

STATE OF THE CITY
Alden Max Smith, Mayor



January 2015

How could anyone living here in the City of Oneida not have noticed all the commotion going on in 2014; the City has been bustling with activity. H.P. Hood has put on a \$6M expansion that brings with it 25 new manufacturing jobs. We are working towards implementing the final step with an improved access plan and projected completion in 2015. The City also saw the addition of Peebles Department Store on Oneida Plaza Drive; Martino's Pizza & Deli opened downtown; a second location on Lenox Ave houses another Community Car Wash; Napoleon's and Winner's Circle II opened under new ownership; Blair's bottles and cans opened in the Northside plaza and is planning to add a small grocery store this year; the Kenwood and Vine Restaurant opened at the Mansion House, and Coolstar International set-up shop on Lake Street doing brake fluid and antifreeze repackaging. Costello Eye Surgeons relocated to the City Center and their former location on Rt. 5 has been remodeled and currently houses an oral surgeon's office. The Gorman Foundation Community Center opened in the Northside Plaza, Consumer Services of Madison County expanded their offices; Oneida Savings Bank rehabilitated the old Salvation Army building on Farrier Avenue making it part of their complex, and Family Counseling Services opened for business on Cedar Street. The Greater Oneida Kallet Civic Center has reorganized with a new Executive Director, a new President, a new Board of Directors and a new vision with the mission of maintaining and preserving this multifunctional historic landmark.

In keeping with my promise to be both aggressive and vigilant with ending blight, the City sold several dilapidated parcels that have been or are currently in the process of being rehabilitated and placed back on the tax rolls. To aid in this process, we are evaluating our Codes Enforcement functions with a goal of increasing performance and efficiency. We will continue to create positive growth and work towards expanding the tax base in the City of Oneida. There have been many repairs in the flood zone to homes and businesses. We have seen several new houses built, as well as many additions, garages, and pools. There were over 250 properties that changed owners in the past year. Currently we are looking toward the opening of two dialysis centers, one in Glenwood Plaza and one in the City Center; Frozen Ropes, a new Yogurt store at Glenwood Plaza; Island Pride, a Caribbean restaurant to be located downtown on Main Street and the YMCA is planning a large addition to their current facility. All

of these new ventures will enhance the many uniquely diverse businesses currently operating in our City.

The City has received or will reap the benefits from the receipt of over \$6M in grants for economic development, housing rehabilitation, streetscape and sidewalks, police safety, drug and traffic enforcement. The Kallet Civic Center will receive a new roof this year, and the Recreation Center will be able to replace an outdated heating system. The Madison County IDA and the City are continuing to move forward with the West Elm Street Development Project to create a shovel ready commercial development site at a 400 acre industrial zoned lot and to meet this commitment; \$1.6M has been allocated.

The City has been awarded a New York Main Street Technical Assistance Grant in the amount of \$20,000. The goal of this project is to focus resources toward a defined area of Oneida – specifically the City Center – as part of a redevelopment and resiliency project. Focus will be on a Building Feasibility Study, with a principal goal of mixed use development that marries the historic streetscape with modern amenities to create an overall sense of place in Downtown Oneida, and serves as the first step to revitalizing the City Center.

The Brookside Crossing Townhome Project commenced their housing development on Fitch Street offering moderately priced townhomes as another housing alternative in the City. The Stoneleigh Housing Group was awarded a \$3M grant to build a 40 residential unit with a mix of one, two and three bedroom apartments. Tenants will benefit from the on-site laundry facilities, security surveillance systems, access to high speed internet services, and 60 parking spaces. There will also be a community building for tenants to use for meetings, birthday parties, etc.; an outdoor pavilion with garden planters for tenants use and sidewalks to tie into the existing City walks. Construction is tentatively scheduled to begin 2015 at the site of the former Casket Factory on Warner Street. This project, along with the Brookside Crossing Townhome Project, is a big boost towards the revitalization of our City center and north-side. The All-Seasonings economic development project expansion will be completed with our assistance in 2015 creating a minimum of fifteen to twenty new jobs.

The 98,000-square-foot Sales Office, the former administration offices of Oneida Limited, on Kenwood Avenue in Oneida is being sold with intentions of the purchasers to convert it into a multi-use building. Already zoned for commercial and light industrial use, a variance was secured to also use the property under multi-family residential and retail zones. With the building already cordoned off into departments, its current layout will be conducive to separating spaces for individual businesses with floor space ranging from 1,500 to 25,000 square-feet and twelve high-end apartments will be

constructed on the upper floors. I have had several meetings with the owner of the Hotel Oneida and am confident that we will see some positive changes with that property in 2015. We are also finalizing the Revisioning Oneida Flats Neighborhood Project. This will help the City plan for long term needs as the neighborhood changes due to the recent flooding and FEMA buyout program.

