

October 6th, 2026, 12:50PM
PUBLIC HEARING ON SEWER RENTS

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Onondaga County Sanitary Unit Charge Hearing October 6, 2026

Statement of John Przepiora, Syracuse, NY

The county's 2027 budget and the proposed unit charge revision will increase cost to residents and businesses. While the modification of the unit charge is likely justifiable, and it is sparing residential users, it does reflect a cost increase to county businesses and residents which can't be taken lightly. The increase in WEP revenue from users of the system is projected to be \$10,759,708 and based on the proposed unit charge increase of 2.9% and, taking into account the quantity reduction in 1 unit, amounts to an increase of 25% for customers using more than 1 unit who pay based on usage. **This is a glimpse of the future when the Oak Orchard debt service and operating costs are kicked in and when it will be imperative that Micron's share be allocated judiciously.**

The dreadful lack of transparency around County decisions must end. The public must be kept informed about critical policy choices which affect their health and wellbeing such as PFAS. The County must adopt policy objectives which provide assurances that hazardous forever chemicals will be kept out of our water bodies, off our land and out of our air.

This hearing is on the changes to the WEP sanitary district unit charge definition: changing 1 unit to 70,000 gallons per year from 85,000 GPY. This impacts commercial, industrial and institutional users who are required to pay based on water usage. Mostly not a big deal since the residential users are largely spared of a sizable rate increase but the commercial plus I & I users will see potentially a 25% increase (when the 2.9% unit rate is included) in the cost per gallon. Still perhaps not a huge deal but will potentially burden some users and is inflationary for county residents utilizing those businesses impacted. How big an impact we don't know since WEP never issued a report to describe the impacts.

The bigger deal is the county in typical fashion is proposing this without ever issuing an analysis of exactly how this will impact users. The public deserves to know what are the short and long term implications of rising treatment costs on the sanitary district unit charge rate? Particularly when the costs to pay the debt service and operating costs on the \$549M oak orchard upgrade get included in the next several years.

Talking Points for Onondaga County Public Hearing on Sewer Rents

October 6, 2026; 12:50 pm

Referenced JP's
Comments

1. The County is proposing to alter the definition of the sewer unit from 85,000 gallons to 70,000 gallons. This seems like a very minor alteration, but the devil is in the details.

Making this change will inevitably shift some of the costs of sewage treatment—one of the largest parts of the county budget—from residential customers to commercial customers. Our initial calculations indicate that the commercial customers could be looking at a 25% increase in their sewer bills. That's significant, and potentially damaging to restaurants, hotels, laundries, schools, hospitals, etc that use a lot of water. The cost of everything is going up—diesel is now approaching \$7/gallon. Do we really want to hit these institutions with a 25% increase in sewer fees?

2. The county's Water Environment Protection Depart. was supposed to provide a report on the impact of the change in sewer rates, following a Commissioner's Hearing held on 27 August 2026. The so-called report which was delivered to the county legislature after weeks of delay contains nothing more than a confirmation that a hearing was opened at 9:16am, no one showed up to make comments, and the hearing was then closed. It appears that no one has prepared a financial analysis of the change in sewer rents. But as I've just noted, the change could bring about substantial increases in costs for non-residential customers.

3. The county executive's office has often kept this chamber in the dark. The aquarium project is a case in point. Few details about rising costs were released to the public, or this legislature. On Sept. 8th, the county executive brought in a panel of experts to talk about PFAS, aka "forever chemicals." The public was not invited. No members of this legislature were invited. We were informed of it the day after it happened. Similarly, the county executive has set up a secretive Water Development Board to oversee the design, construction and financing of an Industrial WWTP whose sole purpose is to treat wastewater from Micron. No details have been revealed about the potential financing of that facility, estimated to cost between \$1.4 and \$2.6 billion.

4. Onondaga County has long held good bond ratings. However, the county executive plans to greatly increase the amount of money the county will borrow in the near future. On December 29, 2025, the county legislature authorized a \$515 million bond to cover upgrades and completely new municipal treatment systems at the Oak Orchard Wastewater Treatment facility¹ This is by far the largest capital investment project in the

¹ Robertson, Laura, "Onondaga County lawmakers approve \$550M plan to upgrade wastewater treatment plant amid concerns about sewer rates," *Central Current*, December 29, 2025, <https://centralcurrent.org/onondaga-county-lawmakers-approve-550-million-plan-to-upgrade-wastewater-treatment-plant-amid-concerns-about-sewer-rates/>.

county's capital budget.² Let's be clear about this bond: it covers only the municipal side of Oak Orchard. It has nothing to do with the Industrial treatment plant which will treat Micron's wastewater.

This recent bond has caused the future indebtedness of the county to rise to 1.02 billion dollars. \$892 million dollars of debt is due to wastewater and sewer projects—almost 90% of the total.

I testified before this body on December 29th, about the expansion of the municipal treatment system at Oak Orchard. "This project is the most expensive endeavor ever contemplated by the county, surpassing the \$164 million Waste-to-Energy plant constructed in the 1990s, and the \$200-300M-worth of improvements to the county's Metropolitan Syracuse STP in the mid-2000s. While the waste-to-energy plant and Metro projects were vetted with numerous opportunities for public input, this Oak Orchard project has been cloaked in secrecy, with no opportunity for the public to comment. One 5-minute information session was conducted on Nov. 5, 2025 in these chambers, with little description of the project. And no public information meetings were conducted by the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

The Oak Orchard municipal upgrade is estimated to cost a total of \$549 million. Included in that upgrade is a new 4 million gallon-per-day water reuse facility with ultra filtration and reverse osmosis equipment. These expensive technologies are included to provide Micron with extra-clean water for re-use in their industrial process. So I ask: why should county ratepayers be paying for a treatment system which is solely for the use of Micron? And why have the costs for these treatment systems been hidden from the public and from you, the county legislature? We deserve to know what we are paying for.

