

**MINUTES OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
NOVEMBER 24, 2014**

A special meeting of the Common Council of the City of Oneida, NY was held on the twenty-fourth day of November, 2014 at 6:30 o'clock P.M. in Council Chambers, Oneida Municipal Building, 109 N. Main Street, Oneida, NY.

The meeting was called to order by Deputy Mayor Helen Acker

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

ABSENT: Councilor Erwin Smith

ALSO PRESENT: City Clerk Susan Pulverenti
Comptroller Linda Pease

DISCUSSION OF 2015 MAYOR'S BUDGET

Deputy Mayor Acker provided the Council a sheet with the tax rates for the inside/outside district, noting that several years ago there was a tax decrease of almost 25% in one year. The Deputy Mayor said the Council needs to have some serious discussions regarding the 2015 budget looking at how much of an increase in taxes there should be, cutting overtime costs, purchases of a fire truck and police cars, and mosquito control. Councilor Acker said if the Council continues on the same path, the City will be bankrupt. She said the Council needs to look at health insurance/Medicare costs and the elimination of positions. Deputy Mayor Acker said as of today, \$1,242,953 is projected to come out of Fund Balance and the Mayor said that is an unaudited figure and asked what the trending figure when audited is. The Comptroller said history has shown that 37% or 38% of what was originally projected has actually been taken out of the Fund Balance.

The Deputy Mayor said she called her insurance company relative to the ISO insurance ratings and they are getting back to her with answers to her questions. Both Fire vehicles are listed in this budget as being bonded for. A discussion of any costs involved with bonding for the fire truck ensued, noting that no costs would be incurred in 2015 for the truck; the burden would be put off until 2016. Deputy Mayor Acker said another capital project for the West Elm Street Infrastructure water/sewer services was added to the budget and the question was asked why sewer was not listed as having any costs relative to the project.

The Comptroller said that the Constitutional Tax Limit has to be filed with NYS ten days prior to the adoption of the budget and discussion ensued relative to the County's date to receive the budget and the City's date to finalize the budget. The tentative date for adoption was set for December 15, 2014 at 8:00 a.m.

Councilor Bowe said the requested General Fund appropriated funds on the pie chart (page N) only add up to 98%, and the City Clerk said the estimated General Fund revenue figures in the pie chart differ from those on the summary page (page P). The Comptroller said the revenue numbers wouldn't match because the pie chart isn't total revenue; it is the percentage of the total budget. The Comptroller said she looked at the budgets of other years, and it is not the same correlation.

Councilor Bowe suggested, with regard to the salaries line for sewer/DPW, to have the new hires start in July because no projects start until July, as there aren't any contracts or reconstruction in the first half of the year. He said there seems to be enough people to slice out the proposed part-time clerk and said

someone from another office should be able to help out in the City Engineer's office. Councilor Zogby said he would like to talk with the City Engineer about what specifically is needed, possibly two part-time people and no full-time. The Mayor said the office is down two full-time people, as the Assistant City Engineer position was eliminated, and the Civil Engineer is now the foreman at the DPW. A brief discussion of clerical duties in the Engineering office ensued, noting that what is going on in that office is not working. The Mayor said there are two clerical people in the Water department with no issues. Councilor Bowe asked if the Code's vehicle is needed or can the City limp along with what is being used now. Discussion relative to financing vehicles, purchasing from local dealers and financing with local banks ensued. Councilor Zogby suggested buying the Water Department's vehicle, purchasing another vehicle for the Water Department, and financing the vehicle through the Water Department to be used by the Codes office. A question was asked as to where the Housing Inspector's vehicle came from. The Comptroller will look into financing with local banks and let the Council know at tomorrow night's meeting.

Councilor Bowe questioned several lines in the DPW budget, which had already been removed. The Comptroller said the Council has to refer to the updated budget sheets when asking questions. The Creek and Stream Bed Removal monies have to stay in the budget because of FEMA. The Comptroller said she modified the Planning salary line and included a revenue line to show the grant funding received for salaries. Deputy Mayor Acker said they will discuss with the City Engineer the sewer budget, any cuts he can make, his office personnel and possibly changing positions there, and the manpower throughout his department. Councilor Chamberlain suggested possibly tightening the figures for Mosquito Control could be looked at, as there were chemicals left over. The City Clerk said the actual impact on the General Fund would be about \$34K, plus any costs for aerial spraying. The City Clerk will provide the City Engineer with a list of the Council's questions.

