



Onondaga County Legislature

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WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE REVIEW OF THE 2025 TENTATIVE BUDGET BUDGET REVIEW DAY 7 – SEPTEMBER 20, 2024 COLLEEN A. GUNNIP, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. May, Mr. Romeo, Mr. Ryan, Mr. Knapp, Mr. Garland

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ms. Abbott

ALSO ATTENDING: Chairman Burtis, Mr. Meaker, Ms. Cody, Mr. Olson, Mr. McCarron, Mr. Bush, Dr. Kelly, Mr. Brown, Ms. Hernandez; also please see attached

Chair Gunnip called the meeting to order at 9:46 a.m.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: Kevin Sexton, Chief Information Officer; Michelle Clark, Deputy CIO

2024 INITIATIVES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Continue to work with Verizon on bringing broadband internet to unserved homes/businesses in the County. The project is about 97% complete; 343 miles of fiber have been installed. 96% of our unserved residents now have high speed internet available.
- Continue to improve our Cybersecurity Posture: refreshing/testing business continuity plans, completed risk assessments, fine-tuned security tools, improved policies & procedures for our Incident Response Plans. Participated in table-top exercise w NYS BOE.
- Transitioned all county law enforcement agencies to county-developed app, C2, for police reporting; retiring old, unsupported app
- Continue with PC refreshes and upgrades to Windows 11 and latest version of MS Office 365
- Transitioning new county web sites to Onondaga.gov starting with BOE, Finance, Law, County Clerks, County Legislature
- Set up PCs, Phones, Wifi and new network at new EOC on Electronics Pkwy

2024 BUDGET REVIEW

County IT is projected to be on budget for 2024.

2025 BUDGET OVERVIEW

The 2025 budget includes standard salary and wage increases consistent with the baseline budgeting approach. Also included in the 2025 budget are increased cost in maintenance, utilities & rent and professional services due to inflation and contract escalators. The 2025 budget contains various personnel modifications all of which are budget neutral.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Continue with technology upgrades to replace end of life equipment including PCs, network gear; continue rollouts of Windows 11 & MS Office
- Continue to improve cybersecurity posture & information section training
- Assist departments in implementing AI solutions including ChatGPT, Chatbots to promote efficiencies & bring ROI
- Segregate WEP's network from the County Network & upgrade phone system and remote plant networks
- Continue rolling out new/upgraded county web sites to Onondaga.gov
- Assist Hillbrook and Sheriffs in upgrade surveillance systems and jail management system

Accomplishments and Projects

- Broadband Project:
 - Wrapping up project covering over 1,400 properties in the county
 - At about ~1,350; Verizon has run 345 miles of fiber with approximately 5 miles left
 - Into final stages
 - Onondaga Nation is nearly wrapped up
 - Big win for county and for those unserved; everyone deserves access to broadband internet
- Cybersecurity:
 - Have Security Advisory Board that meets monthly
 - Establishes and adjusts priorities; discovers new threats and best practices
 - Constantly making improvements and addressing things coming up on scans
 - Directive from County Executive to look into AI solutions – working with departments including Health and DSS
- Department Websites:
 - Upgrading to more modern look
 - Rolled out 7-8 departments; have upwards of 50 sites to do
- Assisting Sheriff and Hillbrook to upgrade surveillance systems and physical security systems
- Took over WEP IT
 - Made improvements to security posture; ensuring computing in environment
 - Currently helping to segregate skate environment (biggest tool to manage operations) from county network
- Working with DA and law enforcement:
 - Improvements to Discovery and managing video evidence
 - Recently brought all county law enforcement agencies onto Chairs II report system for police reporting
 - Allowed to retire 20 year old application unsupported and insecure

Staffing changes

- 101 increasing due to regular salary increases
- Requesting IT Director position grade increases
- Requesting to fund new positions to support well-deserved promotions
- Will unfund current positions and utilize salary savings to offset costs
- Positions to upgrade:
 - From Grade 34 to 35 – Client Solutions Manager, Data Communications Manager, Infrastructure Manager, and Application Program Manager
 - From Grade 35 to 36 – Director of Infrastructure Services, Director of Client Services, and Director of Application Services
 - Necessary to not only meet local standards, but also senior staff make more than starting managers
 - No incentive to promote into management
- Net total difference to 2025 budget is \$13,000

High budget accounts

- Professional Services up 3.1% due to need for consultant assistance with law enforcement applications
- Maintenance, Utilities & Rents – will continue to grow incrementally with moving services to the cloud and structure of software and licensing; vendors not supporting licenses that run on premise; forcing to go to cloud
- Still have number of Microsoft Office licenses to upgrade to Office 365
- VMware – important tool that allows IT to manage server environment more effectively and quickly
 - Previously, any new solution bought would require a new physical server
 - This allows county to use compute capability and run multiple applications on same hardware server environment
 - Broadcom bought out VMware and raised support rates 200%-250% per year
 - Director of Infrastructure Services reconfigured the number of cores (virtual CPUs), but kept same level of processing; hit is now much less, but will continue to see increase
 - Will move time management system to cloud over next year or two
 - Looking to move Lynx budgeting solution and Hyperion to cloud

Questions/Comments from the committee:

- Is there an area that IT has that is particularly old or is behind?
 - Done good job upgrading most things

