

**Conservation/UW-EX Education Committee**  
**Monday, December 9, 2024 Minutes**  
**Oneida County Courthouse, County Board Room and Virtually by ZOOM**

**Committee Members:** Chair Collette Sorgel, Linnaea Newman, Lenore Lopez, Robb Jensen and Chris Schultz.

**Others Present:** Erica Rempala, Jill Nemec, Kathleen Cooper, Karl Jennrich, Michele Sadauskas and Jessica Young. Beckie Gaskill, Dan Butkus, Petra Pietrzak, Edachingua and Jonna Jewell on Zoom.

**1. Call to order and Chairperson's Announcements:**

Chair Sorgel called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. The meeting was properly posted and handicapped accessible and ADA compliant. The symbol /s/ represents a valid virtual attendee's signature.

**2. Approve Agenda:** A motion by Jensen/Newman to approve the December 9, 2024 Agenda with the order of items at the Chair's discretion. All ayes; motion carried.

**3. Approve Minutes:** A motion by Newman/Schultz to approve the minutes of November 11, 2024 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

**4. Dates/Location of Future Meetings:**

Monday, January 13, 2024 at 1:00 p.m. Oneida County Courthouse; County Board Room.

**5. Public Comment:**

Eric Rempala (Oneida County Clean Waters Action) addressed the issue of PFAS contamination. Rempala announced that the Oneida County Board of Health will hold a meeting on December 10, 2024 at 9:00 a.m., featuring an epidemiologist from UW-Madison who will join via Zoom. Additionally, the epidemiologist will attend the Stella Town Hall meeting in person on December 10, 2024 at 5:15 p.m. The epidemiologist plans to conduct a blood testing study in the Town of Stella and is seeking community support for a grant application to fund this research. The blood tests will be offered free of charge to residents on a voluntary basis, though the number of tests will be limited. Rempala believes this initiative represents significant progress for both the Town of Stella and Oneida County. Furthermore, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will soon release the final results from their expanded 3-mile testing area in Stella, which will be accessible on the Stella DNR website soon.

Kathleen Cooper (Rhinelanders – Pelican Township) addressed item #6. Cooper praised the Committee for their diligent work on the Oneida County Comprehensive Land Use Plan. However, she expressed confusion and concern over the Planning & Development Committee's decision to disregard public opinion on the mining issues in 2018 and to ignore the elected officials on the CUW Committee, while giving undue attention to Henry Schienebeck from the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association. Cooper highlighted that Schienebeck has a 31-page booklet outlining the desired changes to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, regardless of

their relevance to timber. According to Schienebeck, a committee, including himself, Tom Tiffany, and Richard Moore from the Lakeland Times, reviewed the plan and proposed updates. Cooper questioned the motives behind these suggested changes, noting that the language used appears to be directly taken from the American Stewards of Liberty (ASL) playbook. She suspects that the ASL, a Texas-based group, has influenced these changes that benefit Canadian mining interests, and will potentially turn the area into a sacrifice zone for mining. Cooper expressed her belief that these unelected officials wield more influence over the County Board than the elected representatives. She urged the CUW Committee to continue supporting conservation efforts, emphasizing the importance of preserving Oneida County's natural beauty. Cooper warned against the short-term nature of the mining industry and advocated for attracting stable, long-term industries that will provide sustainable employment. She stressed that the environmental devastation caused by mining is far greater than that of more stable industries.

## **6. Recommendations to Amend the Oneida County Comprehensive Land Use Plan Ordinance:**

### **Goal 7**

Sadauskas firmly believes that this goal is misplaced and should be included in the land use section, as it pertains solely to coordination. The goal outlines coordination in a broader sense, it does not mention natural resources, and it seems to be applicable across various sections such as land use, economics, and natural resources.

Newman agreed that the goal is incorrectly placed in the current plan and does not appropriately fit within the natural resources section.

Jennrich informed the Committee that they should forward their recommendations to him so that he can relay them to the Planning & Development Committee.

Jensen inquired whether this goal is addressed in Chapter 7, but Jennrich was unable to confirm this at the time. Both Jensen and Lopez believe that the goal would be more appropriately placed in the land use section plan.

Jensen/Lopez made a motion to recommend to the Planning & Development Committee to take Goal 7 from Chapter 2 and incorporate it into the chapter on land use. All ayes; motion carried.

### **Goal 6**

Sadauskas reviewed the goals within a broader context and noted that there is one policy each for metallic and non-metallic mining, both focusing on reclamation. Sadauskas questioned whether this is sufficient. Given the numerous objectives and goals, and the presence of a mining objective in the Land & Water Resource Management Plan, some objectives were transitioned to policy to provide more comprehensive coverage of this significant topic. The aim is to minimize impact, and if the only stated policy is to promote proper reclamation, it may not

fully address the issue. Consequently, three additional policies were incorporated from the Land & Water Resource Management Plan.

The Land & Water Resource Management Plan is a ten-year plan outlining goals, objectives, and activities, approved by the CUW Committee, the Oneida County Board, and the State of Wisconsin. The working document needs to be approved by the state in order to receive funding, and it is required of each county. All added objectives for Goal 6 came from the current plan, which extends through 2029.

Jennrich highlighted that Oneida County is one of the few counties that have implemented a metallic mining ordinance.

Jensen inquired whether adhering to the current ordinance in conjunction with the DNR process would be sufficient. Jennrich responded that opinions on this matter vary, with some believing it is adequate and others disagreeing.

