

**MINUTES OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
NOVEMBER 10, 2015**

A special meeting of the Common Council of the City of Oneida, NY was held on the 10th day of November, 2015 at 6:32 P.M. in Council Chambers, Oneida Municipal Building, 109 N. Main Street, Oneida, NY.

Meeting was called to order by Deputy Mayor Helen Acker

PRESENT: Mayor Alden M. Smith, Councilors Brahim Zogby, Michael Bowe, Erwin Smith, Helen Acker, James Chamberlain, and Thomas Simchik

ALSO PRESENT: Assessor Lonnie Stedman
City Clerk Susan Pulverenti
Civil Service Officer Peg Margo
Comptroller Linda Pease
Police Chief David Meeker
Public Safety Commissioner Mike Kaiser

Discussion 2016 Mayor's Budget

Deputy Mayor Acker said this is a work session for the Council to discuss the budget.

The Comptroller provided an updated salary schedule to the Council.

Assessor Lonnie Stedman said that his budget, on page 25, is pretty much the same as last year. He said that part-time help was cut almost \$2,500. The expenses on property acquired, pages 25-26, was lowered to \$10K. He suggested that \$1,200.00 should be added to the 001.1364.0403 line (property acquired insurance), and the Council agreed. He said a small amount should be included in the exterior maintenance and interior maintenance lines for property acquired, reminding Council that the City has been taking properties. A brief discussion ensued of the taxes/insurances paid on properties acquired. He suggested adding some funding for demolition (page 33), as there is a house the City owns on Upper Lenox that needs to come down. He said there is another in the flats, but that should fall into the buyout. Councilor Smith said there was no insurance on the house that burned on N. Willow Street, and the City will probably have to demo that as well. Councilor Zogby said it has been a month since the Council agreed to compensate the Assessor for the extra time spent on the recent properties acquired. He asked that the City Clerk prepare a resolution for the next agenda.

Councilor Bowe said the Police budget is on page 30. Police Chief Meeker said that he verified with the Deputy Comptroller that there will be about \$100K left over in the police salaries line because of retirements and hiring new officers at a lessor rate. He would like to use those funds to purchase one marked and one unmarked vehicle, and the discussion started. The Chief said they used to have five vehicles and a spare, and they will be down a couple. He said generally a vehicle is in for repairs, as well. Chief Meeker said they can buy two vehicles off the State bid for \$60K, as unmarked cars are plain and cost less (\$40K marked and \$20K unmarked). The Comptroller said that if they are ordered this year, they can be carried over. Councilor Bowe said hard prices would be needed, and Deputy Mayor Acker said the Council has to be mindful of the amount coming out of Fund Balance. The discussion also included leasing vehicles and checking with local dealers for vehicle availability. Councilor Bowe said that dealers who accept the State Bid may have additional vehicles on their lots, and Chief Meeker said he will look into that.

Chief Meeker said that under Mayor Hedglon, the department had a directed patrol fund used to patrol problem areas on foot or bicycles. He said he would like to add \$15K to overtime for that directed patrol, so it can be scheduled on a regular basis. The police officers went into the apartment buildings and talked with tenants, retrieved information, and it was well received. He said there are staffing concerns in the department, as last year they just filled shifts with personnel leaving and training. Chief Meeker said there are two officers eligible to retire next year, but he is not certain if they will retire or not. Part-time officers were briefly discussed, noting the initial cost is quite high with uniforms, training, equipment, etc.