- Still have good number of network switches that have been at end of life, but are low risk
- Not only cost of buying new, but manpower to roll it out; physical installs with over 60 sites
- Application just retired is CNY Leads that was 20 years old; most risky applications running internally
 - That was what law enforcement agencies used to submit police reports
 - Retired it and moved to Chairs II application
- How much of IT's resources, systems, and budget are shifted towards cybersecurity?
 - IT:
 - Several hundred thousand dollars spent yearly for cybersecurity solutions
 - CrowdStrike – paid \$130,000 annually, but NYS offered it to counties for free
 - NYS offering more, so IT will latch on to what makes sense to save money
 - Looking at other network administration and security tools to improve posture
 - Finance:
 - Cybersecurity is critical in environments
 - Continue to procure cyber insurance; across state, some entities cannot procure because of their position
 - Credit to IT team, as people are competing for county's insurance business
 - Last time had 2-3 responses on cyber insurance; validation to work the county is doing
- Broadband a great project and heavy lift with deadline to meet
 - Cannot give Verizon more credit, as they have been an outstanding partner
 - Verizon started 1.5 years ago and have nearly addressed all residents in need
 - Finishing outlier areas with a few dozen homes
 - Awarded to Verizon, as they would do it in a timely and quality fashion
- Is the cost for storage (cloud) due to Discovery going up?
 - Executive's Office:
 - Done through Axon (body camera company) that provides tools for Sheriff and DA
 - Volume that comes through is staggering under new rules and regulations
 - IT has worked with DA's office to implement different aspects of Axon to help manage data
- What are the budget implications for the storage?
 - Executive's Office:
 - Will go back and look for Discovery
 - Axon project covered through grants through DA's office
 - IT:
 - IT's budget does not take hit, because video storage is not on IT's budget
 - Provide integrations with Chairs II application to Axon and DEMS (evidence management system)
 - Making investments in storage to keep some video locally
 - Making things easier to manage video and introduce into evidence, so DA can review and use for case or not
- Is IT able to work with departments to find efficiencies?
- Why would it take a long time for a department to get computers?
 - Finance:
 - The DA's office got laptops, but they have been armed with PCs for quite some time
 - Executive's Office:
 - ADAs did not need laptops before
 - It was not because laptops were not available, or the county was not funding them
 - Now with video data and Discovery, have to have technology to draw from
 - IT:
 - Previously IT was doing 5 year refreshers, but found computers can last 7-8 years
 - Incrementally getting through all departments to replace old computers
 - Some departments reach out for immediate needs and some departments have additional funding
 - Have 2,500 users and over 3,200 computers in arsenal
 - Have limited staff with physical roll out that is time consuming
 - Imaging process takes several hours; then have to do physical deployment to departments
 - Encourage any department head to contact for immediate needs

- If someone's computer is painfully slow, will replace or upgrade
- Finance:
 - Area seeing more and more replacement is DSS and CFS, who run on state network
 - State not supporting the operating system, which forces constant replacement of PCs
- IT:
 - DSS runs on state system with their own IT support
- Is CNY Leads program still in place?
 - In place for inquiry access, but will be shutting it down entirely
- Would it be helpful for law enforcement to move to Axon with the camera systems?
 - Executive's Office:
 - Continue to look at it from cost and implementation status
 - IT worked with CNY Leads; upgrading made more functional and useable
 - In near future, will run into situation where it does not make sense to continue with homegrown application
 - At that point, will look at packages outside
 - IT:
 - Advantage County RMS has over others is that it supports multi-agencies
 - Unique in NYS that (i.e.) Syracuse Police can share with Manlius and Sheriff, where other systems are siloed in their own space
 - Have not looked at Axon yet, but last talked they were not NIBRS (National Incident-Based Reporting System) compliant, which is required by the FBI for law enforcement to submit data; also not multi-agency
 - Once Axon has the enhancements, then will look at to see if it makes sense as standard solution
 - NYS went to new program with painful transition of 6-7 years and is not fully implemented
- If there were more costs, would that hit the Maintenance/Utilities/Rents?
 - Yes; all cloud based solutions are in that account
- Are there 3 additional positions?
 - 3 creates, net is zero
- What percentage of departments are done with the PC upgrades for Windows 11 and Microsoft 365?
 - At about 20% for Windows 11
 - 60-75% upgraded for Microsoft 365
 - Target to be done in 2 years, depending on funding
- How many new computers will IT be able to provide based on the 2025 budget?
 - 300 - 400 computers
- Broadband – state and federal government spent billions trying to do this with limited success
- Verizon did nice job including running a mile of fiber through a swamp to be able to reach one house
- Mr. Donnelly has been quarterbacking this and done a great job in Onondaga Nation
- Nation members met with Verizon to see how to sign up and how it works
- Few little roads with houses on them to hit, otherwise received multiple messages for those that are thrilled
- Only disappointment is people that have other providers, but wanted Verizon; but goal was to get everyone something
 - There will be more competition in the county as a result of this
 - Upwards to 4,000 additional homes have access to FiOS that were not part of the original project, just by nature of running fiber by those houses

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION: Monica Williams, Chief Diversity Officer; Montanette Murphy,

2024 INITIATIVES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- *Created a quarterly newsletter titled "Diversity Today: It's More Than Just Black and White"*
- *Launching our Lunch and Learn Sessions in November 2024*

- *Developed our annual DEI Training Program, which will be available online for all employees to complete on their anniversary dates*
- *Created Onondaga County MWBE Certification, which will be launched in late October 2024*
- *The MWBE/DBE OneStop Program has launched, and we are assisting businesses with training programs, MWBE certifications, mentoring, and MWBE certifications*
- *Conducted DEI Onboarding training for 1,200 county workers*
- *Conducted DEI training for Onondaga County Libraries, Home Headquarters, Sheriff Department, and Liverpool libraries*
- *Increased minority hiring by 52% since July 2024*

2024 BUDGET REVIEW

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion is operating within the budget, and there are no areas of concern.

