# ONEIDA COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

**Oneida County Highway Department Conference Room**
**Thursday, October 22, 2026 – 8:00 a.m.**

| Committee Members | Present | Excused | Absent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ted Cushing | X *via phone* | | |
| Bob Almekinder | X | | |
| Billy Fried | X | | |
| Dan Hess | X *via phone* | | |
| Greg Oettinger | | **X** | |

**Also Present:** Ben Rich/Highway Commissioner, Dan Gleason/Highway Finance, and Linnaea Newman/Oneida County Board

## 1. Call to Order and Chairperson's Announcements

Acting Chair Bob Almekinder called the Oneida County Public Works Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. The meeting was noted as handicap accessible and properly posted according to Wisconsin Open Meeting Laws.

## 2. Approve Agenda

Motion by Cushing, 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 Fried, 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:

- November 5, 2026
- November 19, 2026
- December 3, 2026

## 6. Approve Vendor Vouchers

The committee reviewed vendor vouchers totaling $160,740.47. A question was raised regarding a payment of approximately $36,000 to Energy Solution Partners, which was identified as a fuel purchase.

Motion by Fried, seconded by Cushing, to approve vendor vouchers totaling $160,740.47. Motion carried.

## 7. Road-Crossing POWTS Permit Process

Rich provided an update regarding development of a permit process for private on-site wastewater treatment system (POWTS) lines proposed to cross beneath County highways.

Rich reported that he had contacted other counties and reviewed permit processes used for similar installations. The proposed process had also been reviewed by County staff and Corporation Counsel. The draft would place responsibility for future damage on the property owner and establish an easement or other recorded restriction that would remain with the property following a transfer of ownership.

The committee discussed coordination between the Highway Department, Zoning Department, and Land Information Department. Members expressed concern that the process should clearly identify which department would administer the permit and ensure that the necessary Highway, zoning, sanitary, and land-record requirements were coordinated without requiring applicants to separately navigate multiple departments.

The committee also discussed the permit fee. Rich noted that a standard utility bore beneath a County highway currently carries a $200 fee, but the proposed POWTS crossing process would require additional review and staff involvement. Members agreed that the fee should reflect the actual administrative costs associated with the permit. A potential $500 fee was discussed as an example, but no fee was established.

The committee emphasized the need for clear approval procedures and protections against future roadway damage. Particular concern was expressed regarding the possibility of a pressurized wastewater line leaking beneath the roadway, eroding supporting material, and eventually causing pavement settlement.

Rich was directed to continue working with Zoning, Land Information, and Corporation Counsel to clarify permit administration, recording requirements, approval authority, and an appropriate fee before returning the matter to the committee.

No formal action was taken.

## 8. Approve Out-of-County Travel for Snowfighter Training

Rich requested approval for up to three Highway Department employees to attend snowfighter training in Eau Claire on November 17, 2026.

Rich explained that the Wisconsin County Highway Association contracts with a training provider that uses a plow-truck driving simulator to expose operators to scenarios including pedestrians, animals, limited visibility, and whiteout conditions. The course also includes approximately 90 minutes of classroom instruction specific to snowplow operation.

Rich stated that two of the employees being considered had limited snowplow experience and that the training provides practical scenarios that are difficult to reproduce through normal on-the-job instruction. The training is a one-day course, and the State was expected to reimburse a portion of the expense.

Motion by Fried, seconded by Hess, to approve out-of-county travel for up to three employees to attend snowfighter training in Eau Claire on November 17, 2026. Motion carried.

## 9. Equipment Updates

Rich reported that a 2018 Highway Department truck was out of service due to deterioration of a flange on the diesel exhaust and DEF system.

The manufacturer's repair procedure would require replacement of the complete exhaust "one-can" assembly at an estimated cost of approximately $16,000. Rich reported that the truck's electronic monitoring system detects the exhaust leak and places the vehicle into reduced-power mode, limiting its operation to approximately five miles per hour.

Department staff were investigating alternatives to replacement of the complete assembly, including having the damaged flange repaired or fabricated by a machine shop. Other county highway departments contacted had not yet experienced the same problem..

Rich stated that the remainder of the department's equipment was operating satisfactorily. Preparation of plow trucks for winter operations was expected to begin the following week.

## 10. Complaint Status Report

Rich reported that no new complaints had been received.

The committee discussed continuing problems with the flashing warning lights near Cassion School. The department had moved the units closer together in an effort to improve communication between the signs, but the adjustment had not resolved the issue.

The manufacturer was continuing to assist with troubleshooting. Rich stated that if the issue could not be corrected, the department may need to consider a different product or manufacturer.

## 11. Commissioner's Report

### *Winter Maintenance Policy*

Rich reported that work was continuing on the Highway Department's winter maintenance policy. He anticipated having a more complete draft available for committee review by the November 19 meeting.

### *Salt-Sand Production*

Rich reported that the department was actively producing winter salt-sand material. Production for participating towns had been completed, with approximately 6,000 tons remaining to be produced for the Rhinelander location.

Completion was anticipated the following Tuesday.

*Highway Department Facility Planning*

Rich reported that discussions with Kraus-Anderson had identified a need for substantially more detail regarding the scope, sequence, and cost of planned Highway Department facility projects.

Committee members expressed concern that funding had been made available for facility improvements but that there was not yet a sufficiently defined plan identifying the work to be completed, project priorities, sequencing, and the relationship between individual projects.

The committee discussed the benefit of coordinating related improvements so that work within a particular portion of the facility could be completed together rather than disturbing the same area multiple times. Examples included coordinating windows, doors, ceilings, lighting, electrical improvements, drainage, tuckpointing, roofing, and other building work where appropriate.

Members supported holding a dedicated working meeting with Kraus-Anderson and relevant County representatives to review available funding, project scope, priorities, and a realistic implementation schedule. The committee indicated that the goal of the meeting should be to establish clear direction regarding how currently available and future funding will be used.

The committee generally supported continuing to prioritize the main Highway Department facility while acknowledging that outlying shops also require maintenance. Recent roof replacement work in Three Lakes and roof leaks at the Minocqua facility were cited as examples of needs at the satellite locations.

The November 19 meeting was initially discussed as a possible date; however, because WisDOT representatives are expected to attend that meeting for discussion of the Routine Maintenance Agreement, a separate date for the facilities working meeting will be coordinated.

*Four-Day Workweek*

The committee was informed that the Executive Committee had approved continuation of the Highway Department's four-day, ten-hour work schedule for the current season.

The arrangement will be evaluated during and following the season to determine whether it results in additional costs or operational impacts. The information gathered will be used to support a more definitive decision regarding future years.

## 12. Future Agenda Items

The committee discussed the upcoming November 19 meeting with WisDOT representative Nick Voss regarding the State Routine Maintenance Agreement.

Members requested clarification regarding reimbursement for additional curb, drainage, and related State highway maintenance responsibilities being assigned to the County. The committee also identified the cost of specialized equipment necessary to perform the additional work as an issue to be addressed with WisDOT.

A separate working meeting will also be coordinated with Kraus-Anderson and appropriate County representatives regarding Highway Department facility improvements.

## 13. Public Comments

None.

## 14. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at **8:35 a.m.**

Committee Chairman

Committee Secretary