PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 24, 2026 ELAINE DENTON, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Denton, Mr. Knapp, Mr. Meaker, Mr. Brown, Mr. Eriksen
ALSO PRESENT: Leader May, Mr. Bush, Mr. Ryan, Mr. Romeo

Chair Denton called the meeting to order at 10:47 a.m., and the previous meeting's minutes were approved.

1. **DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING:** Troy W. Waffner, Director; Ellison McMahon, Planner 1
   a. INFORMATIONAL: Update on Greenways and Blueways

   (*Attachment No. 1: Naturally Connected, Onondaga Greenways + Blueways)*

   Overview
   - Plan Onondaga, five themes; one of the major themes is blueways, greenways
   - Over almost a year, creating a grants program to fund initial ideas from municipalities on the implementation of greenways and blueways
   - Undertaking Naturally Connected, the master plan of greenways and blueways
   - Naturally Connected, the countywide blueways and greenways plan; not a final plan, still in development with the consulting firm
   - Primary consulting firm Colliers Design and Engineering; two subconsultants, Terry Horst Landscape Architecture and Sue Steele Landscape Architecture
     - Terry Horst responsible for the municipal toolkit
     - Sue Steele spearheaded the branding and wayfinding component

   Project Schedule
   - Started with inventory and analysis; from there, able to develop the vision statement and strategy development
   - Currently working on project profiles; scoped for 10 in total
   - Developing a municipal toolkit, which will provide municipalities with the tools and the framework to get projects related to greenways and blueways off the ground
   - By winter of 2026, the end of this year, a draft and then the final plan

   Vision and Goals
   - Everything in Naturally Connected building off the framework set forth by the 2023 Plan Onondaga, the comprehensive plan; greenways and blueways one of the five thematic areas in that plan
   - Vision statement; Onondaga County is envisioned as a naturally connected region where an integrated network of greenways, blueways, parks, open spaces, agricultural lands, and conservation corridors serve as vital infrastructure connecting residents and visitors of all ages and abilities across urban, suburban, and rural communities
   - Six goals, each with a set of actionable strategies
     - Environment; building climate resilience and protecting natural resources

- Economy; attracting investment and supporting regional prosperity
- Recreation; promoting health and environmental engagement of residents
- Society; advancing equity, community connectedness and cultural identity
- Transportation; improving the transportation connection and access across the county in a multimodal network
- Land conservation and agriculture; protecting open spaces, working lands and habitat connectivity for wildlife

Branding and Wayfinding

- Developed some concepts for Naturally Connected branding signage
- Through conversations with municipalities and the public, identified a need for directional signage that is cohesive across the county
- Some municipalities or not-for-profit organizations may not have their own signage concepts; an opportunity to fill in gaps; no one has to use this signage
- Still exploring how to implement a program such as this

Community Engagement

- Community engagement throughout the whole process
- Established a project advisory committee; meet quarterly; met three times, one more meeting scheduled in the fall
  - SMTC, Office of the Environment, the County Executive's office, CNY Land Trust, Finger Lakes Land Trust, and the Soil and Water Conservation District
- First public meeting in June at the Onondaga Lake Park Visitor Center
- Second public meeting scheduled for December 1st; presenting the draft plan
- In August, hour-long stakeholder interviews with user groups, businesses, environmental organizations and institutions
- Municipal roundtable discussions early in the fall; 18 municipalities in total; a second round this fall
- Online engagement opportunity through the Plan Onondaga web page; a story map and an interactive crowdsourcing mapper

Typologies

- Recreation greenways
  - Mix of different uses; multimodal, bikers, walkers
  - Usually publicly owned; connect different recreational assets, open protected spaces, parks
- Conservation greenways
  - Agricultural, rural or suburban in nature
  - Environmental education; protecting natural landscapes, plant and wildlife species
  - More heavily managed than a recreational greenway
- Blueways
  - On waterways throughout the county; fishing, boating, kayaking, canoeing
  - Waterways typically publicly owned; access normally privately owned; exploring public access of waterways
- Agricultural lands
  - Buffer zone between working landscapes; connect to scenic byways, i.e., Route 20
  - Privately owned, heavily regulated
  - Potential connection between two agritourism destinations
- Mobility corridors
  - Not urban environments only; suburban and rural as well
  - On-road options connecting with off-road options; sidewalks, protected walkways, protected bike lanes
  - Connecting trail users to public transportation
- Additional considerations

- Winter specific activities, i.e., cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, ice fishing; retrofit the existing network
- Accessible design considerations; aging population

Benefits

- Economic; tourism and spending, jobs and economic output, return on investment, quality of place, property values
  - Parks and Trails New York released an economic impact statement earlier this year; Empire State Trail running right through the county
- Environmental; climate resilience, clean water and healthy watersheds, habitat preservation and biodiversity
- Recreational; active lifestyle, physical and mental health, ADA and inclusive recreation
- Social; connecting neighborhoods, expanding equitable access, celebrating local identities
- Transportation; connects municipalities, i.e., the Empire State Trail; opportunities to connect with regional significance