2025 BUDGET OVERVIEW

The 2025 budget includes standard and wage increases consistent with the baseline budgeting approach.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We are continuing with the development of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training program and are seeking new initiatives and opportunities to enhance DEI within the county workforce. We will continue to operate the MWBE One-Stop Shop, providing opportunities for Minority and Women-Owned Businesses, Disadvantaged Businesses, and Small Businesses. By increasing their capacity and access to opportunities and providing workforce development training, we aim to meet labor demands, decrease unemployment, and improve the sustainability of families in Onondaga County.

- Working within 2024 budget; 2025 budget asking for upgrades, title change and 2 unfunded positions
- 5 new initiatives
 1. Diversity Today quarterly newsletter – goes to all departments, keeps conversation going on what diversity and inclusion means in Onondaga County, where falling short, what working to do
 2. Department is growing and moving to 11th floor
 3. One Stop Program
 - Deals with individuals looking to get into construction and professional services
 - Offering training and computer access to upload information needed for program
 - Program is unique to Onondaga County, 1 out of 26 counties doing the program
 - Credit also goes to County Executive and Chief of Staff (Mrs. Stanczyk)
 - Lot of buy-in for what the department wanted to do and how the department wanted to grow county as far as minority and women businesses
 - Lieutenant Governor came to visit office when heard about this program
 - Currently surface starting and is something to look forward to
 4. Launched County's first MWBE certification program
 - Up and running within next month
 - Online availability for people to apply for certification for small businesses for minorities and women
 - While working with state, found the state is in bottleneck to get people certified for projects
 - Working with IT to get online
 - Working with Law and Purchasing, who are part of Review Committee
 - Review Committee will review applications coming in to ensure the applicant qualifies as a small business and documents are filled out accurately before being certified with program
 - Already receiving tons of phone calls for program
 - People in Onondaga County wanting to get certified as MWBE are finding it hard due to bottleneck with state
 - State reached out to use Onondaga County as pilot program; slow process as there is so much involved
 - Diversity is a lot more than just race
 - Job of department is to make sure everyone feels welcome in county; whether worker or community
 5. Lunch and Learn
 - Bring in people from outside to talk about topics dear to people in workforce
 - Safe space – able to talk about things and how feeling
 - Pronouns – what does that mean, and how does the county deal with it
 - How to get people where the country is going, so people feel part of the team and part of the community
 - County workforce has representation all over

- Everyone should be able to come here, work here, and feel that they belong
- DEI training
 - Gone viral for Onondaga County - lot of requests for outside training
 - Department does all onboarding training for new employees
 - Working with IT to get annual DEI workforce training up and running – hopefully online by November
 - Have been doing training for Sheriff, Libraries (i.e. Liverpool), Home Headquarters, Wegmans reaching out
 - Main thing is making Onondaga County workforce the number 1 priority, making sure people are inclusive of all individuals, and folks coming in are receiving services in respectful manner
- 2025 Budget Request
 - Upgrade for Chief Diversity Officer from Grade 36 to 37
 - Title change for Executive Director to Deputy Chief Diversity Officer with upgrade from Grade 35 to 36
 - Create 2 unfunded positions
 - 1 in Human Rights department
 - Another Assistant Contract Compliance Officer
 - Asking for unfunded positions due to space in the office that cannot fit more people
 - Idea to hire closer to end of next year

Questions/Comments from the committee:

- Is all the growth in the department new services the county is providing, or are they shifts from other areas?
 - All new initiatives that have not been done in the county before
 - MWBE was originally in Purchasing, but was moved to Office of Diversity
 - Human Rights Division was standalone, and has moved to Office of Diversity
 - Grown in initiatives and services providing
 - Providing spaces for employees who are struggling with issues – able to talk through things and give them tools on how to be successful
 - Grown in knowledge of what county workforce is looking to the office for
 - Presented with issues and try to find solutions that in turn can be a new initiative
 - Work closely with Purchasing Director, as a lot of what department does is compliance, which intertwines
 - Work with County Attorney
 - From legal aspect there is a lot of changes in Human Rights Law with pronouns and transgender
 - Want to make sure the county is using right terminology
 - Where is the county falling short
 - What can be brought in to enhance the county
 - Supervisors direct diverse workforce, which is sometimes harder than people think – work with departments to make sure they are being supportive of all staff and needs
- How does the department get the word out about outside training? Is there a request?
 - (i.e.) When the department did training for Onondaga Libraries at the Zoo, there were 115 participants
 - Libraries loved the presentation and called Liverpool libraries; word of mouth
 - As requests grow, is there a financial piece to this
 - Department's role is for the county's workforce, but what happens when other agencies are requesting training
 - May be something to look into
- Is there a possibility for expanding? If so, what resources would the department need?
 - First, would need more people
 - One person cannot be everywhere, but currently try to make it work
 - If it is something that continues and gains momentum, would need more individuals to help with training
 - When doing training for county staff, is it something that can be supplemented from other people within county
 - Do not see as an issue now, but long-term would need to look at other things
- The only local contractor awarded by the state for the I81 project was rescinded, because the contractor did not meet the metric of minority contractors; they are contesting it, but is there anything the county can do to help them?
 - That would be a conversation above this department
 - County does due diligence to ensure county is meeting MWBE goal requirements
 - Always reasons when someone does meet the requirements, but county does not have that issue
 - County Executive believes in MWBE program