Civil Service Officer Peg Margo said she had notified the Mayor that she was planning on retiring. She said she provided the Mayor with the procedures the City has to follow to abolish the Civil Service Commission and have the County take over the Civil Service portion of her job. The law provides that the County has up to a year to do so, but it could be done sooner. Councilor Smith asked if personnel would be needed and the County and Ms. Margo said they have indicated to her that they would. The Civil Service portion includes the school, library and Housing Authority, as well as the City of Oneida. She stated there are a number of duties performed by her office that do not fall under Civil Service, including benefits, workers comp, retirement, mandatory training, drug testing, coordinating anything with employees, personnel actions, insurances, etc., and someone would have to take over those tasks. Ms. Margo said a big portion of her day is consumed with dealing with employees/retirees, be it in person or on the phone. She said that the City receives approximately \$10K from the school system for Civil Service duties. Mayor Smith explained the present Civil Service Law, and said the Council could enter into a Memo of Understanding with the County to provide the services until the formal announcement is made. Ms. Margo said the Personnel Officer at the County said they would have to hire another person to takeover this commitment, because of the size of the City, schools, etc., and Councilor Smith asked how much is that going to cost the City. He said if we have to pay the County, then the City should just keep it right here. She said she has not received a response from State officials relative to the request for a meeting. The Mayor said he would like to see all the parties involved come together at the table, as there may be mixed messages coming from the County as to whether additional County staff will be needed. The Mayor said, as was discussed briefly last night, this is one methodology, and Councilor Bowe presented another at last night's meeting. Councilor Acker said that we need the education from the right sources.

The Mayor said he will call the State and County officials, and the Council can decide what is in the best interest of the community. Ms. Margo said the City will need to decide who is going to take on the responsibilities of her office that do not fall under Civil Service. Ms. Margo said in 1997, she was made full-time because the Comptroller's office could not handle the workload. Councilor Bowe said there are many more regulations in place now, noting drug testing and PERMA. Ms. Margo said that there is a lot more paperwork with everything now, and there are so many more regulations. Discussion included the availability of persons with Civil Service experience, and the possibility of the Deputy Comptroller handling the position. Councilor Zogby questioned the need for privacy all day and suggested possibly scheduling appointments for people and/or private hours. The Civil Service officer said she cannot plan on what will happen on a given day citing insurance issues, discipline matters, employee problems, etc. and office privacy is necessary. Councilor Smith said there are time limits involved with disciplinary problems. Councilor Chamberlain said having a single office is working now, and asked if this could be done with someone else in the position. Councilor Zogby said the Civil Service Officer knows what she deals with, adding that the Council is trying to work towards a solution. Councilor Acker said you cannot plan on what is going to happen, emergencies occur, and the Civil Service Officer said you have to be ready with the paperwork. Councilor Bowe said there are multiple services performed by the Civil Service Officer on a daily basis, and when our employees have a need; she is there to respond to it. He said that our employees deserve to have that representation; they are not just numbers, and we should be able to provide services for our employees if we are saving money. He said his proposal does that, if

someone can be found for the position. Councilor Bowe said the Council just made a huge change in part of our insurance, and there will be many questions forthcoming. He said retirees may need help signing up for EPIC, as well. Councilor Bowe said it just makes sense that if we can offer this to our employees and not spend any more money, then do it. Ms. Margo said the law has changed and for those who work a regular 30 hour schedule, insurance has to be offered. Councilor Bowe said the hours could be cut to 25 or 30 and still have someone there five days a week. Councilor Smith said Civil Service was moved from the Comptroller's office, because that office had too much work. Councilor Chamberlain said this is working right now. Mayor Smith said Councilor Bowe's proposal has merit and should be looked at and discussed, just as having the County take over Civil Service is being looked at. Ms. Margo said the City of Rome looked into moving Civil Service to the County in 2014, and the Council voted it down because they wanted to keep the control. She said the information as to what was involved to consider the move was provided to the Council in her packet. She said most cities have their own Civil Service, noting the City of Sherrill does their own Civil Service also. Deputy Mayor Acker said the Council needs the education to make this decision; saving \$42K is noteworthy, but there is a price to pay for that.

After a brief discussion, Deputy Mayor Acker requested that the Planning Director, City Chamberlain, and Recreation Director be available go over their budgets at the end of the regular Council meeting on Tuesday, November 17, 2015, and then the Council will go into Executive Session for a personnel issue. She reminded the Council that Water, Sewer, DPW and Fire will be discussed at the budget work session on Wednesday, November 18.

