

**MINUTES OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
APRIL 20, 2017**

A special meeting of the Common Council of the City of Oneida, NY was held on the twentieth day of April, 2017 at 6:37 o'clock P.M. in Council Chambers, Oneida Municipal Building, 109 N. Main Street, Oneida, NY.

Meeting was called to order by Deputy Mayor James Chamberlain

PRESENT: Michael Bowe, Erwin Smith, Helen Acker (arrived at 7:08 p.m.), James Chamberlain, and Thomas Simchik

ABSENT: Mayor Leo Matzke, Councilor Alan Cohen

ALSO PRESENT: City Clerk Susan Pulverenti
Recreation Director Luke Griff
Supervisor Joe Magliocca
Account Clerk/Rail Trail Committee Patti Meakin
Scott Ingmire, Director Mad. Co. Planning
Jamie Kowalczk, Asst. Director Mad. Co. Planning
Sara Kirsch, Madison County Planning

ONEIDA RAIL TRAIL PROJECT – CHANGES TO ONEIDA STREET AREA

Deputy Mayor Jim Chamberlain said that the members of the Rail Trail Committee will explain the proposed changes to Oneida Street first, and then everyone who wants to speak will be given time to do so.

Recreation Director Luke Griff said they are here tonight to talk about the proposed changes to Oneida Street and opened up the meeting with a power point presentation of the overall design of the 11.3 mile Oneida Rail Trail. He said that the City received grants from the New York State Department of Transportation-Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP) in the amount of \$585K and the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) in the amount of \$716K. He provided an overview of the proposed changes to Oneida Street both east and west, which included curb bump outs at the ends of Oneida Street by Broad and by Main to shorten the distance for pedestrian and bicycle users, a bicycle lane running along the sidewalk on the west side of Oneida Street, a “gateway” arch to the pedestrian plaza on the east portion of Oneida Street, kiosks, parallel parking instead of angled parking, and the loss of parking spaces. He said that they have taken out trees on the east portion of Oneida Street. In response to a question as to how many parking spaces would be lost on the east portion of Oneida Street, Ms. Kowalczk said 22 spaces on Oneida Street east (11) and Freighthouse Alley (11) would be lost. Director Griff said a parking study was completed. He said they are doing this project to create business and help downtown.

Jamie Kowalczk, Assistant Director of Madison County Planning, discussed the parking study using a power point demonstration. She said all cities struggle with downtown parking because there is mismatch between perception and reality. She said that five parking areas were considered during the study; Parking Lot 1 Main Street across from City Hall; Parking Lot 2 Oneida Street West, which has 45 angled parking spaces (23 south side/22 north side); Parking Lot 3 Oneida Street East, which has 39 angled spots; Parking Lot 4 Freighthouse Alley, which has 36 angled parking spaces; and Parking Lot 5 City Hall Parking Lot. She said there will be a loss of 15 parking spaces on Oneida Street West, and 11 spaces on Oneida Street East, and 11 spaces on Freighthouse Alley. She explained about how the parking study was conducted over the week, peak and non-peak times for parking in the lots they studied, and all the reports’s findings. Mr. Joe Stabb said the study was done wrong, noting that the Mayor was over to visit the Owl’s Club on Thursday, and there were only two open parking spots on all of Oneida Street west. She said that that ample parking opportunities were observed with the study. She displayed aerial photos from Sunday, April 9, 2006, Monday, May 5, 2008, Monday, April 19, 2010, Saturday, April 7, 2012 and Sunday April 19, 2015. She said that they counted the cars in the lots during each of those aerial images, and explained the results were all under 25% full. She said they want to understand the impact on downtown, to give a facelift to downtown and make the Rail Trail happen. She recapped the loss of spaces; 15 on Oneida Street west, reduced from 45 to 30 and 22 spaces lost on Oneida Street east/Freighthouse Alley for a total of 37 parking spaces on Oneida Street from Broad to Williams. She said the City Hall lot could accommodate some of the parking. Ms. Kowalczk showed a comparison of Oneida vs. Cazenovia downtown parking spots. She said that downtown is gaining from this project.

