



# Onondaga County Legislature

**HASSINA K. ADAMS**  
Clerk

**NICOLE WATTS**  
Chairwoman

**SPENCER BERG**  
Deputy Clerk

## **JOINT MEETING OF THE WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE BUDGET REVIEW DAY 3 MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 17, 2026 MAURICE BROWN & GREGG ERIKSEN, CO-CHAIRS**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mr. Brown, Mr. Eriksen, Leader Hernandez, Leader May, Mr. Burtis, Ms. Denton, Mr. Romeo, Mr. Bush, Mr. Garland, Mr. Kelly, Mr. Thompson, Mr. Meaker

**ALSO ATTENDING:** Chairwoman Watts, Mr. Ryan,

Chair Brown called the meeting to order at 11:08 a.m.

### **Opening Remarks**

Chair Brown and Environmental Protection Committee Chair Eriksen co-presided over the joint meeting, with Chair Brown yielding the gavel to Chair Eriksen to conduct the proceedings.

**OFFICE OF THE ENVIRONMENT:** Elizabeth Bough Martin, Director

*(Attachment No. 1: Onondaga County Office of the Environment, 2027 Executive Budget Written Statement;  
Attachment No. 2: Office of the Environment Project Information)*

### **Overview**

- Small department, but with a really large scope
- Mission to protect and restore Onondaga County's natural resources, ensuring a healthy and sustainable environment for all

### **2026 Initiatives & Accomplishments**

- Continued work with local, regional, and state partners to protect water quality
  - Focus on the two drinking water sources, Skaneateles Lake and Otisco Lake
- Efforts largely revolve around programs to reduce erosion of sediment and reducing total phosphorus
  - Reducing the likelihood of harmful algal blooms and reducing invasive species
- Another successful season of managing the water chestnuts
  - Three-prong approach noticeably impactful in the Seneca River
  - Mats of water chestnuts far less dense this year
- Completed the most recent greenhouse gas inventory for Onondaga County operations
  - Notable progress towards the 25% reduction in emissions in 25 years
  - Eligible to be a Climate Smart Community certified municipality

### **2027 Budget Overview**

- In 2027, expects to complete the most recent update to the climate action plan
- 2027 budget remains steady
- Budget is sufficient and includes funds for the substantial projects administered
- Will continue to seek outside grant funding
- Show appreciation for the many groups and volunteers
  - Lake associations, Climate Smart Community Task Force, wildlife rehabilitators

#### **Questions/Comments:**

- Transfers to grant expenditure line, a reduction; reason for the reduction?
  - Two programs in that line, the water chestnut program and the legislative deer and tick program
  - Never used the entire allocation; credit to the Town of Camillus
  - Didn't allocate that additional \$120,000 this year; sufficient revenues to continue the project through 2027 and partially 2028
- Does the county set guidelines, i.e., chestnut removal, or follow the state, federal, or local rules?
  - Complies with all state and federal environmental laws
- Do we establish our own at any point?
  - Environmentally minded policies on procurement, but no legislation, no laws
- Tree canopy study; continued funding into 2027? Completed?
  - Completed for the four towns, Cicero, Clay, Lysander, and Van Buren
  - Regional Planning and Development Board applied for a federal USDA grant to do the same assessments across the entire region
- Status of the Hemlock program?
  - Not one of the office's programs
  - Cornell Cooperative Extension applied for a grant for more hemlock treating
- Revenue line, a little more revenue than 2026; where is that coming from?
  - Interdepartmental revenue; service department
  - Bills out the time spent working for other departments
- Water chestnut infestation; making progress?
  - Change this year very noticeable
  - Canal Corporation has a biologist on staff
  - State found funds to help Cayuga County with their harvesting
  - Working group got federal money for the Three Rivers area
  - One plant can lead to 256 plants
- Onondaga County took ownership of the issue and created funding that gives a sustainable program
- Skaneateles Lake water quality monitoring; pull in the city to leverage their jurisdictional coverage?
  - Partner with the City of Syracuse, the Skaneateles Lake Association, and homeowners
  - Mostly implementation of the nine element plan; total phosphorus
- Climate plan and carbon reduction; any projects next year that contribute?
  - Facilities looking at energy efficiency in every upgrade project
  - Fleet vehicle emissions decreased; better emission standards

- Not one big project
- Biggest issue is tracking as county services increase
- How many volunteers?
  - Not county volunteers; lake associations tied to their own watersheds
  - Climate Smart Communities Task Force, about a half dozen
- Recognized the Otisco Lake and Skaneateles Lake Associations; worth looking at a way to recognize work being done on Oneida Lake

**WATER ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION:** Odean D. Dyer, Commissioner

*(Attachment No. 3: Onondaga County Department of Water Environment Protection, 2027 Executive Budget Written Statement)*

**2026 Initiatives & Accomplishments**

- Completed a review of divisions, i.e., plumbing control, collection systems, and asset management
  - Plumbing control lead time from two to three weeks down to two to three days
- Focus on meeting current maintenance demands and preparing for future growth
- Enhanced customer service focus
- Strengthened safety policies and procedures internally
  - Framework to promote a consistent safety culture throughout the department
- Key infrastructure investments
  - Feasibility studies underway to define each plant's capacity
  - White Pine pump station construction almost complete; ready to take on municipal flows
  - Meadowbrook-Limestone Wastewater Treatment Plant I&I abatement project in the construction phase
  - Camillus force main replacement project underway; seven-mile long force main

**2026 Budget Review**

- Forecast to finish 2026 within total departmental budget
  - Transfers between individual appropriation accounts may be necessary

**2027 Budget Overview**

- Standard salary and wage increases
- One new funded FTE, previously approved as part of the 2026 modified budget
  - Increased workload within the plumbing control division
- Supplies and maintenance and utilities appropriations increase, primarily due to inflation and contractual escalators
- Utility costs increase by approximately \$1.3 million
  - Higher utility rates and significant energy consumption associated with wastewater treatment operations
- Travel and training appropriation decreases from 2026
- All other expenses and contingency appropriation decreases by \$1.9 million
  - Lower anticipated costs associated with biosolids hauling

**2027 Strategic Priorities**

- Workforce safety remains the highest priority

- New contracts for air quality and initiatives to ensure worker safety
- Efforts to attract and retain talent continue
- Countywide capacity plan and comprehensive master plan in development
- Continued focus on consent order projects
- Continued investments in deficient pipelines and deteriorated pump stations

**Questions/Comments:**

- Status of the cogen at Metro; recognizing savings next year?
  - Expect it to be running by the end of this year
  - Expect to realize savings next year
- Status of staffing; people feeling overwhelmed with the number of projects and staffing shortages?
  - Requested staffing throughout the year; granted additional staff
  - Team ready to tackle the next day
- With the continued growth of WEP, incremental increases in staffing; what does future staffing planning look like?
  - Putting in VRRs as we go along
  - Focused on training; very measured approach
- Transfer to grant expenditures; zero for 2025; zero again this year?
  - Current project sufficient for education and outreach
  - Historically the only transfer to grant line
- Overtime exceeded the budget in past years; reason for the anticipated reduction? Contingency if it goes back up to 2025 levels?
  - Salary lines looked at as all three
  - 2025 overtime higher due to vacancies
  - Historically remained in budget between the 102, 103, and 101
  - Savings in the 101 line
- Professional services, the 080 line; what is the addition in relation to?
  - Mostly contractually related
  - Every five year permit and EPA testing
- About how much is that?
  - \$250,000 or \$300,000 of that increase
- Contract 6334 with Miller Strategies for federal lobby and consulting services related to the semiconductor cluster; still under that contract; part of this line?
  - Advisory and advocacy group at the federal level; also helpful at the state level
  - Funding available from the federal level; Department of Commerce, where the CHIPS office sits; regulatory and permitting areas
- Interaction with the EPA and USGS; logic behind using this as a WEP line item?
  - In the beginning, activity based on the WEP wastewater component
  - Now past WEP in terms of scope; general advocacy and advisory service
- Potential that future similar expenses would come from different lines?