- Do not know all issues that happened with I81, but if there is something the county could do, it would be the County Executive; understand it is a federal program
- What are the goals set for county MWBE?
 - 18% MBE and 12% WBE

BOARD OF ELECTIONS: Michele Sardo, Commissioner; Dustin Czarny, Commissioner

Thank you to the Onondaga County Legislature for the opportunity to discuss our 2025 budget request. Representing the Board of Elections is Democratic Commissioner Dustin Czarny who has served in that role since 2013 and Republican Commissioner Michele Sardo who has served as Commissioner since 2017. The Onondaga County Board of Elections has 20 full time staff, including the two commissioners. We also have 25 seasonal machine custodians that serve during election periods. Onondaga County has over three hundred and eight thousand active registered voters. To serve those voters we currently have ten Early Voting sites, One Hundred and Forty-Six election day polling places and over one thousand inspectors bi-annually for the June primary and November general election. We also assist the villages who have March and June elections as well as the rural and suburban school districts, along with library and fire districts.

The 2025 County executive proposed budget for the Board of Elections has addressed many of our wishes for 2025. The budget includes an increase in pay rate for our part time mobile technicians from \$25.00 to \$25.75 an hour. This is the first pay raise for this position in over a decade and reflects pay increases that school districts and villages that run their own elections have instituted over the last several years. The County executive budget also institutes cleaning fees for our private polling sites. We are losing polling places each year, especially among private institutions who find the burden of hosting a polling place to outweigh the civic pride of doing so. This cleaning fee will retain more polling places.

Commissioner Salary Raises

In 2020, a change in the classification of the Commissioner's title eliminated an annual salary increase. Other elected officials, department heads, and county employees have seen annual 3% raises during this period. In the last four years, we have seen some of the largest rates of inflation in our country's history. The election commissioners are re-nominated this year, and it is appropriate to address the salary for the next two-year term. We are asking for a 5% raise to \$104,971.65. This will bring the salaries more in line with similar sized counties: Monroe {\$153,534}, Orange {\$96,342}, Rockland (120,606), Albany {\$108,593}, and Dutchess (\$121,058). It is important to note that the Commissioners get no overtime and have led the department through uncertain election times while maintaining a cost ratio of spending to voter registration of just \$11.67 per voter which is the 5th lowest in all of NY State.

Additional Staff

The need for additional permanent staff for the Board of Elections is more crucial than ever. The OCBOE has 20 full time employees and over three hundred and eight thousand voters. That is one full time employee for every 13,959 voters. This is the highest ratio in New York State according to the annual report provided by the State Board of Elections. For comparison of similar sized counties, Monroe County {482,105} has a ratio of 1:9,642.10, Orange {241,849} has a ratio of 1:10,515, Rockland (204,078) has a ratio of 1:8,872, Albany {200,107} has a ratio of 1:8,700, Dutchess 198,801) has a ratio of 1:9,466.

The county executive budget rejected our proposal to add two additional Machine Custodians, and four additional Election Clerk II positions. The Custodians will help safeguard and program the Clear Ballot election system as well as the Knowink poll pads and poll print cabinets. We have nearly 1,200 pieces of election equipment (275 Clear Cast Scanners, 175 Clear Mark Units, 450 Knowink poll pads, 150 Knowink poll print pads, 150 Knowink poll print cabinets) that needs to be tested and programmed before every election event. The two custodians who hold the positions are overwhelmed and need support to protect our capital investment.

The four additional Election Clerk II positions will not only help with the influx of registrations that we have seen over the last few years, but it will also help us with the influx of vote by mail applications that we have received and are expecting for years to come. Also, next year automatic voter registration will take effect and expected to increase use of online voter registration will continue to burden our staff.

The low staffing levels is causing stress as we must implement voluntary and mandatory overtime as we must have every voter registration processed before every election event. The additional six employees would bring Onondaga Staffing ratio to 1:11,808 which is at a higher ratio in comparison to similar sized counties but will address the immediate needs.

103 Clarification

The County Executive budget allocation in the 103 account is less than our projections for 2025. We estimate \$1,072,328.50 in expenditures. This estimate is put together assuming a countywide June primary. It is reasonable to believe the primary in 2025 may only be a city wide primary, however we have no way of knowing that for sure. We won't know the extent of the 2025 primary until the petition filing period in April of 2025. At that time, we will have a clear estimate of what areas primaries may occur in. We leave it up the Onondaga County legislature to determine the best course of action to accommodate this. The allocated 103 in the County executive budget could be enough to cover a city only primary and may not need adjusting at all.

- 103 Account
 - Always budget for full county primary (i.e. judicial seat, someone retires)
 - More likely to have only a city primary in local year
- Did get money for polling place fees and more money for roving technicians that go out on Election Day
- Requesting 6 additional staff
 - 2 Custodians and 4 Election Clerks
 - BOE has 1 fulltime worker for every 14,000 registered voters in Onondaga County
 - These additional staff would bring that down to 1 fulltime worker for every 11,000 voters
 - Custodians would help with the over 1,200 pieces of technology
 - 600 poll books
 - 150 poll prints
 - ~400 Clear Ballot voting machines
 - 2 Technicians currently are overwhelmed getting everything prepared for elections
 - Voter registration is 90% of job in non-election times – facing massive crunch
 - 18,000 registrations behind – not atypical to happen, but less of scale in local election years
 - Voter registrations have to be done before election day
 - Averaging 50-100,000 voter registrations per year; used to average 25-50,000 forms per year
 - 6 additional workers would be trained and work on voter registration, early voting by mail and absentees
 - Absentee has application and ballot; takes staff time to verify
- Commissioners asking for 5% raise
 - No raise since 2020; everyone else in office on CSEA contract
 - Classification change in 2020
- Thank IT Department
 - Massive transition to new voter registration this year after last year's transition; company discontinued service
 - Switched this year as the service would not be there in November
 - Largest county to do this and used grant money to cover costs; no cost to county taxpayers
- Capital Project
 - \$2.5M from county and \$600K in state aid
 - Transition to Clear Ballot voting system, as well as poll prints on demand
 - Largest county to have ballot on demand at every polling station
 - As soon as NYS law changes, will be able to go to any election day voting centers, as done during early voting
 - Will save inspector costs and be better service to county