Inventory and Analysis

- Data collected in-house and from other outlets, such as SMTC and clearinghouse
- Maps developed
  - Recreational resources; trails, parks, open space, water access
  - Transportation infrastructure; rail, other transit, bike infrastructure, pedestrian infrastructure
  - Land use; residential, agricultural, commercial, industrial, parks, open space, vacant land
  - Agricultural districts; economic input, farmland protection
  - Natural resources; wetlands, wildlife management areas, natural heritage communities, flood hazard areas, flood prone corridors, dams
  - Key assets and destinations; historic districts, shopping centers, entertainment, institutions, agritourism; work with the Onondaga Nation
- Multimodal infrastructure concentrated in and around the City of Syracuse; opportunity to connect outlying community centers with recreational corridors
- Trail camera analysis; Limestone Creek Greenway in Manlius, Canal Landing Park in Fayetteville, Charlie Major Trail in Skaneateles, Mercer Park and the kayak launch in Baldwinsville, a riverfront park in Brewerton
  - Trail users per day, group composition, user group types, ages, time of day

Next Steps

- Identified 80 potential projects; narrowing that down; scoped to do 10 project profiles
  - Link gaps that exist in the network; diverse in nature
- Municipal toolkit for municipalities and not-for-profit organizations
  - Meeting in a box framework; best practice guide and standards for trail and waterway development and access; performance evaluation and roadmap; funding resources; maintenance framework
- Municipal roundtable meetings late October, early November; hoping to engage more than 18
- Second public meeting December 1st

Questions/Comments:

- Specific example of how they connect?
  - Creek Walk in the City of Syracuse; connects parks, schools, neighborhoods with shopping and restaurants; also a waterway people kayak on
  - Outside of the city, the Charlie Major Trail in Skaneateles connects parks
  - Loop the Lake Trail the ultimate piece of connectivity; connects the Empire State Trail and the communities on the northern and western parts of the lake
- Already done several transfers to the program; how much has been appropriated, and roughly how much is remaining?
  - Committed over $2M

- Includes pay to the consultants?
  - Yes
- Funds available to both not-for-profits and municipalities?
  - Yes
- Timeline for when applications are accepted?
  - Rolling deadline; no hard deadline; similar to the ag grant programs
  - Draft plan ready late fall, early winter; presented at the December 1 meeting
- Funds available now, or does funding start after the plan?
  - Initial lump of funding made available to municipalities and not-for-profits to begin getting projects going
  - A lot went for initial design and master plan type things; some going towards hard construction dollars
  - When the master plan is done, release another chunk of money for projects that fit priority profiles
- Folks don't have to wait until the plan comes out to get an application together?
  - Encourage municipalities and not-for-profits
  - Got the first not-for-profit application from the Central New York Land Trust recently
  - Finger Lakes Land Trust very active around Skaneateles and Otisco Lake; worked with them on Shotwell Brook
  - A fall off in the number of applications; encourage submitting ideas; helps the process of inventory
- How much did Naturally Connected cost?
  - About $215,000 for the study
- Where are the applications available?
  - Plan Onondaga web page, under the greenways and blueways tab
- When these groups apply, what does the review process and timelines look like?
  - Go over them and make sure the applications are complete
  - Small committee meets and takes a look at them, including Dave Knapp and Megan from the office
  - Don't reject a lot of applications; go back to applicants with questions; most are well thought out and well intentioned
- Had $5M, spent $2M; how long is the additional $3M anticipated to last; how conservative, how aggressive?
  - Somewhere between now and eight years
  - Want to spend it as quickly as possible
  - Some funding intentionally held back to get the master plan done, to see the project profiles and inventory list
  - After the master plan, continue spending down the money as quickly as possible, in a way that is thoughtful and intentional
- How much money can a project get; is there a maximum amount, or is a percentage covered?
  - Maximum award amount $150,000; targeted towards planning and design
  - Some construction funded, especially infrastructure that prevents flooding onto trailways
  - Intention to keep it at $150,000
- So can come with just an idea and use the funds to build it out?
  - Yes
- State and federal environment for funding to help actual construction?
  - Extremely favorable; seen with the consolidated funding application; several funding opportunities targeted specifically towards greenways and blueways related projects
  - Federal funding anybody's guess day to day, but available
  - State funding more predictable, with the CFAs and dedicated sources through the EPF
  - Camillus trail connecting the Empire State Trail to the Village of Camillus and eventually Martisco; funding the initial study to 80% to 90% design
  - Initial design for $180,000 gets them to the point to apply for millions to build the trail; importance of initial seed funding

- Communicate at all with the snowmobile clubs; a wonderful template for how they work with mostly private landowners?
  - Communicated with several snowmobile organizations, specifically the Snow Owls, north county
  - Interested in the way snowmobile organizations work with entities like National Grid to utilize land in the winter
- Do the recommendations mention restrooms in the larger areas?
  - Categorized into amenities; restrooms, places to hydrate, places to sit and take a break, going into a village to get a bite
  - Most probably fits the goal focused on economic factors; pulling somebody into a nearby village
  - Not necessarily publicly owned facilities in this plan, but exploring
  - Placement mainly at trailheads; can't put restrooms three or four miles into a trail
- Best way going forward for community engagement?
  - Crowdsourcing survey currently open; put points on the map where using these facilities or noticing any issues
  - Invitation for the second public meeting, December 1st
- When the draft comes out, a public comment period?
  - Yes; a place on the Plan Onondaga web page to submit comments or questions