City Clerk Sue Pulverenti said her budget requests (page 26) are about the same as last year. She said she has been working with NYCOM over the several past months to have the amount the City can charge for vital records increased. She said a letter was sent to Governor Cuomo. Ms. Pulverenti said the \$10 fee has not increased for almost 25 years for most cities/town/villages throughout NYS; however, NYS increased the amount to \$30 for Onondaga County, Monroe County and New York State. It was increased to \$15 for Oswego County.

Comptroller Linda Pease said her budget is on page 24. She said under the office technology expense (001.1315.0444) line, she has budgeted for a new computer and a machine to print the checks. She said that machine is quite old and needs to be updated. The audit line (001.1315.0403) has been reduced, as last year both the audit and single audit were completed. She said the \$4,500 in the training line (001.1315.0416) is for her municipal finance officer education credits earned at the NYCOM conference. The Comptroller asked the Council if they received the e-mail about sending a condensed budget to NYS for the transfers, and said the one sent to the State will be simplified. The Council briefly discussed various grants pending and received.

Councilor Zogby inquired as to if the Council's or Mayor's salaries would be increased next year. He asked if the City Chamberlain's salary would be increased, and a lengthy discussion commenced. The City Clerk said the City Chamberlain is not listed in the management handbook. Councilor Zogby said the Chamberlain's salary has gone from \$31K in 2005 to \$40K ten years later. He said that this seems to be a significant oversight that needs to be corrected for a position that, in his opinion, does not require a \$40K salary. Councilor Zogby said he has difficulty with the Chamberlain making more than the Mayor. He suggested the Chamberlain's salary be lowered to that of the Mayors (\$27K), and the remaining \$13K be used for someone to enforce Codes. Deputy Mayor Acker said that two people ran for the Chamberlain position with a salary of \$42,209 for 2015. She doesn't feel the Council can take back \$13K now, when the person coming in knows that the salary history is \$40K. Councilor Zogby said there is no criteria of hours listed for the Chamberlain's position, and Deputy Mayor Acker said the Chamberlain has to do due diligence for the taxpayers. The discussion continued, which included the daily chores, yearly salary increases, and current work hours of the City Chamberlain. Councilor Zogby said there are no guarantees of what an elected official will earn until the Council goes through the budget process; they

only know what the salary was the previous year. Councilor Bowe said that the City Chamberlain will be here next week and any questions can be asked at that time.

Mayor Smith said there is merit in having this conversation. It is an elected position that for whatever reason was granted an exception to the same standards that apply to everyone else and whether or not the Council wants to cut the salary is a separate issue. He said the City Chamberlain can advocate for herself. The Mayor said the Chamberlain's position has significant value and is sometimes under appreciated. Mayor Smith told the Council of his conversation with the City Attorney, who had partners in her firm comment that when they went through the certiorari process; the Chamberlain's performance was quite exceptional. He said the Chamberlain's position should be looked at to determine if annual salary increases should continue, but he leans heavily towards the Deputy Mayor's position, and he would have some difficulty reducing it at this point. The Deputy Mayor reiterated that the Chamberlain will be at the meeting Tuesday.

Mayor Smith commended the performance of Councilor Acker since the 2013 flood event, noting the number of hours she put in meeting with all those affected by the flood. He said he doesn't know anyone who has displayed such diligence and dedication, along with the numerous hours of time spent on behalf of those folks in the flood district; it leaves him speechless. Mayor Smith said this all came with no salary increase, and Councilor Acker did this because she has the integrity and compassion to help those who need her. Mayor Smith said he puts this in the same context. There are people here who perform to what is necessary, and the Council should look at these things objectively, see how it fits into our overall design, and make the decision based on that.

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Chamberlain

The meeting is hereby adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

CITY OF ONEIDA

Susan Pulverenti, City Clerk