Questions/Comments from the committee:

- What does the grant landscape for 2025 look like?
 - Used almost all existing grant funds this year
 - Will be asking for more money from NYS
 - State given some money (whether capital or personnel) every year
 - In 2023 budget, NYS brought in money for equipment, which was used to upgrade capital project and voter registration system
 - 2024 budget, NYS put in \$5M for Unexpected Costs Grant, which gives flexibility; (i.e.) can pay for inspector costs
 - Never know what the state will do, but do know they put in \$357K for Onondaga County through Poll Book Grant
 - The new iOS 18 will not service the 5th and 6th Gen iPads bought in 2019 for checking in voters; funds will be

- enough to cover the replacement of iPads; January
 - Sometimes Apple will not service the iOS, so have to be on new iOS for security needed
- Does BOE have the ability to hire out for technician services? Has BOE been able to do that successfully in the past?
 - 2 Techs will add to the 2 already have
 - Would work with IT Department and Clear Ballot
 - Use mobile technicians, who get paid more per hour than in-house technicians
 - Mobile techs are not as skilled with operating equipment, as they do not get specialized training from Clear Ballot
 - They do not have familiarity with system and operate under guidance of technicians; lengthier process
 - 60% of tech's job is voter registration; another reason needing permanent people to do both jobs
 - Technicians are verifiers now for voter registration
 - Every voter registration has to go through Democratic and Republican review – forms touched at least twice
- Are the Technicians trained or certified, and is it extensive?
 - Yes; 2 day training in New Hampshire
 - Free training by vendor, only pay for lodging; part of contract with vendor
- Will the 4 Election Clerks help with the 18,000 registrations behind?
 - It is growing, but have never seen such a late rush; caught up in July
 - Part is the political nature of the year and the late switch in candidates
 - State Legislature moved the 25 day timeline to 10 days, which shifted burden for people who wait till last minute
 - 10th day is NYS Constitutional minimum
 - By Oct 21st, every registration in-house has to be in poll book by early voting on Oct 26th
 - Every registration in by Oct 26th has to be in poll books by Nov 5th
 - Going on 10 hr mandatory minimum overtime for staff; most working 6am-8pm
 - Will go to 15-20 hour minimums for rest of year
 - As seen in Oneida County, cannot delay registrations until after Election Day
 - Only people in office can do registration due to training and bipartisan checks
- In a year, what is the estimated hours of mandatory overtime?
 - Local year is low; Presidential years are astronomical
 - Start voluntary overtime 2 months prior to election, but as it gets closer, have mandatory overtime
 - Have mandatory for long days and weekends for early voting
 - Each year after Labor Day, BOE starts looking at mandatory overtime to meet burden
 - Most voter registrations coming through DMV and online systems; easier to process, but has been massive
 - Registrations dropped 2-3 times through DMV annually
 - Get duplicates – people register online, but so far behind, they resubmit; still have to look at all forms
 - If form comes in, whether duplicate or not, have to go through bipartisan checks
 - New system is better and faster, but will continue to have to do manual checks
- Will BOE end this year's budget in line?
 - Going to guess will go over with everything coming in now; today have 2 trays of absentees that came in
 - Cannot imagine will not go over with OT or 103
 - Only way to deal with added influx is temporary work; (i.e.) Inspectors and Technicians opening envelopes
 - Keeping specialized workers on computers doing as much voter registration as possible
- Is the county doing more early voting sites then required?
 - No; 10 is mandatory minimum for county; 310,000 voters – have to do 1 for every 30,000, capped out at 10
 - Been at mandatory minimum for quite some time
 - In primary, do one early voting site more than mandated; mainly because of large geographic area of county
 - Adjust staffing in primary – bare minimum staffing in early voting sites; still have to do 1 for every 30,000
 - In June, had 6 early voting sites, but mandate is 5
- Is there a cost estimate for how much it was per vote for the two primaries?
 - Can get that; at end of year, look at what was spent and how many voters
 - Not much more cost vs votes on election day with 146 polling sites