- Anything not related to WEP would not be charged to them
- Drainage district evaluation; Bear Trap-Ley Creek is the biggest drainage district; start with that one beginning of next year
  - Will look at all four; tackle them in the most critical order
- Fund balance draw down of \$4.25 million, down from last year; fund balance target and plan for the pace of future draw downs?
  - Very strategic in reducing the amount of fund balance
  - End of 2025, about \$19 million in fund balance
  - Plan reviewed yearly
  - Eventually expenses and revenues equal without the need of fund balance
- User fees about \$91 million in 2025, going up to \$107 million?
  - Rate increase last year; much smaller rate increase this year, about 2.87%
  - Bringing gallons per unit down; costs associated with the highest users
  - More housing units coming on; stabilize over the next several years
- Losing people we're training up to the private sector, to Micron? Working to stay competitive?
  - Not the main concern; training very specific to WEP
  - Working diligently at employee retention
- Current staffing levels?
  - Able to accomplish all goals each year; current staffing level sufficient
- Budgeted positions versus filled positions?
  - Periodically requesting specific positions; focusing on infrastructure support staff
- No hiring freeze?
  - No
- Automotive line down half a million; crane truck for a specific project?
  - All-purpose vehicle
- Western shore of Onondaga Lake, effluent from the Solvay waste beds; who's responsible; any money allocated within this budget?
  - Some conversations; can give more information later
  - Yearly review and update with Honeywell; plan can be shared
- Any financial exposure to the county?
  - Don't believe so
- Contingency line, roughly \$1.85 million; how were we able to knock that out?
  - 2026 contingency done in partnership with the Legislature
  - Dryer project; moved from the all other account into the contingent account to report back out
- Who's been transporting the sludge from the sludge drying facility; where does that show up in the budget?
  - In the all other line
  - Through procurement or a bid process

- Contingency the additional expense?
  - Hoped the dryer would be fully online in the first quarter; not sure
  - Legislature reduced it; bring the dollars back for a report out on the dryer situation
- Safety officer added to the roster; how did we do it before?
  - Always had a safety person in house; more recently a safety director
  - Safety officer more boots on the ground at each of the sites
  - Building a safety culture
- Measurable results over the past year?
  - Yes; union wants to share the program with everyone else
- Fewer accidents, claims, or building culture at this point?
  - Building culture at this point
  - Will compare to previous years toward the end of the year
- Benefit cost disproportionately higher in WEP?
  - Based on salaries and historical trends; last year's actuals by department
- Comp costs by department in this category?
  - Yes; entire insurance program
- One safety officer for six sites; what is the safety plan?
  - Much larger than one safety officer
  - Daily toolbox safety talks; additional trainings with each team
  - Two people going over six sites
  - Procedures turned into one page
  - Director of industrial health and training people also work on safety
- Any safety related incidents in the past calendar year?
  - Yes
- Addressed?
  - Yes
- Automotive equipment; condition of the fleet; expect that to bump up in the near future?
  - Condition of the fleet very good
  - As the fleet ages, will need to request more
- List of the fleet; how many vehicles, conditions, mileage?
  - Will discuss with the team
- Maintenance and utilities line up; reason for the increase?
  - Primarily gas, electric; huge power user
  - Slight inflation on replacement parts
- HELP titles mirroring existing positions; through the state process?
  - Every HELP title has a corresponding non-HELP title
  - Funding for one position, but two positions
  - Funding follows the HELP position once it matures into a regular position, after one year

- Ricelli; with decreased reliance, more of our own drivers in the future?
  - Ricelli contract not taking work from WEP; auxiliary
  - Hope to see a decrease once the dryer runs at peak efficiency
- Types of communications between WEP and the Onondaga County Renewable Water Corporation?
  - Works parallel and in collaboration with WEP; same campus
  - Ongoing collaboration
- Who is sitting on the board?
  - Can get it
- Plant energy efficiency initiatives?
  - Cogen project; three cogeneration plants
  - Flare at Metro will be out; gas used to help power the plant
- Mechanisms for departments to find efficiencies across the county in automobiles or vehicle maintenance?
  - WEP is the fleet manager for the county outside of DOT
  - Every other department's vehicle reviewed by WEP on a yearly basis
  - DOT has its own mechanics
- Reflected in this budget?
  - Interdepartmental charges
- Provision for capital at zero for 2027; any concerns in relation to debt service?
  - No concerns
  - Utilizing cash from other projects
- Support the drainage district evaluation; explore putting it up a year
- What's missing from the budget?
  - Most difficult problem has been utility bills
  - Getting the cogen up and running and finding efficiencies internally

#### Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m. The committee will reconvene on Friday, September 18, 2026, at 9:30 a.m. for the joint Public Safety and Ways & Means meeting.

Respectfully submitted,



SPENCER BERG, Deputy Clerk

Onondaga County Legislature