Joe Liebl said if they are anticipating people to come to the pedestrian center and if you get 40 people there’s forty spots taken. Mr. Liebl said that he owns the building on Railroad Street that housed Church on the Rock and the Pizza Palace. He said he has some other ideas in the works for his building. He said

this is a good idea and it looks nice, but he doesn't want to end up with a building like Hotel Oneida, where there are no parking spaces for the tenants of the building.

Marty Winchell said if someone were to build a new building downtown, it requires handicap parking. He inquired as to what he should do with the elderly/disabled customers in the dead of winter who can't walk that far into his store. Mr. Cordell said that Madison Street is always full of cars. Ms. Kowalczk said an additional handicap spot is proposed for each side of Oneida Street. Mr. Winchell said that we are talking about existing businesses, and Ms. Kowalczk said that Oneida is not unique. Mr. Winchell responded yes we are, because now we have the parking to accommodate downtown customers. Mr. and Mrs. Cordell both stated that they need ten parking spaces just for those who are in their building now, and all the spots proposed to be removed are directly behind their building.

Sara Kirsch, Madison County Planning, continued on with the power point presentation showing various communities across the United States where communities have completed similar downtown projects. She said some have populations that are similar and some have space sizes that are similar. She said these projects are designed to promote downtown businesses and reconfiguring parking. Those communities included Sulphur Springs, Texas; Syracuse, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Sundance Square, Texas; Bronx, New York; Brooklyn, New York; Columbus, Ohio; Oakland, CA; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Long Beach, CA.

Gregg Myers, Oneida, said that he owns the building directly across from City Hall. He said that for 25 minutes we listened to a presentation on comparable communities, but we are not in Texas or California. He said that you cannot compare the City of Oneida to Sulphur Springs, Texas, as it may be comparable in size, but they do not get 100+ inches of snow each year. He said that there are piles of snow that accumulate on Oneida Street during the winter. He asked why Broad Street is not being narrowed and why that street hasn't been looked at. He said that City Hall, Court and Police employees use 14-16 parking spaces on Oneida Street daily. He said there are two sides to the City Hall lot, one side for fire and one side for City Hall. The Deputy Mayor said that employee parking will be addressed, and the public can use the City Hall Parking Lot after 4:00 p.m. when the building closes. He said it is hard to tell someone that they cannot park on a street that has public parking. Mrs. Myers asked if there is public parking on the street, who is going to enforce the police employees not to park on the street, repeating her question several times. Deputy Mayor Chamberlain reiterated that employee parking on the street will be addressed. Mr. Myers spoke about the tractor trailers that deliver to the businesses on Oneida Street. He said that they have to double park to do their deliveries, and if the road is narrowed, how will traffic navigate around it. He asked if any input was received from the Fire Chief, Police Chief or DPW, as to the impact of the narrowing of the street and employee parking. He said that he spoke with the DPW foreman who said he didn't know the details of the proposed project.

Joe Magliocca said the project is over-budget, and they are trying to claw back some things. He said the purpose of the bump outs is to shorten the crosswalks and to add landscaping that will be visual to the eye. Councilor Smith questioned if the bicycle lane could be moved over to the other side of the sidewalk by City Hall, and Councilor Bowe concurred saying this would leave the parking spots on Oneida Street. Ms. Kowalczk said that change is hard, but they have demonstrated that Oneida Street is a lot wider and they have shown that the supply for parking is already being met. Councilor Smith said there has to be some compromise from both sides. Mr. Myers said a very wise college professor once told him in a statistical course that you can skew numbers any way you want, whether it is pro or con. He said the street needs to stay the way that it is. Scott Ingmire, Madison County Planning Department, said that the data has not been skewed. Mike Kruger said that the committee did not address parking for the Church on the Rock and did not address parking at the Owls Club. He said several times a month, they have over 100 vehicles at their facility. Mr. Kruger said there are many vacant buildings downtown and asked how we are going to fill them if there is no parking. Ms. Kowalczk said that is your perception, but in reality we are doing great. Scott Ingmire said the designs are based on data and professional engineers.