- Massive amount of Election Inspectors; most cost effective vote is voting by mail
- Are more people voting by mail vs polling places?
 - Yes and no; hard to compare 2020 to now
 - 50,000 vote by mail in pandemic, and at 20,000 now
 - Seeing more prorated ratio of who decided to vote, to vote by mail, to vote early, or to vote on Election Day
- Are there any initiatives or mandates by the state coming in the next couple of years that would increase costs to county?
 - Automatic voter registration is coming next year, which will create even more voter registrations
 - Other states that have in place have seen voter rolls rising 30-40%
 - Have form of that with DMV, but still have to opt in; moving to opt out could increase registrations
 - Law has been passed, but not implemented yet; waiting for state board to get vendor
- Would someone reach out to every person that has turned 18?
 - No, it is if they interact with a NYS agency; would start with DMV
 - If a person has a driver's license, but did not opt in to vote, it would automatically opt in; person would have to click to opt out
 - Anyone interacting with other NYS agencies would have info sent to BOE to automatically register
 - Do not know what it will look like until state gives regulations and guidance once vendor is chosen
- Will the state be providing additional funding for that?
 - Do not know, but will ask
- Is the NYS Legislature waiting to decide on anyone being able to vote anywhere?
 - There is a bill from Senator Rachel May that passed Senate with no vote in Assembly
 - No provision in Election Law to allow voters to go to any polling place
 - Election Law says the person has to go to a particular polling place on Election Day
 - Theories that the state board can authorize individual counties to do that, but hesitant to do that
 - Do not want to program machines to allow any voter in any polling place, then 48 hours prior a lawsuit comes in mandating BOE to reprogram everything
 - Hopeful the legislation will allow county boards to decide if they want to do that, and in what manner
 - Maybe Onondaga County decides that every polling place is a vote center, or that the 10 early voting sites that are open on early voting and Election Day remain voting centers people can go to
 - Until legislation is passed, hesitant to put county in bad position for lawsuit without direct permission
 - It would work like early voting, where a voter can go anywhere; would be good downtown with one at the Library, so people can run over there during work instead of driving home
- Yesterday, Onondaga County showed up on a list for new program that says if the county changes a polling place, it has to be reviewed by Attorney General's office?
 - Met with Attorney General, who was clear that it was not something the county did
 - Believe it is the racial poverty in city of Syracuse that determined it; part of NYS Voter Rights Act
 - In March, when BOE determines polling sites for the year, any that changed from the previous year have to be provided to Attorney General as to why they are changing it; decision is still the county's
 - Change of polling site could be a (i.e.) church was sold
 - Might be new law saying that if BOE changes an election district, they would have to do the same thing
 - Happens in February, March and May
 - If an emergency happens a week before elections, would have to brief the AG's office, but they would not hold it against the county
- Almost every department is saying NYS is creating new rules, regulations and requirements, but there is no one to call, clarify or explain, which is making chaos in departments; this appears to be another top-down over-the-top thing
 - Monroe and Erie are part of it; most counties with large urban centers, because one thing is array of poverty
 - AG's Office has been very forthcoming with BOE; several webinars on it and have been responsive
 - The requirement is something BOE is doing internally that they will now be sharing with AG

VISIT SYRACUSE: Danny Liedka, President & CEO

p. 3-36

VISIT SYRACUSE

2025 BUDGET



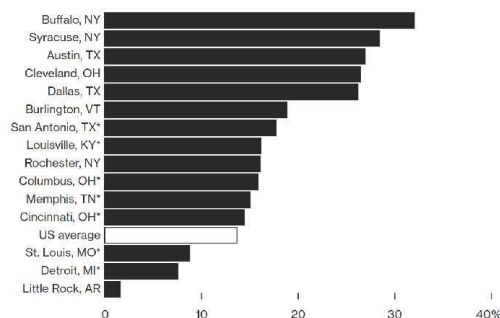
Our tourism economy is booming and poised to continue its upward trajectory in 2025. In 2024, the tourism economy will surpass the record heights achieved in 2023. The tourism industry has proven to be a cornerstone of economic growth, contributing substantially to local businesses, job creation, and infrastructure development. For the 2025 budget year, Visit Syracuse requests \$3,305,000 from Onondaga County’s room occupancy tax collections for funding operations and program work for Visit Syracuse Inc. This represents a 5.4% increase. The two largest factors in this requested increase are anticipated health insurance premium increases of between 16-18% and transportation costs tied to our decreasing hotel inventory downtown.

Hotels, restaurants, retail establishments, and cultural attractions have all seen increased patronage, fostering a vibrant local economy. Moreover, the influx of visitors has not only enhanced our cultural diversity but also promoted greater understanding and appreciation of our unique heritage. The investments made, thanks to Onondaga County’s leadership, in promoting our tourism assets, coupled with strategic partnerships and community engagement, have undoubtedly played a pivotal role in this success. Your investment helped generate over 1.2 billion dollars in visitor spending in Onondaga County in 2023!



Eclipse Boosted Tourism Spending in Upstate New York

Year-over-year percent change in tourism-related spending for selected metro areas in or near the path of totality, Friday-Monday period



Sales

Our convention sales team continues to achieve outstanding results even while facing a drastically changing convention center district. All 2024 booking goals are on pace to be exceeded by more than 10%, and the combined economic impact of these bookings will exceed \$52 million. In today's competitive market, achieving excellence requires more than just skill; it demands unwavering passion, strategic vision, and a relentless pursuit of perfection—all qualities that our team exemplifies.

Marketing

I would like to commend my incredible marketing team for doing an outstanding job. In 2024, we have seen a significant rise in both our website traffic and social media engagement metrics. This puts us on track to exceed previous years' numbers for the fourth consecutive year. This achievement reflects the dedication, creativity, and strategic thinking that the team brings to the table. Their ability to harness the latest trends and insights in digital marketing has been instrumental in achieving these results.

Looking ahead, I am optimistic about the opportunities that lie before us. However, those opportunities are countered by an extremely challenging time in our convention district. The looming Route 81 project and the dramatic loss of hotel room inventory downtown create the perfect storm. Fewer hotel rooms will create higher room rates at a time when price sensitivity is paramount. To this end, we are actively exploring strategies to mitigate the impact of higher prices on our customers, such as value-added services, promotional offers, or strategic partnerships. We will continue to explore emerging markets to help offset the anticipated loss of business.