2. <u>VISIT SYRACUSE:</u> Kristi Smiley, Chief Fiscal Officer

a. Designating Visit Syracuse as the Agency Authorized to Make Application to the New York State Department of Economic Development and to Receive Matching Funds Therefrom Under the New York State Tourist Promotion Act for January 1, 2027 Through December 31, 2027

- Annual resolution throughout the budget process, designating Visit Syracuse as the tourism organization
- Allows them to get additional state dollars

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

3. <u>COUNTY LEGISLATURE:</u>

a. DISCUSSION: Confirming the Appointment of Dr. Jaynelle Nixon to the Board of Directors of the Greater Syracuse Property Development Corporation – Maurice Brown, Legislator

Item has been considered.

b. DISCUSSION: Budget Discussion & Follow-Up Items – Kristi Smiley, Chief Fiscal Officer; William "Billy" Barlow, Deputy County Executive for Economic Development

Local Farm and Food Security Pilot Program

- Some details haven't been hashed out yet; why it is considered a pilot program
- A pilot program is a one-year temporary program to hash out details and see if the program is worth funding for a multi-year larger budget allocation
- Idea to get more nutritious food into local pantries and give local farmers an opportunity
  - Food pantries often sustained by food drives; canned goods, things with preservatives
- Exactly what it looks like or how it operates hasn't been fleshed out; tasked with doing this fall to launch in the new year
- Lessons learned from that first year
- Question about a discount; not heard in conversations; haven't even got that far yet

Questions/Comments:

- Farmers need to know before they buy their seed and hire their labor; a focus group and structured input from the ag community, all facets, beef, dairy, fruits and vegetables, of huge value to the success of the program
    - Engage as a parallel first step with food access; sustainability of agriculture; keep prime soil in agriculture
    - Connect locally grown food with schools on a more structured basis; a great idea, intend to support
    - Plan to form a work group, identifying farmers who may not participate but understand the business; similar to housing and what the Chairwoman formed
- A few years ago, the Agriculture Council granted money to the Central New York Food Rescue
    - Go out to the regional market at the end of the day on Saturdays and talk to the vendors; leftovers donated or sold inexpensively to the food rescue network, then to the food pantries
    - Setting up purchases between the two; no downside; engaging the producers
- If the pilot goes well, when will that be determined, and when would the expansion come?
    - Pilot for a calendar year, January through December
    - Evaluate it come fall when crafting the following year's budget; continue it or scrap it
- In September 2027, voting on the 2028 budget, what will have happened along the past year to show the program is worth expanding?
    - Feedback from the recipients; the farmers, the pantries and folks who rely on pantries for food
    - Food making its way from local farms to the pantry into the hands of those who need it most; a success
    - Products leaving the pantry immediately and still more demand; a bigger allocation and perhaps a longer period of time
    - Not a lot of use coming out of the project; maybe not worthwhile funding
    - Not a metric ready to put on paper; results visible along with feedback from those involved
- A wonderful concept; a pilot is necessary; hope it is successful
- County Executive announced the grants for the food pantries; would this tie into that?
    - Supplements the work the County Executive has already done
    - Deep relationships with the directors of the pantries and organizations; make sure the money goes as far as possible

Economic Development Revenue

- $1.4M in the county service, other economic assistance revenue lines
    - Revenue derived from the boards and entities economic development staff supports; the administrative cost they reimburse the county for their time
    - Covers the majority of the office's budget
- Programmatic updates more beneficial in the normal programmatic committee updates; not specific to the 2027 budget

Agriculture Council

- In 2026, increased to $275,000; all for the council?
    - Correct; this legislative body added $25,000 last year during the Ways & Means report
    - Line in economic development, $250,000 for the new pilot program and $250,000 for the ag council

Gen Z Home Ownership Program

- Working on some additional information; will respond back

Land Bank Funding

- Land bank funding is in county general; $250,000?
    - Correct

Questions/Comments:

- Not comfortable putting money into these programs without strong metrics; i.e., O-CHIP, that money should be spent by now
    - Want to support the farmers; food pantries under stocked; is this the best way to address it
    - Asked about the 225 number not because it is too high; too low, and no metrics
    - Without knowing those metrics, don't know how to gauge success; need big wins
    - Same about the Gen Z housing program; $2M, but what are the outcomes and measurables
- A budget process; power and authority to assign dollar amounts to contingency
    - Chance to weigh in at a later date when there are guide rails and particulars with the program goals established; done year over year
    - $1.7 billion budget; $250,000 for an idea that has merit; urge a contingency approach
    - Potential to recognize the agriculture industry as a very relevant one; serve a known need in this community

Adjournment

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

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

Respectfully submitted,



SPENCER BERG, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature