



# Onondaga County Legislature

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Chairman

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## WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 28, 2021 TIM BURTIS, CHAIRMAN

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mr. May, Mr. Rowley, Mr. Ryan, Mr. McBride, Mr. Williams, Mrs. Ervin  
**ALSO ATTENDING:** Chairman Knapp, Ms. Kuhn, Dr. Chase, Mr. Bush; also see attached

Chairman Burtis called the meeting to order at 9:37 a.m. *A motion was made by Mr. May, seconded by Mrs. Ervin to waive the reading and approve the minutes of the previous committee meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

### 1. GREATER SYRACUSE LAND BANK:

#### a. **Confirming the Reappointment to the Board of Directors of the Greater Syracuse Property Development Corporation (Michael LaFlair) (Sponsored by Mr. Knapp)**

Mr. May:

- He has the business acumen needed for this organization to come in and help; fully support

**Mr. Bush and Dr. Chase requested to be added as cosponsors.**

Chairman Burtis agrees with everything said, and he thanked him for his service.

*A motion was made by Mr. May, seconded by Mr. McBride, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

### 2. WATER ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION: Shannon Harty, Commissioner

#### a. **Authorizing the Acquisition of Real Property Adjacent to the Belgium Pump Station for Sewer Purposes (\$264,000) (Sponsored by Mr. McBride)**

- Authorization to acquire single family home in town of Lysander; Baldwinsville Seneca Knolls treatment plant service area – northern reach of service area; seen development over the years particularly in northwest corner; flows increasing
- Pump station originally built on small ¼ acre site; had lower flows, but capacity increasing; now in larger category; normally large station on parcel at least ½ acre to ¾ of an acre; facilitate more routine access for (i.e.) chemical treatment
- First step in getting prepared for anticipating capital improvement is improving the pump station itself; current land not sufficient to support construction and expansion of infrastructure needed
- Property to south under environmental protections - has wetlands and not available for growth
- Want to acquire property north of the pump station as part of capital program
- \$264,000 – coming from a capital project; existing funding at WEP; no impact to budget
- Pump station driveway currently comes out to River Road and on adjacent parcel; cannot expand into the south with environmental restriction; want the other parcel which will give whole piece of land to work on
- Intent to have driveway and buffers for any other neighbors
- Combination of buffers and access; River Road driveway not safe to get in and out of and has limited site distance; no easy way to turn around at pump station (have to pull in or back out onto River Road)
- Because of size, typically have multiple vehicles; want area to drive in, drive around, and get around safely
- Pump station is outdated - need upgraded pumps and piping, as well as expanded chemical treatment; larger pump

stations typically have feed system to suppress odors; this facility needs enhanced chemical feed system

*A motion was made by Mr. May, seconded by Mr. McBride, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

**b. A Resolution Calling a Public Hearing in Connection with the Proposed Adoption of an Amended Schedule of Sewer Rents for the Onondaga County Sanitary District (Sponsored by Mr. McBride)**

- This is first step in adjusting the current sewer unit definition from 120,000 down to 115,000 gallons per unit; small but necessary; dropped it last year to 120,000

Ms. Harty responded to Mr. May that the fee will be part of the budget. The commissioner's hearing is scheduled for Thursday afternoon, then there is a legislative public hearing, and finally adoption with the budget.

Chairman Knapp asked what the current national average is, and Ms. Harty responded that she will get the answer.

Mr. Rowley asked how this is enforced and measured, and Ms. Harty replied that there is a meter. Sewer unit assessment is driven by real property tax data. If it is assessed residential or multi-use apartment, it is fixed flat based on the unit. For commercial and industrial, the water usage data comes from OCWA, town of Clay, town of Dewitt, and village of Baldwinsville. They give a years' worth of meter data on commercial properties, which is then divided by 120,000. That becomes the unit assessment.

Dr. Chase asked how they are defining commercial with a property that has commercial on the bottom and residential on top. Ms. Harty answered that she will look into the mutli-use facility. If there is no water usage, they are billed the minimum of one unit, since they are still connected and sewer service is available. Mr. May commented that at one point the county needed the city to get up to speed with their zoning. The issue was how the multi-use properties were zoned, which meant they were not being taxed properly. Dr. Chase said the re-zone issue is in limbo, and the reason the city is giving is COVID.