Newman inquired about how Oneida County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan compares to that of Vilas County and other counties. Sadauskas mentioned that Vilas County lists goals and objectives in their Comprehensive Land Use Plan but does not delve into policy details. At the policy level, individuals are directed to the appropriate Land & Water Resource Management Plan, County Comprehensive Plan, or Forest Plan. Sadauskas proposed incorporating similar language into the Oneida County Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

Jensen inquired about who will be responsible for handling the policies. Jennrich clarified that the various departments of Oneida County will manage this task.

Jensen suggested that terms like "promote" and "protect" might need clearer definitions, but does not see an issue with it at this time.

Additions to the policy section include:

- Protect groundwater from the negative effects of mining.
- Protect surface water and wetlands from the negative effects of mining.
- Maintain county mining ordinances.

Newman/Schultz motioned to accept the recommended changes to Goal 6 and forward them to the Planning & Development Committee. All ayes; motion carried.

Chair Sorgel expressed discomfort with the word "allow" in Goal 6, and Lopez disliked the term "balancing".

## **Goal 5**

Chair Sorgel indicated her satisfaction with Goal 5 and asked if there were any objections from the Committee. None were stated.

### **Goal 3**

Sadauskas expressed internal conflict about the objectives under this goal, noting that the Land & Water Resource Management Plan already details numerous activities and objectives on this topic. Sadauskas questioned whether it would be beneficial to add a bullet point in the objective section of Goal 3 to direct readers to the Land & Water Resource Management Plan.

Chair Sorgel expressed a desire to include this addition, as it would prompt readers to consult the relevant sections to ensure compliance with the outlined objectives.

Sorgel/Lopez made a motion to add a policy under Goal 3 stating, "See additional policies in the Land & Water Resource Management Plan". Jensen requested a revision of the sentence. Sorgel/Jensen amended the motion to read, "Reference and consider policies in the Land & Water Resource Management Plan". The amendment was unanimously approved, and the motion carried.

### **Goal 2**

Sadauskas expressed discomfort with some of the wording and language used in the objectives. Lacking a clear solution, and not wanting to attempt to write a narrative for forestry, Jill Nemec was brought in to assist with refining the forestry language. The current goal is very specific to private lands, and some of the objectives seem more appropriate stated as the goal instead of the current goal. There is concern about the heavy emphasis on timber priority and forest management, as a conservation committee, water quality and watershed should be the priority.

Nemec indicated that it is appropriate to state that sustainable forest management and timber production are the main goals, but it is important to include other objectives here as well. Nemec explained that the focus on timber production is due to statutory requirements; if there is a conflict with land use, timber production takes precedence. The goal is to minimize the conversion of woodlands and forest lands into other uses and increase timber production as a sustainable forest management practice.

Jensen inquired whether this goal pertains to county lands or private owners under the Managed Forest Law (MFL) program. Nemec clarified that the goal references private land, while the objectives below reference both public and private lands.

Jensen/Newman made a motion to delete Goal 2 and Objective 1 and to add the information provided in the handout for Goal 2, Objective 1, and Objective 2 as presented. All ayes; motion carried.

### **Goal 1**

Sadauskas stated that the first paragraph sufficiently summarizes Goal 1, and that paragraphs two and three are redundant. The objectives focus heavily on promoting development and maximizing economic benefits, with little emphasis on natural resources. Objectives 1 and 2 need to be rewritten to emphasize multiple-use sustainability, natural, agricultural, and cultural

resources, and then working in balance and promoting economic development at the end. The focus should be on minimizing impacts. As this is the natural resource section, agricultural and cultural resources should be prioritized before economic development.

Chair Sorgel suggested replacing the word “wise” with “responsible”.

Jensen/Newman made a motion to delete paragraphs two and three from Goal 1. All ayes; motion carried.

Newman/Schultz made a motion to accept Objective 1 as written, including the strike-out. All ayes; motion carried.

Sorgel/Lopez made a motion to change Objective 2 to read: “The County shall assure responsible stewardship of the environment by identifying and balancing industrial, agricultural, forestry, and tourism opportunities that can best maximize economic benefits”. All ayes; motion carried.

### **2013 Issues**

Comparing Chapter 2 of the 2013 Issues with Chapter 2 of the 2024 Issues, the issues in the 2013 version were omitted from the 2024 version. Many issues in the 2013 version still apply to Oneida County, with new issues emerging over the past decade. Major issues such as PFAS and water contamination are not mentioned in the 2024 Issues. Enhanced wakes and shoreline development are relevant but not addressed. Climate resiliency should also be added, considering the lack of snow last winter. A narrative has not yet been created for these issues. Sadauskas requested the Committee discuss these points and decide if an Issues section should be included in Chapter 2, ensuring a natural resources issue is prioritized in the plan.

As Oneida County’s population grows, it is important to promote and identify natural resources, as more people will utilize these resources. Protecting water and natural resources is essential.

Issues 1 and 2 in the 2024 version focus primarily on property rights, which is acceptable, but there needs to be a balance with the protection of Oneida County’s natural resources.

Sadauskas will review the 2024 version and make recommendations to the Committee on beneficial adjustments.

Sorgel/Jensen made a motion to direct staff to identify the high-level issues the CUW Committee believes should be included in the Comprehensive Land Use Plan’s County-Wide Planning Issues section. All ayes; motion carried.

**7. Adjournment:** Chair Sorgel adjourned meeting at 2:52 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Jessica Young, Recording Secretary