Film

Visit Syracuse Film is on pace to generate \$30 million in production revenue in Onondaga County in 2024. This is a respectable number considering the turbulence of the industry caused by strikes and work stoppages. Film production serves as a dynamic economic engine that generates substantial revenue and creates numerous job opportunities. Iconic filming locations often attract tourists, boosting local tourism industries. These locations become landmarks that draw visitors eager to experience the magic of their favorite films firsthand. Additionally, the production companies and visiting crew members who stay, often for weeks at a time, further support local businesses, from hotels to restaurants, sustaining a thriving economic ecosystem.



- Main competitors are Rochester, Buffalo and Albany – Thruway corridor
- In 2018, Onondaga County trailed in every metric; visitor spending was in \$740M range with competitors close to \$950M - \$1B; hotel occupancy rates lagged by 10-15%

- Today, there is growth in visitor spends in competitive markets:
 - Albany County grown over 5% in that period
 - Erie County grown 28%
 - Monroe County grown 32%
 - Onondaga County grown 36%
- Went from \$675M in visitor spend, to record of \$1.256B in 2023 thanks to investments, marketing tactics and convention sales working
- In 2023, roughly \$70M in sales tax generated by tourism; ~\$14M in ROT
- \$3M investment last year turned to \$70M in sales tax
- Ask for nominal increase at 6%
 - Driving it is healthcare increase of 15-20% by carrier
 - Obstacle is hotel situation in Syracuse with hotels going offline
 - Sheraton offline now, Genesee Grand will reduce at least 50% and Crown Plaza will go offline
 - When hosting a large convention, Marriot, Sheraton, Genesee and Crown Plaza are the main players, taking 3 away
 - Now, customers will choose Rochester's convention center, or transport them to suburbs (not easy)
 - Will make arrangements to keep conventions here, as the situation will correct itself
 - Perfect storm with hotel situation and I81 – difficult scenario downtown
 - Proactively looking at other types of business to replace it

Questions/Comments from the committee:

- Please talk about convention business, and what Visit Syracuse will do as far as bidding with hotels coming offline
 - Strategy is a combination of both
 - Will drive business, but comes at a cost with financial incentives
 - Always look ahead for other types of business
 - COVID changed market dynamic from midweek corporate convention business to outdoor recreation
 - Tremendous amount of resources in marketing outdoor recreation
 - Markets going after were (i.e.) Scranton, PA and Erie, PA
 - Number 1 city driving business now is NYC, as well as Philadelphia and Boston
 - Coming here for great outdoors, great food, and it is more affordable than major city (1/3 of price)
 - Shifting makeup of business to be reliant on leisure travelers over convention business
 - Egaming a big deal
 - Syracuse University making tremendous investments and would like to host ACC tournament for Egaming
 - Competitors do not have to be big, fast, strong; can be any race, color, creed; any disability
 - Everyone can compete on par
 - The most viewed sport in the world; 5 times more viewers than Netflix, Amazon and other viewership combined
 - Initially it was at the MOST, but outgrew in 1 year
 - New 20,000 sq. ft. facility in Atrium Building – helping to market it
 - Tremendous investment in film to bring up business
 - Taking on a lot of smaller things to add up to the large convention business
 - What Visit Syracuse does is saves the average household ~\$632 in property taxes
 - Salt City Sports
 - VS created it with another operator
 - Operates Hopkins Road Park, Carrier Park
 - Where travel tournaments fail is lack of marketing and what to do after the game is over
 - Salt City Sports does the marketing and drives traffic; seen it grow tremendously
 - With town and county investments into the parks, this is the only travel sports company with professional marketing agency behind them
 - Advertising in (i.e.) NJ about competing in Syracuse for half the price, more affordable and more things to do
 - Want to increase spend and give ideas of what to do with downtime
 - Send itineraries; pre-email blast that goes to everyone coming for tournaments to know what to do in downtime
- Last year, the Legislature added funding for a local event to Visit Syracuse (VS) to assist with marketing; how did that work out?
 - Jazz Festival and Rhythm and Blues Festival – helped with marketing and attendance was up 40%
 - Had people from almost all 50 states; economic impact was in the millions
 - Going into small businesses that are tourism assets to help them understand best practices with digital marketing