*A motion was made by Mr. May, seconded by Mr. McBride, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

**3. HEALTH DEPARTMENT: Dr. Indu Gupta, Commissioner**

**a. Amending the 2021 County Budget to Make Funding Available for use in Connection with a Grant from the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), and Authorizing the Execution of Agreements (\$11,046,875) (Sponsored by Mrs. Abbott-Kenan)**

- Received ~\$11 mil from NYSDOH; flow through from feds to enhance testing in schools
- COVID pandemic continues; cases continue to go up; schools open
- Crucial to have opportunity for surveillance testing; surveillance different from symptomatic testing, where a person has symptoms and gets tested in different labs
- Working with all school districts in Onondaga County (public/private) to create program – baseline surveillance testing in each school district; not required
- Testing, tracing, isolation, and quarantine is bedrock to address the ongoing pandemic
- Funding through July 31, 2022 - it is significant amount of money for time period, but have learned in pandemic at national/international/state levels that people are not prepared
- Not enough funds to support prevention and strong infrastructure for prevention
- Federal government has provided opportunity; does not mean have to use every penny
- Will have strong program to support staff, get test kits, and create program for PCR testing for asymptomatic children and staff; considering low consumption - is significant amount of money; would prefer more
- Cannot utilize this money in any other way, otherwise it will go back; or state may extend the deadline

Chairman Burtis stated the budget impact is \$0 and asked for an explanation on the incentives for children and parents for testing. Dr. Gupta responded:

- COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures should be based on signs and data, but that has not happened; things drifted in other direction with misinformation
- Hesitancy for testing in community has been noted; parents reluctant, because if they test positive, their child will be in isolation; right thing to do to reduce outbreaks within classroom/school district; also reduce impact in community
- If have baseline surveillance testing, can find those asymptomatic and not spread the disease; to convince people to allow voluntary testing is a task; people have significant concerns on how it will be used
- Health Department does not share confidential information other than diagnosed with COVID-19, or exposed
- If negative, that is good; schools stay open; incentives meant to entice people to allow child to be tested
- Most are for minors who need parental consent; have not used any incentives at this point, but had to have plan
- Percentage testing in each school is less than 10%; small incentives can be for (i.e.) books (not tablets, small incentives)
- (i.e.) Vaccination clinic gave kids little goodies or toys; proven technique in public health; makes people feel important and will participate

Mr. Rowley asked for clarification on the type of testing (individual or pool). Dr. Gupta explained:

- It is a combo – they are saliva tests; can do with supervision; tube with swab at top; open tube, swab the mouth, invert and put back in with name and information on the tube
- Have contract with Quadrant Lab - pool testing done at lab; 12 individual tests will be in biohazard bags and “pooled” into one (max is 12); goes to lab in Crouse Irving in Human Performance Building
- Take 12 tests out, PCR liquid pooled together, but individual tests still available; run the pool
- If pool negative, then all 12 are good; if pool is positive, will take bag out and individually test each of the 12 samples
- Less than 24 hours for pool result; additional 12 hours if pool positive

Dr. Gupta responded to Mr. Rowley that there have been many conversations with schools, and a key discussion was to say not to put all the staff into one pool. They could pool one staff member, five students, one custodian, etc. This way it does not take a chunk out of the staff. Regarding quarantine, the Health Department is not doing an official quarantine. If the pool is positive, it would be appropriate to quarantine. Also, there is no contact tracing done until final results are complete.

Mr. May asked for a sense of the appropriation of dollars, what costs the most, and what the drivers are.

Dr. Gupta replied:

- Biggest expense is the test itself; did RFP and took most effective vendor – easier for kids to do swab
- Look at max amount of kids that can be tested; thinking max of 10,000 per week (not at this point)
- Each test costs to get to schools; largest money is getting the test to Quadrant Labs
- Need a small number of staff – Program Coordinator (trying to get), have not hired fulltime staff yet
- Will have 1 Program Coordinator; 1 data person (required for reporting to state); 1 driver to take samples from each school
- Have not given any dollars to schools – schools must request it; grant allows for PPE, medical expenses; have to justify

Mr. McBride asked of all school children age 5 – 17 that have contracted COVID, how many did not survive. Dr. Gupta answered that there have not been any deaths reported under the age of 18. The youngest person she remembers being reported was in their 30’s. The delta variant is very serious, and it is impacting kids significantly.

Mr. Ryan thanked Dr. Gupta for her comments and advocacy, and he hopes there will be greater participation.

***A motion was made by Mr. May, seconded by Mrs. Ervin, to approve this item. Ayes: 7 Absent: 1 (Rowley); MOTION CARRIED.***

**b. Amending the 2021 County Budget to Make Funding Available for use in Connection with a Grant from the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) for the Establishment of the New York State Public Health Corps (NYSPHC) Fellowship Program, and Authorizing the Execution of Agreements (\$5,859,670) (Sponsored by Mrs. Abbott-Kenan)**

- Public health infrastructure continues to be cut at state and local level; negative consequences during COVID pandemic; emerging infectious disease; more and more new infections coming in other ways
- When state got money from feds, came up with the NYS Public Health Corps Fellowship Program
- Instead of giving funds, which would be temporary, create a fellowship program to increase workforce for the time being until have more resources in future (i.e. from state or feds) to improve the infrastructure
- Amount based on needs and guesstimation for counties; Onondaga County share is \$5,859,670 – they are giving people not money; does not mean county will get that many people
- State does all screening and looks at public health personnel who have a masters, undergraduate, or PHD, and who are interested in public health arena for the future; not just public health agency, but all health systems; state sends people
- County has rising rates of STDs, active cases of TB, significant opioid problem, suicide - Health Department does not have enough people to do delve into local data and do outreach in the community
- Infectious diseases are “easy”, because they impact physical health; other things in the background that cannot be felt or touched are like a volcano that can erupt at any time
- Can get up to 30 fellows; should be able to house in the building or work virtually; will work with the county
- All paid for – salaries, equipment; no cost to county
- Program for year or two max, then will go away; if plan successful, will ask state to continue, or will come to Legislature to say it would be a good investment for public health
- Fellows paid about \$50,000 with fringe; same as Health staff; do not want them paid more - equity
- Health staff working tirelessly for 18 months+; people are leaving health field from exhaustion and burnout
- Focusing on locals for fellows to come here, but others will fly; been going on for months; lots of outreach
- People go on website and put in applications; become part of training with Cornell about public health; look at resumes to see if they will fit the needs

*A motion was made by Mrs. Ervin, seconded by Mr. Ryan, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

**Dr. Chase requested to be added as a cosponsor.**

**c. Authorizing Advance Step Placements (Sponsored by Mrs. Abbott-Kenan)**

- COVID impacting community; creates challenge to recruit staff; 2 advance step placements
- Medical Examiner’s Office has accreditation; 2 Pathologists – Chief Medical Examiner and pathologist
- Have significant number of autopsies done in office; based on accreditation from National Association of Medical Examiners, 250 is max autopsies a Pathologist can do
- Chief Medical Examiner cannot do all of these autopsies due to other duties; more than 1,000 autopsies (1,100-1,200)
- Autopsies also include full services for Oneida County, as well as serving Madison and Cayuga on case/case basis
- Need more pathologists; not rely on contracted pathologists; if there complicated cases (i.e. homicide, gunshot), there has to be testimony in court, and the contracted pathologists do not want to do that – back on the county’s team
- Cannot get an experienced pathologist based on current step; County Executive can approve up to step 3, but unsuccessful recruiting; current opportunity to get an experienced pathologist who is very interested in joining
- Advance step to 12; having 3 pathologists will provide opportunity to recruit more; when in fellowship, they are taken by other areas before Onondaga County can recruit
- Medical Director – right hand; cannot do anything without that position; have to recruit someone; continuation of successful accreditation; same step 12 advance to get experienced Medical Director
- Make sure out there with good salary range; helpful to recruit; experienced physicians in community, but requesting to have stronger salary

Mr. May asked what the average cost is for an outsourced autopsy. Ms. Mignano responded that they are paid by the day. There is a cost for them to travel here, and a cost based on how many autopsies they do during that time.

Mr. May asked for a ballpark number, and Dr. Gupta answered that an autopsy costs ~\$1,200. The problem they are facing is that if there is too much of a burden on the current staff, then they will go somewhere else to be paid more with less burden. Mr. May believes the business case is there to make these hires. Dr. Gupta commented that having full staff at the Medical Examiner’s Office is very important.

Chairman Burtis asked what the budget impact is, and Dr. Gupta said it is calculated in the budget going forward.

Mr. Rowley asked how many positions are vacant. Dr. Gupta answered there are two pathologist positions vacant, and the current Medical Director is retiring. The two vacant are funded and have been for years.

Ms. Kuhn asked if there is a backlog of autopsies due to the shortage. Dr. Gupta explained that there is no backlog, and they have the contracted pathologists to continue to serve the community. A crucial part of accreditation is having a strict timeline to finish autopsy reports, but there are exceptions that will delay an autopsy due to complications (maybe up to 90 days). In general there is a very good turnaround time for autopsy reports.

***A motion was made by Mr. May, seconded by Mr. Ryan, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.***

Mr. Yaus responded to Dr. Chase’s question earlier regarding mixed use properties and said the entire formula will be included in the final resolution. The formula is 3/4 unit for residential and 1 unit for commercial.

**4. LAW DEPARTMENT:**

**a. Settlement of Actions**

Mr. Yaus recommended, as this is a potential settlement of ongoing litigation, that the committee go into executive session.

***A motion was made by Chairman Burtis, seconded by Mr. May, to enter into executive session for the purpose of discussing proposed, pending, or current litigation. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.***

***A motion was made by Mr. Ryan, seconded by Mr. May, to exit executive session and enter regular session. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.***

Chairman Burtis stated for the record that no motions or actions were taken during executive session.

***A motion was made by Mr. May, seconded by Mrs. Ervin, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.***

***A motion was made by Mrs. Ervin, seconded by Mr. Ryan, to adjourn the meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.***

ATTENDANCE

The meeting was adjourned at 10:48 a.m.

COMMITTEE: **WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE**  
DATE: **SEPTEMBER 28, 2021**

Respectfully submitted,



JAMIE McNAMARA, Clerk  
Onondaga County Legislature

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Yvette Velasco	LAW
Ben Yaus	LAW
SHANNON Mahony	WEP
Inala Goff	OCHD
Michelle Mignzo	OCHD
T Murphy	CE
Steve Morgan	CFO
John De Santis	Leg
Nick Pars	Leg
Tim Fratechi	Leg.