The City was awarded two grants, the Transportation Enhancement Program Grant and Transportation Alternatives Program Grant in 2014, to develop the Oneida Rail Trail. The first mile of the nearly 12-mile planned Oneida Rail Trail opened in September 2014 between Hubbard Place and Lenox Avenue on the west side of Oneida. When complete, the rail-trail system will use three former railroad corridors to provide access to much of the community, as well as a connection to the existing Erie Canalway Trail. A roughly 6-mile loop via the bisecting corridors will also provide a popular recreation route around the city. Atlanta, Georgia was recently given national recognition as a model city for a similar development project. We must all take advantage of our historical railway beds and the largest contiguous span of the old Erie Canal, the vehicle that allowed the westward expansion of this great nation, as assets to promote tourism. The Recreation Center had over 35,000 visitors pass through its doors in 2014 and administered over 25 different programs, events and activities. In 2014, there were a total of 451 rentals, which generated \$37,612 at the Recreation Center. The Recreation Center gym had new energy efficient lighting installed in 2014 replacing the old and outdated lights.

A WQIP grant was awarded in November for \$46,041 and Madison County Soil and Water, along with the City, began submitting for permits in November. The Maxwell Field Streambank Restoration project consists of approximately 420 linear feet of stone rip rap stabilization for a section of streambank at the youth baseball complex. Extensive bank erosion has been observed over the years contiguous to the baseball field creating a safety concern for the users and maintenance staff.

Over 150 legal and public notices were filed by the City Clerk in 2014 to comply with the Open Meetings Law and eleven new Local Laws were filed with New York State. The City Clerk's office recorded 464 births, 250 deaths and issued 102 marriage licenses in 2014. Thousands of certified copies of various vital records are issued by the City Clerk's office each year to the public and government agencies. There were 955 dogs licensed in the City, and a variety of more than 1,500 permits, licenses and services were provided that included handicapped parking permits; fire department permits; foil requests; notary services; genealogy requests; landfill coupons sold; bingo and bell jar licenses; building, sign and sewer permits; ZBA and Planning department permits; deed recording fees and many other miscellaneous licenses.

In 2014, the Oneida City Police department saw an increase in arrests, felony level charges and traffic summonses issued. The department continues to work with many agencies and schools on community and safety initiatives. Community relation projects, such as the Good Child Award, Department Intern Program and various community events, promote a positive relationship with the public. Working with City officials, a slight schedule adjustment was made to provide better staffing levels at certain times and overtime was reduced to \$17,000 under budget, with an additional \$16,000 received in reimbursements to offset overtime costs. Several details to address distracted driving, texting and cell phone use were conducted along with school bus safety, seat belts, speeding and aggressive driving. The sale and possession of illegal drugs continues to be a priority with several arrests through investigations and working with various agencies. The City will continue to provide an effective police department while keeping costs down. Comparisons among similar jurisdictions substantiate those efforts. Oneida has two times the square miles and one-half to one-third fewer officers to accomplish this task, as cities of similar size.

The City's Fire Department responded to 1,696 EMS calls in 2014, and as the rescue truck is the workhorse of the department, this year the City will be replacing the 15 year old truck that needs major repairs. An aging fire engine in need of substantial repair will also be replaced, along with the 25+ year old outdated SCBA air packs, which are coming close to mandatory out of service dates. A grant has been applied for through FEMA for the air packs and hopefully the City will be awarded those funds. This year will be the final year the City will be operating a municipal alarm system. The City decided in 2014, following the recommendation of the Fire Chief, to remove this aging system in an effort to provide commercial property owners with improved monitoring of their fire and sprinkler alarm systems. At my direction, the Fire Department will continue to focus on neighborhood aesthetics, identifying those homeowners with violations and concentrate on having them clean up their properties, which will in turn increase property values for that homeowner, as well as for the neighborhood and our City. Home ownership is a privilege, not a right, and with that privilege comes a responsibility to your neighbors and to this community.

In December of 2014, the City began upgrading its computer operating systems and servers to enhance end user security. While no system ensures that systems are immune from malicious attacks, keeping hardware and operating systems current will enhance our ability to improve security, as well as, our user productivity. The City has updated its website and continues to use the social media outlets available. The Police department's Facebook page has over 2,000 likes and has been key in identifying suspects that have been captured on video committing various crimes. The City Clerk, Fire and

Recreation Departments Facebook pages also continue to provide our residents with up-to-date information.

The Community Development Program will continue to assist local homeowners in need of housing rehabilitation to improve City housing stock. In 2014, approximately 18 housing units in the City were rehabilitated, bringing them up to code, testing for lead and radon, and making them safer and more energy efficient. We will continue to apply for funding to maintain the City's Housing Rehabilitation Program.