Joe Pomerleau said that he is the owner of the building housing Sweet Temptations Cafe, a hairdresser and another office. He said Parking Lot 1 is by his business. He said if 22 spaces are pulled from Oneida Street/Freighthouse Alley, they are going to be parking in front of his business and where will his customers park. He said there are six businesses plus City Hall in the Parking Lot 1 area, and he guarantees that somebody is going out of business. He said this has been a tough year, and people are not going to walk 2 blocks to park. He said maybe a two-hour parking limit would be in order, but again questions of enforcement came up. Mr. Pomerleau said we are all business people in Oneida, and Oneida does not help us. He said you cannot take away business owners parking; there are already 22 vacant buildings downtown now and guarantees there will be more. Joe Magliocca said that the County planning officials can provide a wealth of information. He said this project will go to bid within months. Deputy Mayor Chamberlain said there has to be a compromise with the Rail Trail and parking. Councilor Bowe said that three of the five days that pictures were taken are Mondays, and Sweet Temptations is not open on Mondays.

Gary Taylor, 105 Madison Street, said that he attends all the City meetings. He said the Rail Trail is not a bad thing, it is very nice. However, he said he has concerns about parking. Mr. Taylor said he agrees with the Council solving the west side of Oneida Street by moving the bicycle lane to the other side of the sidewalk. However, he is on the east side of Oneida Street and questioned if traffic was being diverted on to Freighthouse Alley. He asked what is happening with James Street, as he has heard there is some talk about closing a portion of that street. He asked if there will be enough roadway for the large trucks that deliver to Thompson Appliances almost every day and to the Pizza Place further down. Mr. Taylor said that he is putting in higher end apartments and noted that when that is done; people drive. He explained to the Council about the property on Grove Street that he purchased where the former tenants didn't have vehicles, but once he remodeled the four apartments, there are now eight cars in the parking lot. Mr. Taylor said that he is planning on remodeling ten apartments in his building, and the building owner down the street has six that he is planning on redoing. He said that is a lot of parking spaces that will be used, which weren't being used before. He said that higher end apartments were put into the building next to Kay Real Estate, and now the City parking lot behind that building is always full, because those people have cars. He agrees there are some parking spaces not being used now, but what is going to happen in the future; adding that is why we, as business owners, are concerned about parking. Mr. Taylor said he has some questions about the pedestrian plaza and asked why it can't be located in the green space that is there now. He said that arguing doesn't solve the problem. He is concerned with the flow of parking, and would love to hear any solutions that anyone has.

Mike Kruger, Owls Club, said that he not against the project; they are against losing any parking spaces on Oneida Street. He said that the Club invested a tremendous amount of money into their building to make it look better. He said that January is not the time of year to do a parking study. He said Vanderbilt Avenue is filled with post office employees, Broad Street has Wilber Duck employees parking there all day long and the City parking lot by Higinbotham Park is always filled. Councilor Simchik said that during the winter it seems you can park anywhere on Oneida Street, but once the weather gets nice the street fills right up. He said that the City Hall employee lot maybe has six spaces left empty during the day.

Danielle Krol, Oneida, said that she is a Transportation Planner for the City of Syracuse, where parking is always an issue. She said there are over 200 parking spaces in a one-two block area, and it is proposed to drop to 155 spaces. She said the money being brought into this community by the Rail Trail project is significant, noting the competitive nature for these types of grants. Ms. Krol said to the business owners that if you want people to come to downtown, you want a parking problem. She said Oneida Street is 70 feet wide and in Syracuse they are putting bump outs and bike trails on streets 40 feet wide. She said there is no problem with tractor trailers. She said the bump outs are for safety measures, as well as for beautifying the area. She said that certainly Oneida is not Syracuse, but the climate is the same. Ms. Krol said this is an incredible opportunity, adding that downtown is not losing hundreds of parking spaces.