Deputy Mayor Acker said she will have the ISO insurance rates tomorrow and the Mayor said it should also be taken into consideration what impact the new fire vehicle would have on fighting fires. Councilor Simchik said the Fire Department is planning on making the new fire truck their front line truck.

The Mayor said the Medicare Part B reimbursement is about \$88K per year and a lengthy discussion followed. The Mayor explained how the process works and said for our retirees, the City pays the cost. The Mayor said he has looked into this extensively and said there are retirees out there where removing this reimbursement would be a hardship. The Mayor said the Civil Service Officer can explain the costs involved and how much it would cost the retirees. The Mayor said if this was challenged by the unions, they would win the litigation. Councilor Zogby said there are a group of individuals not covered by a union, who receive that benefit, and the Mayor said when they retired, this was an expected benefit and every time it has been tried, the retirees have won. Councilor Zogby said the Medicare Part B reimbursement received by retired management confidential employees, who were not represented by a union, can be taken away from them. The Comptroller said there are eight people currently receiving the benefit, and Councilor Zogby said that it is probably not worth discussing then. He inquired as to how many current employees would benefit upon retirement and asked if legislation would be adopted to stop them from receiving the reimbursement. The Council said they are working on this with the negotiations of the union contracts. In the future, everyone going forward will pay their own Medicare Part B when they retire. The City Clerk said mgmt/confidential generally follows the CSEA contract. Health insurance costs were touched on, and the increases for retirees were noted. The Mayor said that next year other plans will be looked at for retirees, including Humana; however, there are network issues there. The Mayor said he has requested RFP's from all providers for health insurance for retirees going forward and said the City cannot afford the "Cadillac" plan for retirees anymore, i.e. ones that have no co-pays anymore. He said there are legalities to look into also, but the plans will be changed next year, as he believes there can be a savings there. Councilor Simchik said health care costs are the largest change in the budget.

It was questioned why the school doesn't pay for the \$24,960 for crossing guards when there is 100% busing, and there was a brief discussion of where the guards are stationed. The City Clerk said in the Fire Department revenue line, \$54K for Sherrill Kenwood Fire District is not included, and the Comptroller said she would double check on that. The question of supplying fire protection for the Oneida Indian Nation in the outside district was asked and Councilor Bowe said this is revenue lost by the City. The Mayor said the Nation properties came off the roll because of the agreement ratified with the Governor of NYS.

The Mayor read aloud a chart of undesignated Fund Balances over the past years, and the Mayor noted the balances have stayed pretty much the same each year, adding that there may be something that factors into that, which we may be missing. Councilor Bowe noted that the undesignated Fund Balance amounts listed in the 2014 and 2015 budgets and the amounts listed on the paperwork provided this evening do not match. The Comptroller said she will check the reports, as she was unsure as to why there is a difference; noting some figures are audited and some are unaudited. She said she will update the figures and get the replacement page to the Council tomorrow. The Mayor said if you look at the history of the Fund Balance 38% of what is allocated is actually spent.

The Mayor said he was very encouraged with the response from the owner of the Hotel Oneida. They supplied a detailed time line, and he will be meeting with them to discuss the preliminary design specifications prior to going to the Planning Board. He said the Council may have to find creative ways of providing parking, as this will be key to the project.

Bonding and BAN's were discussed briefly with the Comptroller. Fringe benefits were talked about and numbers need to be updated. The Comptroller said all the schedules have to be updated. The Mayor said State Law specific to cities is involved with who collects the county taxes, and it should be looked into paying the County once a year for taxes collected. The City Clerk said the lighting district line should be \$1,800 less, as the Business Park Lighting District was abolished. Councilor Zogby said the City will be paying \$1,500 for street lights in Kenwood, as Oneida Limited no longer pays those electric fees, and it should be added into the budget. Councilor Bowe said a lighting district should be created to turn the costs over to the benefiting property owners. Lighting districts were briefly discussed. Councilor Simchik said on the inside district, lighting is factored into the taxes, but in the outside district tax bills it is broken down line by line for fire protection and lighting. The Comptroller said she will check on the line that has \$5K in it for the purchase of a parking lot. The City has checking, saving and money market accounts.

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Bowe

The special meeting is hereby adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

CITY OF ONEIDA

Susan Pulverenti, City Clerk