ONEIDA COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Oneida County Highway Department Conference Room
Thursday, October 8, 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 and Chris McDonald/Highway Finance

1. Call to Order and Chairperson's Announcements

Chair Ted Cushing called the Public Works Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m., noting the meeting was handicap accessible and posted according to Wisconsin Open Meeting Laws.

2. Approve Agenda

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

3. Approve Minutes of the Public Works Committee Meeting Held September 24, 2026

Motion by Hess, seconded by Almekinder to approve the September 24, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

4. Public Comments

None.

5. Future Meeting Dates

The following future meeting dates were announced:

- October 22, 2026
- November 5, 2026
- November 19, 2026

6. Approve Vendor Vouchers

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

7. Routine Maintenance Agreement Review

Rich reviewed the proposed Routine Maintenance Agreement (RMA) for the upcoming year. The proposed agreement totaled $1,629,100, unchanged from the prior year.

Rich reported that, beginning in January, WisDOT planned to discontinue existing State Maintenance Agreements with municipalities for curb, storm inlet, and related maintenance. Those responsibilities would instead be incorporated into county maintenance obligations. The change would affect multiple communities and state highway corridors within Oneida County, including areas in Three Lakes, Minocqua, Lake Tomahawk, and Rhinelander.

The additional responsibilities would include street sweeping, cleaning and maintaining storm water inlets, repairing inlets, and curb maintenance. Rich expressed concern that the proposed RMA did not include additional funding to support the added workload.

The committee discussed the specialized equipment required to perform the work, particularly vacuum trucks and street sweepers, and noted that the Highway Department does not currently own the necessary equipment. Contracting with municipalities or private entities was discussed as a possible method of completing the work; however, funding for those services would still need to come from the RMA.

Rich reported that the issue was generating concern among highway departments throughout the WisDOT North Central Region. The committee requested additional clarification from WisDOT when department representatives attend a future meeting.

The committee also discussed the overall level of RMA funding. Rich reported that approximately 70% of the agreement is typically consumed by winter maintenance. He noted that actual expenditures can exceed the original RMA allocation and that the County was currently projected to exceed the 2026 agreement by approximately $300,000. Rich stated that WisDOT historically reimburses those approved excess expenditures.

No formal action was taken. The committee requested further discussion with WisDOT before approval of the agreement.

8. Equipment Updates

Rich reported that no new trucks had been received during the previous month.

The committee discussed the removal of one proposed truck purchase from the 2027 budget. Rich explained that the department had recently placed several trucks into service following extended delivery delays and that skipping one purchase year could be managed without immediately disrupting the department's replacement cycle.

Rich cautioned, however, that omitting truck purchases on a recurring basis could create future replacement problems and should not establish a precedent. He explained that the department attempts to maintain a regular replacement cycle because older equipment becomes increasingly costly to operate and repair.

The committee discussed the department's current fleet and clarified that two older trucks identified in previous fleet totals were already being auctioned and were no longer operational. One had a locked engine and the other had a failed transmission.

Rich reported that current delivery lead times for fully equipped trucks remain approximately 18 months. Two trucks were presently being built, with one anticipated around February and delivery of the second not yet determined.

The committee noted that the truck purchase could still be reconsidered during the County Board budget process if the department determined that maintaining the purchase was necessary.

No formal action was taken.

9. Complaint Status Report

Rich reported that the Highway Department was current on outstanding complaints and had no significant backlog.

10. Commissioner's Report

Utility Permit – CTH D

Rich reported that the department had received a utility permit request involving a proposed private sewer force main beneath CTH D in the Sugar Camp area.

The property configuration would require wastewater from a residence on the lake side of the highway to be pumped beneath CTH D to a dispersal system on the opposite side of the road.

Rich expressed concern regarding responsibility for future highway damage if the force main failed beneath the roadway. He noted that the current permit process did not contain an agreement clearly assigning liability for roadway repairs or other damages resulting from a failure.

Rich had not signed the highway permit, and the Zoning Department was holding the related sanitary permit pending resolution of the issue.

The committee directed Rich to consult with Corporation Counsel regarding an agreement or permit language that would protect the County from financial responsibility for damage caused by the private force main.

Electrical Upgrade Project

Rich reported that the design for Phase 1 of the Highway Department electrical upgrade was complete. The consultant was working with Corporation Counsel to finalize bid specifications, including required insurance language.

Rich expressed concern regarding delays and communication difficulties with the consultant.

The committee discussed whether some planned facility improvements could potentially be combined into larger bid packages to improve coordination and potentially reduce costs. Projects referenced included electrical improvements, tuckpointing, drainage work, chimney and roof work, and other facility repairs.

Rich also reported that department staff planned to meet with representatives familiar with the previously proposed major shop improvements to better define the project scope and establish priorities for future facility work.

Four-Day Workweek

The committee discussed whether additional formal action was required regarding the Highway Department's four-day, ten-hour work schedule.

Members noted that the 2027 budget had been developed and approved on the assumption that the department would continue operating on the four-day schedule. The committee expressed support for continuing the schedule but requested confirmation that all necessary procedural requirements had been satisfied.

Rich was directed to contact County Clerk/County Administrator Tracy Hartman and Corporation Counsel to determine whether additional committee or County Board action was necessary.

Town of Woodboro Winter Maintenance

Rich reported that Highway Department staff and supervisors were meeting with Town of Woodboro representatives to clarify expectations and operational details for the County's new winter maintenance responsibilities.

The County assumed responsibility for the Town's maintenance effective October 1, 2026. The Sheriff's Office had also been notified that winter road concerns within the Town should be directed to the Highway Department.

Winter Sand Production

Rich reported that the department planned to begin winter sand production the following Monday and was preparing equipment for the operation.

Highway Department Staffing

Rich reported that one of the department's vacancies had been filled, with the new employee scheduled to begin October 19, 2026.

Rich also reported that the limited-term employee for whom a position had been held had successfully obtained her commercial driver's license temporary permit. The department planned to send her to training to obtain the full license, after which she could transition to full-time employment.

11. Future Agenda Items

The committee requested follow-up regarding whether additional formal action was required for the Highway Department's four-day work schedule.

The Routine Maintenance Agreement and WisDOT's proposed changes to municipal maintenance responsibilities were also expected to return for further discussion.

12. Public Comments

None.

13. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at **8:37 a.m.**

Committee Chairman

Committee Secretary