Sandy Cordell said that she owns the apartment building directly behind Freighthouse Alley and Oneida Street where it is proposed for 22 parking spaces to be removed and a pavilion added. She said that although she doesn't live in the City, she has worked and shopped here for over 20 years. She said they purchased the building five years ago when the City was pushing to clean up Madison Street and install mid to high-end apartments. She said they have a laundromat, rent space to Oneida Appliance Service and have ten beautiful apartments upstairs. She said that they have invested an enormous amount of money in their building, including insulation and new windows. She said that she has tried to beautify the area and placed benches out front of the laundromat, adding that she is located 100ft from the Police Department, and the benches were stolen. She said that between her tenants and Oneida Appliance Service, right now, there are 11 vehicles that need parking for her building, and then there are her customers. She said she parks over near the Kallet and complained of a business owner across the street who doesn't park by his building but parks in front of her building all day. She said that her business will be directly affected by the removal of those 22 spots, noting that people are not going to walk two blocks carrying their laundry. She said there are a lot of people who just hang out downtown, because they have nothing better to do. They hang out at Clinch Park during the summer. She said the right people will not come downtown, because they don't feel comfortable with the wrong people. Mrs. Cordell said to leave the parking alone and move the pedestrian plaza over to the existing green space. She said you are planning to keep the parking in front of the old Lerman building, which is currently being remodeled, so they will get the parking while all of theirs is being taken away. She said that after 4:00 p.m. on Madison Street, Mind Games patrons fill the street. She said she agrees with the project, but said you can't eliminate any Freighthouse Alley parking.

Joe Liebl, owner of the property that housed Church on the Rock said once parking places are removed, you never get them back. He said if you drive around and cannot find a parking spot, that is not a perception; it is reality, and you are going to go somewhere else. He said you can still make it beautiful with an adjustment by moving the plaza to the median that is there now while still maintaining the parking areas. He said he is trying to attract businesses that will need parking, and he is not going to put any money into his building if he does not have sufficient parking for the tenants.

Jamie Kowalczk reiterated that they are only talking about 11 spaces on Oneida Street east and 11 spaces on Freighthouse Alley to gain a new amenity to downtown and a connected trail system. Mrs. Cordell responded that all those lost parking spaces are directly behind her building. Deputy Mayor Chamberlain reminded the audience that this project is just proposed, to which Mr. Cordell asked why all the trees were already cut down. Mrs. Cordell said the parking lot behind the Kallet where she parks is always full. She said the City sold Dr. Costello 1/3 of the parking lot behind the Kallet and he doesn't even allow his employees to park there. They have to park in the other portions of the lot. She said that ARC has now moved to Main Street, and all their employees are parking in the Kallet lot also. She said not one parking spot is available in that lot during the day. Mrs. Cordell added that the Oneida Commons patrons fill both sides of Cedar Street during the day.

Joe Stabb, Owls Club said he worked for 30 years with the OHS Maintenance Department, and the project engineers use to come to him for his input after designs were done, and then they were usually changed because certain things were not taken into consideration. He asked why, if the trail is coming off from Liberty Street, it isn't going directly across the street and onto the trail. He said he is concerned about safety. He said the Owls Club has put \$50K+ into the outside of their building, which is now going to be covered by trees. Councilor Simchik said the DMV test site is also at the end of Oneida Street on Broad Street. Mr. Stabb suggested a traffic light to cross the street and put the trail onto City Hall property. Mr. Stabb asked if any of the local businesses were ever contacted for their input, to which those in the audience all responded no they were not. A brief outburst ensued.

Dennis Mills, Oneida, said that the City is already losing 22 spots downtown on Lenox Avenue between Main and Broad due to the NYS DOT project and shouldn't lose anymore. Councilor Bowe thanked him for his comment noting that this has been a bone of contention for him as well.

Deputy Mayor Chamberlain thanked everyone for coming and said that he appreciated everyone's opinions. He invited the audience members to come to every meeting. Councilor Bowe said listed on each Council meeting agenda, there is old business and new business, and anyone in attendance at the meetings can ask for updates on the Rail Trail project.

Councilor Acker said with the Ward boundary changes, she has inherited much of downtown and she has a lot of concerns with this proposal. In response to a question, Jamie Kowalczk said a total of 37 parking spots are proposed to be removed. Councilor Acker said she found out about the Oneida Street proposal two weeks ago, and that is why we are meeting tonight. She said this is a great project and wants to keep the dialogue going to determine what the best is for the City.

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Bowe

The regular meeting is hereby adjourned at 8:39 p.m.

CITY OF ONEIDA, NEW YORK

Susan Pulverenti, City Clerk