Areas at Polling Locations in Onondaga County Absent a Valid Judicial Warrant or Court Order; Encouraging the Identification and Distribution of a Protocol for Responding to Such Presence; and Encouraging the Posting of Know Your Rights Signage at Polling Places (*Sponsored by Ms. Block*)
 - Resolution is a symbol to support the people who work at election sites
 - Expect they will experience a regular day of earned pay
 - Despite laws prohibiting armed federal agents from entering polling sites to intimidate or disrupt voting, agents overstepped these parameters during the primary election cycle this year
 - Extend support for poll workers by providing materials to help should another similar instance occur
 - Under duress, it is always helpful to have reminders and training
 - Being approached by a federal agent in this political climate has been more than stressful for many
 - Encouraging the posting of know your rights signage at the 100-foot mark outside polling sites
 - Providing resources for know your rights trainings
 - Resolution does not purport to enforce restrictions on federal agents; reiterates what is and is not allowed at polling sites

- Does not serve to say that there are any known concerns for voting at this time
- States support for the people who have expressed concern for being in polling sites this election season
- Legislative body electing to do all it can to support the process with additional tools and resources
- Enter into the record that their concerns have been heard, acknowledged, and appropriate action taken

Questions/Comments:

- Mr. May: I don't want to be redundant; I think Legislator McCarron had some really good comments during public safety over why it's likely this caucus won't support this. For the most part, the situation that occurred was kind of a one-time occurrence; it's not a trend. The local law itself cites five or six different laws, federal and otherwise, that already make it very clear that this is not allowed.
 - In the spirit of how I feel about memorializing resolutions in general, I won't be supporting it, and at this point I don't have a sense that the caucus will either. It seems to be a bit of an overreaction to a one-time incident
- Ms. Hernandez: I just want to make a quick comment about the one-time incident and the purpose of memorializing resolutions, to make sure we stop things that are happening. We have elections one time a year, so we have another election coming up, and we don't want the trend to start
 - That was the last election, so that's why it was a one-time thing; we don't know if it's going to occur again because elections occur one time a year, so it might occur again this coming election
 - To be preventative, this is something that needs to be put up as signage to let them know that they can't go in and bother those who are representing democracy, who are already not even getting paid a lot, and doing something that's good for the community
- Mr. Bush: Would you be willing to support a resolution that includes all police agencies?
- Ms. Block: What do you mean?
- Mr. Bush: You've honed in on armed federal immigration enforcement officers, but I don't think any police agency should come into a polling place under the circumstances that you've outlined
- Ms. Block: If there was, for example, a fight that were to break out, it was explained to me that our local agencies would respond to help with that; we don't want to prevent them from coming in for, say, a fistfight or something of that nature where they would typically respond. I'm not positive how that would have that sort of impact
- Mr. Bush: I just feel a little uncomfortable that this isn't a more holistic approach to protecting our polling places from any armed police that don't have a valid warrant or an emergency situation for going there. And what you outlined with ICE, the fellow was unarmed that came to the polling place, is that correct?
- Ms. Block: He left his weapon in the car
- Mr. Bush: Right, so he was unarmed when he walked in. I just want to be sure that your protection of the polling places is encompassing all enforcement or police agencies and not singling out just one. That's what this appears, that you're singling out one for one incident rather than coming up with a proposal that would apply to all police agencies in the same circumstance; the same situation
- Ms. Hernandez: I just wanted to try to clarify for Legislator Bush that when you have police officers, they do enter a building for, like Legislator Block said, an emergency reason; they're there to protect and to serve
 - When ICE enters a polling place, they're entering for a specific reason, to go detain. There's kind of two different types of policing going on. We want our police to go in for emergency reasons; we don't want ICE to go in and detain citizens that they might not even have the legal right to detain

A motion was made by Ms. Hernandez, seconded by Ms. Denton, to approve this item; Ayes: 4 (Brown, Hernandez, Romeo, Denton) Noes: 3 (May, Burtis, Bush). MOTION CARRIED.

- c. Amending the Onondaga County Charter to Establish Term Limits for the Office of the Onondaga County Executive and the Office of the Onondaga County Comptroller (*Sponsored by Mr. Kelly*)

Mr. May, on behalf of the sponsor:

- Asking for this item to be considered, and to keep it on the desk for the time being
- Practice of this caucus to respect other branches of government, especially when directed by their standpoints of responsibility and authority; intend to comply with all of that
- Not competing or dueling legislation; administratively keeping it on the desk until session or thereabouts

Item 4.c. was considered and will be referred to session.

- d. Amending the Onondaga County Charter and Onondaga County Administrative Code to Establish Term Limits for the Office of the Onondaga County Executive and the Office of the Onondaga County Comptroller (*Sponsored by Ms. Watts*) – Nicole Watts, Chairwoman

- Negotiated agreement arrived to last week between all involved parties related to term limits law passed last session
- Confusion surrounding whether or not it was accepted or vetoed by the county executive
- Not able to fully adjudicate the situation itself because there were questions beyond its purview
- Matter taken to the courts, initially by the board of elections commissioners
 - Case between the two board of elections commissioners where the conflict existed
 - County executive expressed intent to file suit
 - Judge called us to have an attorney also join the discussion at a judicial conference a few weeks ago
 - Judge Lamendola offered the opportunity to continue forward with a negotiated agreement, leading to the law that is sitting in front of you today
- All involved parties brought different interests through attorneys into those conversations, negotiated the local law sitting in front of us
- Did not remove the legislature's ability to pass or not pass the law
- Still has the responsibility to pass it through the regular legislative process
 - If not passed through that process, does not go forward
- If not passed, back at ground zero with the situation that took place before, because this law supplants the previous law
- If the previous law isn't supplanted, that law is still in a question mark
- If passed, moves forward to the county executive's desk
 - Agreement states the executive has agreed to sign it into law by September 9th, including the public hearing
- Agreement also has the board of elections doing their dual duties to put it on the ballot
- Most excited that term limits will be on the ballot for voters this November
- No other pathway was going to make that possible
- Voters have clearly expressed that they would like to see this

- Negotiated agreement, shared with all legislators, also has a statement on whether a board of elections commissioner is able to take the action that happened before
 - Determined this does not set precedent
 - If such a thing happens again, goes straight to the judge for judicial determination
- Local law is being considered the way all local laws are considered
- Crafted by the negotiated agreement rather than the more typical process

Item 4.c. was considered and will be referred to session.

C. Adjournment

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

The meeting was adjourned at 1:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



SPENCER D. BERG, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: WAYS & MEANS

DATE: AUGUST 25, 2026

NAME (Please Print)	DEPT/AGENCY/ORGANIZATION
ODEAN DYER	OCDWEP