A couple of things we do know: The \$3.5 million pipeline between Micron and county facilities is in the county's budget. Also, \$35 million of sewer upgrades for parts of Clay and all of the Micron campus—that's in the county budget, too. Taxpayers will be paying for that.

In conclusion, I urge you to delay a vote on this resolution to approve the alteration of sewer rents. There are simply too many details that are missing. Too many unanswered questions

² Onondaga County, Capital Improvement Plan 2027-2032, 2026, pg. 29, https://docaccess.com/docviewer.html?url=https%3A%2F%2Fonondaga.gov%2Ffinance%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2Fsites%2F193%2F2026%2F09%2F2027-2032-EXECUTIVE-CIP.pdf&url_hash=fbce26be72b7bbca0fd6af2574285d35&domain=onondaga.gov&site=fb2a504b-61a1-48bb-9012-21da28a035ca&found_on=https%3A%2F%2Fonondaga.gov%2Ffinance%2Fbudget-documents%2F.

about its impact on non-residential customers. Too much secrecy about just about everything, whether it's treatment of PFAS, or how much of Micron's treatment process taxpayers are going to be paying for, or just what is going on with the \$2 billion industrial waste treatment facility.

Comments on proposed Onondaga County Sewer Rents for 2027

(Paul Doody, October 6, 2026)

I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed 2027 Onondaga County Sewer Rents. My name is Paul Doody, I am a retired chemical/environmental engineer and I currently reside in Baldwinsville, NY.

A major concern I have is related to the construction, operations and maintenance costs for wastewater treatment facilities in Clay that serve Micron. The proposed 2027 county budget includes big ticket items for wastewater infrastructure to upgrade and expand the Oak Orchard wastewater treatment plant. Some of these items are solely for the benefit of Micron, therefore they should be paid for by Micron, not by county residents. Micron is already receiving over \$20 billion in subsidies from the state and Federal governments.

On December 29, 2025, the county legislature authorized a \$515 million bond to cover upgrades and completely new municipal treatment systems at the Oak Orchard Wastewater Treatment facility¹ - by far the largest capital investment project in the county's capital budget.² This only covers the municipal treatment components at the Oak Orchard treatment facility. It has nothing to do with the Industrial treatment plant which is in design now, with estimated costs in the \$Billions.

The Oak Orchard municipal upgrade is estimated to cost a total of \$549 million. I am not aware of any estimates for operation and maintenance of these treatment system upgrades. Included in that upgrade is a new 4 million

¹ Robertson, Laura, "Onondaga County lawmakers approve \$550M plan to upgrade wastewater treatment plant amid concerns about sewer rates," *Central Current*, December 29, 2025, <https://centralcurrent.org/onondaga-county-lawmakers-approve-550-million-plan-to-upgrade-wastewater-treatment-plant-amid-concerns-about-sewer-rates/>.

² Onondaga County, Capital Improvement Plan 2027-2032, 2026, pg. 29, https://docaccess.com/docviewer.html?url=https%3A%2F%2Fonondaga.gov%2Ffinance%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2Fsites%2F193%2F2026%2F09%2F2027-2032-EXECUTIVE-CIP.pdf&url_hash=fbce26be72b7bbca0fd6af2574285d35&domain=onondaga.gov&site=fb2a504b-61a1-48bb-9012-21da28a035ca&found_on=https%3A%2F%2Fonondaga.gov%2Ffinance%2Fbudget-documents%2F.

gallon-per-day water reuse facility with reverse osmosis equipment. This water reuse system is included to provide Micron with extra-clean water for reuse in their industrial process. I am concerned that county ratepayers will be paying for a treatment system which is solely for the use of Micron. I have not seen details behind the estimated costs that would allow me to estimate how much of the \$549 million (plus the unknown operations and maintenance costs) is related to the water reuse system. It is imperative that the legislature obtains and reviews detailed cost estimates to be able to share them with the public and also be able to transparently show how Micron will be paying for the reuse facility that is exclusively for their benefit. I continue to be extremely disappointed with the County's lack of transparency on details regarding the proposed massive investment in our infrastructure that is being driven by the Micron development. The legislature needs to demand more details on these estimated costs so the County can demonstrate in a very clear and transparent fashion how these construction, operations and maintenance costs are going to be paid for. We need to understand and agree with how much the residents will be paying and how much Micron will pay.

My understanding about the proposed sewer use rents is the only proposed change being discussed is the threshold used to define how many "units" each water user will be assigned (assuming the actual total rent costs will be some unit cost times the number of units). I have not been able to find any details demonstrating that the change from 85,000 gallons per year (gpy) water usage to 70,000 gpy will achieve the county's objective "to make the sewer rent structure more equitable and reflective of actual usage". This demonstrates my main frustration with the lack of any details and cloak of secrecy around the sewer rents and how the massive expenditure to upgrade the Oak Orchard Facility will be paid for. Onondaga County ratepayers deserve to see the details so they can be assured that Micron is paying its fair share for the expansion. As my college professors would say, "show your work", so I request the County Legislature obtain these details and share them with the public before approving the changes. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.