The City started this year with a slight decrease in the minimum charge for water. Water is still affordable in the City, with the average home only expending \$405 per year for 80,000 gallons. Two hundred gallons are delivered for only a dollar, which in comparison is much less than the cost of a 16 ounce bottle of water at a convenience store. Meeting regulations is expensive and always challenging. Over the past 25 years both Federal and State regulations governing the operation of the water system has driven costs higher. Operating a utility requires that funds are available to meet expectations, obligations and regulations. Water rates will continue to rise in the future to meet these costs. Providing safe water, reliable service and keeping it affordable is our goal. The City of Oneida has a continuing program to replace water mains and bring them to current standards to meet capacity, reliability and quality that is expected today. The City in the past 25 years has replaced 10.8 miles of existing main and expanded the distribution system with the installation of 11.8 miles with a benefit of improved water quality and reduction in water main breaks. Disruptions in water supply have been minimized, as has the risk of contamination. Planned replacements for 2015 will include replacement of a circa 1927 main on Williams Street with new 12" ductile iron, reinforcing flow into the City. The City will continue to replace meters in 2015 to ensure older meters are replaced prior to failure and degradation of accuracy. Radio reads are also being installed at select locations to reduce meter reading time.

The City made a major improvement in the water transmission system in 2014 with the completion of the \$3.3M Fish Creek Crossing Project. This challenging project involved relocating the main transmission line from its precarious location to a more stable crossing $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile downstream at Taberg's Main Street Bridge. This project was completed under budget. In 2015, the permitting and final design continues on the Dam upgrades at Glenmore Reservoir. This circa 1923 structure will undergo security, structural and mechanical upgrades as part of the rehabilitation. Included will be the raising of the spillway an additional two feet to recapture lost storage due to sedimentation. This will restore the safe-yield to 4.0 million gallons per day (MGD).

The driving force behind water rates is the ever increasing regulatory burden coupled with the need to update an aging infrastructure. The Glenmore Treatment Plant is thirty six (36) years old and most of the plant is untouched since construction. Ongoing maintenance will increase with the need for a significant plant upgrade at some point in the near future. The City is working with nearby municipalities on a Smart Grant obtained from the State. The Smart Grid Study will be utilized to examine regional water issues affecting involved communities and develop joint cost saving solutions to meet current and future water needs in an affordable manner.

Several major projects at the City's Waste Water Treatment Plant are ongoing under the direction of the City Engineer. The WWTP Flood Mitigation will limit the potential for damage from flood inundation. The project would be designed to the 2013 flood event plus 1-ft per FEMA requirements. The alternatives review and design portion of the project started in 2014, and will include sheet pile wall flood protection, on-site storm-water improvements and mechanical equipment upgrades. Currently, construction drawings and bid documents are substantially complete. This project will be 75% funded with FEMA mitigation funds with the total estimated cost at \$1.2M.

The WWTP Gas Monitoring and Biogas Flare Project is predominately a worker health and safety project. Design began in 2014, and the project is currently being advertised for bid. The project includes installation of hazardous gas detection devices within the plant to alert WWTP staff of potential danger. The project also includes installation of a new digester gas flare to accommodate mechanical issues occurring with the cogeneration unit.

In 2015, a main line camera to inspect and track sewer pipe network conditions will be purchased. The city will invest in GIS mapping software to manage its sanitary sewer pipe network inspection. We anticipate that the software will expand to incorporate multiple infrastructure elements to efficiently track and manage systems. The camera's inspection data will be tracked and managed via the GIS software. The inspection camera will allow the City to better manage the pipe network for repair and rehab work.

I am pleased to have been instrumental in developing a Municipal Solar Project that will include the installation of an approximately 2.8 MW solar array via power purchase agreement. The project utilizes a public-private partnership in order to take advantage of federal incentives and will potentially save the City over \$100K in the first year alone and annually saving \$400K by year 25 (upwards of \$6M), utilizing no taxpayer dollars. We will continue to pursue alternative energy opportunities. The Climate Action Plan completed in 2014 provides strategies for the City and residents to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2015, the City will be updating its DPW truck fleet to replace a 15 year old six wheel

vehicle. We will be updating our snow and ice operations to include a combined body system to allow for material spreading and pre-wet salt applications. We will also be implementing an ant-ice brine system to reduce salt use. We are currently working with the NYS DOT on an agreement for brine supply.

I must close with recognition and thanks to department heads, employees, members of the City Council and the nearly 50 people who serve as unpaid volunteers on our many boards and commissions. From fire protection, building safety, law enforcement challenges of a changing society, the myriad of complex issues developing and guiding our numerous projects and economic expansion, to the competent guidance and performance I receive from our management team on a daily basis; I am proud and grateful.

2015 is shaping up to be another lively year. I am proud that we are rebuilding our neighborhoods, growing our economy, improving our parks and cleaning up our City and we aren't just talking about it, we are doing it. We have identified our opportunities, as well as our problems, and we are working toward making Oneida a place that welcomes change, meets challenges and embraces the future. I love this City and I know that many of you love it too, so please have faith in your City and together we can make certain that our future is brighter than our past and that Oneida continues to be a wonderful place to live, work, and visit for decades to come.