ONEIDA COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Oneida County Highway Department Conference Room
Thursday, September 24, 2026 – 8:00 a.m.

Committee Members	Present	Excused	Absent
Ted Cushing	X		
Bob Almekinder	X		
Billy Fried	X		
Dan Hess	X		
Greg Oettinger		X	

Also Present: Ben Rich/Highway Commissioner, Chris McDonald/Highway Finance, Toddy Troskey/Planning and Zoning, and one community member.

1. Call to Order and Chairperson's Announcements

Chair Ted Cushing called the Public Works Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m., noting the meeting was posted according to Wisconsin Open Meeting Laws.

2. Approve Agenda

Motion by Hess, seconded by Almekinder to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried.

3. Approve Minutes of the Public Works Committee Meeting Held September 17, 2026

Motion by Fried, seconded by Almekinder to approve the September 17, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

4. Public Comments

None.

5. Future Meeting Dates

The following future meeting dates were announced:

- October 8, 2026
- October 27, 2026
- November 5, 2026
- November 19, 2026

6. Approve Vendor Vouchers

Motion by Almekinder, seconded by Hess to approve the vendor vouchers as presented. Motion carried.

7. Approve State Maintenance Agreement 1170-16-72, USH 51 and CTH K Roundabout

Rich presented the proposed State Maintenance Agreement for the USH 51 and CTH K roundabout. He reported that the agreement would require the County to maintain specialty pavement markings, approximately eight signs, several hundred feet of curb, and the raised center median associated with CTH K.

Rich explained that the Wisconsin Department of Transportation would remain responsible for replacing these features during future reconstruction, while the County would be responsible for ongoing maintenance expenses. He noted that the proposed agreement was similar to the existing maintenance arrangement for the USH 8 and CTH G roundabout, although the CTH K roundabout would require less maintenance.

Rich reported that he had met with WI DOT representatives regarding the proposed responsibilities, but the department was unwilling to modify the agreement. He requested that WI DOT coordinate future pavement marking work with the County to allow both agencies to utilize the same contractor when practical and potentially reduce costs.

The committee also discussed winter maintenance responsibilities for the Swamp Lake Road approach to the roundabout. Rich reported that WI DOT was discussing the possibility of having the County perform winter maintenance on that approach, with the State potentially covering the associated costs.

Rich indicated that the maintenance obligations under the proposed agreement would be relatively minor and could be incorporated into existing operations.

Motion by Hess, seconded by Cushing to approve State Maintenance Agreement 1170-16-72 for the USH 51 and CTH K roundabout as presented. Motion carried.

8. Revocable Occupancy Permit, CTH N

The committee reviewed a request for a revocable occupancy permit involving a private septic system with dispersal cells extending into the County highway right-of-way.

The committee was informed that the septic system had been installed in 2021 following a reported system failure. A subsequent inspection identified that approximately half of the dispersal area extended into the highway right-of-way. The installation had occurred without an approved permit, and the permit application remained unresolved. The installer had previously been issued a citation, which was paid.

The committee reviewed prior discussions concerning a possible revocable occupancy agreement that would allow the system to remain in place, subject to relocation if the County needed the right-of-way for future highway operations or utility installations.

Concerns were expressed regarding potential conflicts with future utility installations, ditch maintenance, and other highway operations. The committee also discussed the costs and administrative requirements associated with preparing a revocable occupancy agreement.

The committee supported requiring the affected portion of the septic system to be relocated outside the highway right-of-way rather than allowing the installation to remain under a revocable occupancy agreement.

Motion by Fried, seconded by Almekinder to deny the revocable occupancy permit as presented. Motion carried.

9. Review Winter Maintenance Policy

Rich presented a preliminary draft of the County Highway Department's winter maintenance policy and requested committee input regarding its content and implementation.

Rich reported that he had reviewed winter maintenance policies from more than 20 Wisconsin counties and developed the draft to document the Highway Department's existing operational practices. He noted that the proposed policy would apply to County highways only, as WI DOT establishes separate maintenance requirements for state highways.

The committee discussed the differences between County and State winter maintenance standards, including highway classifications, service hours, pavement conditions, and response expectations during winter weather events.

Rich explained that the proposed policy does not establish a minimum snow accumulation threshold for initiating maintenance because snow and ice conditions vary significantly depending on temperature, precipitation type, wind, and other weather factors. The policy would also clarify that dry, bare pavement cannot be guaranteed during or immediately following winter storm events.

The committee reviewed the Highway Department's typical winter maintenance schedule of approximately 4:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., seven days per week, when weather conditions warrant. Rich explained that the schedule is intended to provide initial road maintenance before morning school bus operations and continue service through the afternoon school transportation period.

Rich emphasized that actual deployment times may vary depending on storm conditions, road hazards, available personnel, and equipment. Crews may be called in earlier or remain on duty later when conditions require additional attention, including freezing rain and other circumstances that make roads difficult to travel.