and social media to increase their business

- Is Visit Syracuse willing to do that again?
 - Doing it, and have big plans with E. Syracuse for indoor basketball facility – do social media and marketing
 - Hired person to find folks that need help (who are tourism related) and will strategize with them to grow their business through marketing
- Please talk about expanded advertising and the role of visitors from Canada
 - Slow return post pandemic; not back to prepandemic levels
 - County does great job with parks; Landmark with Broadway shows
 - Will see Canadians come back full force this year
 - Relevant with news, print and digital in Canada with Ottawa being the most opportunity; little from Montreal
 - Ottawa – take advantage of relationship with Crunch
 - Have been reaching out internationally – spent time in Germany, England, even Australia
 - International market was singularly focused to Canada pre-COVID and is now branching out
- What can be done about the hotel shortage besides the County Executive building one?
 - Certainly appreciate the County Executive creating incentive plans for builders, but not sure the level of incentives will attract big box hotel builds
 - Interest rates and building costs are why there are not shovels in the ground
 - Met with feasibility consultants – if interest rates come down and see materials go down, do not think the problem will exist in a few years
 - When building a big hotel, \$700K looks good, but the gaps are \$3M - \$4M
 - Money will appeal to local hotels that will refurb or add on, but still lacking hotels
 - For an (i.e.) NCAA Tournament, the county has to have minimum of 4 or 5 Five-Star hotels, and there is not 1
 - But can Visit Syracuse go after other types of tournaments, absolutely
- Is there increased attendance and revenue spent for people coming in for the Amphitheater?
 - Yes, it has had tremendous impact on local economy
 - Based on last year, it is only going up
 - Geofence that area and have good idea on what the spend impact is
 - Look at hotel rooms one day in advance and one day post, the occupancy rates elevate to double digits
 - Average rate elevates almost \$50-\$60 dollars, which generates more sales tax
 - It has moved the needle on hotels; hotels wait for amphitheater calendar to set rate strategy
- Does Visit Syracuse do anything with the Zoo?
 - Assist the Zoo, but they have solid marketing team
 - Zoo numbers are off the charts, especially post-COVID; world-class Zoo
 - Closest competitor is in Rochester
 - Last year had record attendance, and do not see that changing
 - Investment from County and private investment is tremendous
- Is the Zoo one of the things people do for downtime when coming in for sporting events?
 - Yes; push the Zoo, Syracuse Mets, showcase County Parks
- With three hotels coming offline, how will that impact ROT?
 - Would like to have answer
 - Sales team at VS has increased sales almost 60% since Mr. Liedka started
 - There will come a day when the sales team hits the ceiling
 - Thought that year was here with I81 and lack of hotel rooms
 - Team already made number for this year, so have not seen the hit yet
 - Do not believe it will affect it a great deal; finding ways in future years to fill in gaps with other business
 - Concerned with city center and businesses that thrive on conventions; those business will suffer the most
 - Will be able to tell at end of year, what those paces look like; but have not seen the pace come down

- What is VS doing to attract sports tournaments and travel sports?
 - County is on the right track with investments at Hopkins Road including the super field
 - County can compete with Diamond Nation, as this is a 10 minute town
 - With Carrier Park build out and investment at Hopkins Road, will get county in the game
 - Underserved is indoor sports like basketball, volleyball
 - Diamond Nation is not easy to get to, and when a tournament is done, there is nothing to do there; have to drive half hour for something to eat; no zoo, no park, no shopping
 - Onondaga County is more affordable, which is the message VS is touting
 - Canada travels big for baseball and softball
 - If give VS the facilities, will pack them - families spend \$350/day conservatively
- How many more rooms will be needed?
 - Depends on location; strategically have to be in the right place
 - With 3 hotels going offline, minimum of 2,000, which will continue to grow
 - The county is going to lose some convention business
 - The second those hotels go down, the rates go up (i.e. Marriott) at least \$20 with supply and demand
 - Marriott is marquee hotel in city center; rooms become more expensive and county becomes less competitive
 - Has potential to be big problem
 - Micron will drive demand in northern county and downtown
 - Being hyper conservative on the number
- Hearing stories about the mall closing; what would be the financial impact on the region if that were to happen?
 - Mall has to be in top 5 of sales tax generation, so it would be a big problem
 - It is a tourism draw; millions of people go through there
 - VS has retail center across bridge from Embassy Suites
 - Fingers crossed that place survives, as it is a big draw; especially for Canadians
- There was a study done with Amazon ecommerce overtaking brick and mortar sales to the point it is even
 - Finance:
 - No question that brick and mortar was dying before pandemic; pandemic sped it up
 - If not for online retail market during pandemic, the county would have been in big trouble
 - Year or two previous, the state put in apparatus necessary to collect sales tax on those platforms
 - Critical going forward with sales tax production
 - If mall were to shutter, would be huge blow to local economy, as it is a big producer of sales tax
- Anything the county can do to help (i.e. public safety)?
 - Public safety not VS wheelhouse, but have had meetings with local hospitality industry and law enforcement officials on proactive measures they can take to keep area safe
 - More of a liaison; let law enforcement be the pros
- Pre-COVID, the mall was one of the big stops on bus trips from NYC to Niagara Falls; is that still happening?
 - Bus trips about 60% of what they once were; DestiNY does tours there
 - One area working on is agritourism - agritourism a great idea, but need to flush it out more
 - If driving tourists out to farms, need to make sure the farms are prepared to handle the volume
 - Working with Cornell Cooperative and County Planning
 - I81 project – doom and gloom, but what can the county take as a positive
 - Redirect people to take scenic route going by farms and breweries
 - Will see big campaign coming out next year
 - Not sure when big demolition will start; will do best to get folks off I81 and into more rural areas

The meeting was adjourned at 11:47 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

JAMIE McNAMARA, Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: **WAYS & MEANS BUDGET REVIEW – DAY 7**

DATE: **SEPTEMBER 20, 2024**

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Stacey Rhoades	Personnel
Selena Pappas	Personnel
Beth Mortas	Personnel
Brian Sheperden	Employee Relations
Monica Williams	Diversity & Inclusion
Montanette Murphy	Diversity + Inclusion
Herman Howard	Diversity & Indusion
Kristi Spaley	Finance
Kevin Sexton	IT
Michele Clark	IT
Ben Yaws	law
Anne Marie Donohue	Personnel
Donna Buscoe	Personnel
Melissa Colombo	Finops
Jennifer Paganelli	Fin Ops
Mary Washo	Fin ops
Dustin Czarnik	BOB
Sue Staszyn	CE
Michelle Saeder	BOE