The committee also discussed differences in winter maintenance materials used on County highways. Rich reported that CTH K and CTH L receive brine treatments, while other routes receive varying sand and salt mixtures. He noted that additional salt had been incorporated into the sand mixture used on CTH A following concerns regarding winter road conditions.

The committee discussed the importance of clearly communicating the County's maintenance standards to the public, particularly regarding expectations for road conditions during storms, maintenance schedules, and the differences between County and State highway responsibilities.

Rich reported that WI DOT representative Nick Voss had expressed willingness to provide a presentation regarding State winter maintenance standards and operational requirements. The committee expressed interest in receiving the presentation.

Rich indicated that he would continue refining the draft policy and return it to the committee for further review. The committee also discussed the possibility of distributing the finalized policy through public notices, news releases, and social media to improve public understanding of winter maintenance operations.

No formal action was taken.

10. Updated Project Cost Information

Rich provided an update regarding the proposed CTH H highway safety improvement project, which is scheduled for construction in 2028.

Rich reported that the project consultant had identified substantially more utility infrastructure and roadside obstructions within the proposed clear zone than originally anticipated. Initial estimates identified approximately 12 utility poles requiring relocation; subsequent field review identified approximately 49 poles and more than 60 utility pedestals potentially affected by the project.

The consultant also estimated that approximately 40% more trees would require removal than originally anticipated.

Rich explained that the project involves roadside safety improvements and clear zone modifications rather than pavement reconstruction. The increased number of utility relocations and additional clearing requirements could result in a significant increase in project costs.

The committee reviewed the project's grant funding and the County's anticipated 10% cost share. Rich indicated that the County's original share was estimated at approximately $177,000, but a revised project cost had not yet been established.

Rich reported that discussions were continuing with WI DOT and the project consultant regarding potential design modifications, including reducing the clear zone where permissible to limit the number of required utility relocations.

The committee acknowledged that the additional work could substantially increase project costs and potentially affect the County's financial contribution.

Rich indicated that further information would be presented as the project design and cost estimates were developed.

No formal action was taken.

11. Equipment Updates

Rich reported that Highway Department equipment was operating satisfactorily and that the maintenance shop was keeping up with equipment repairs and maintenance.

-Highway Department Staffing

Rich reported that the Highway Department had two vacant positions. The positions had been advertised for two weeks, with one application received.

An interview was scheduled for October 1, 2026. Rich indicated that the applicant possessed a commercial driver's license and appeared to meet the position's qualifications.

The committee discussed the department's staffing requirements for winter maintenance. Rich reported that the department operates 16 winter maintenance routes and could cover all routes with its existing personnel if necessary. However, the department ideally would have approximately 18 qualified drivers available to provide sufficient coverage and operational flexibility.

Rich noted that the department's winter maintenance responsibilities would increase when the Town of Woodboro maintenance agreement begins at the end of October.

The committee also discussed the possibility of utilizing limited-term or seasonal employees to supplement winter maintenance staffing if vacancies remain unfilled.

Rich indicated that filling the vacant positions before the winter maintenance season remained a priority.

14. Future Agenda Items

The committee noted that previously identified matters would remain under consideration for future meetings.

15. Public Comments

None.

16. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:01 a.m.

Committee Chairman

Committee Secretary

12. Complaint Status Report

Rich reported that the department had addressed nearly all outstanding complaints and that relatively few new complaints had been received.

The committee inquired about the flashing school bus warning signs near CTH K. Rich indicated that the signs appeared to be operating inconsistently and that their status remained uncertain.

13. Commissioner's Report

Rich provided the following updates:

-USH 70 and USH 51 Paving

Rich reported that the first portion of paving work on USH 70 West in Ottawa had been completed, with approximately 5,000 feet of additional paving scheduled to begin the following Monday.

Following completion of the USH 70 work, the department planned to begin paving the center turn lane on USH 51.

Rich explained that the USH 51 work would utilize a thin asphalt overlay of approximately three-quarters of an inch as an interim pavement improvement until the planned reconstruction project. He noted that the asphalt mixture contains a higher asphalt content and that similar overlays used on previous projects had performed satisfactorily.

The committee discussed the expected durability of the overlay, particularly during winter plowing operations.

-Winter Sand Production

Rich reported that winter sand production was anticipated to begin around October 12, depending on the completion of paving operations. Approximately two weeks of production were expected.

Rich reported that the department had received two proposals for sand material to support winter maintenance operations in the Minocqua area.

Although County Materials submitted a lower material price, the department selected material from the Pitlik & Wick Rocky Run location due to its shorter hauling distance and more favorable transportation logistics reducing over-all expense.

Rich explained that the reduced hauling distance was expected to offset the higher material price and provide operational benefits for the County and other participating municipalities.