

**ONEIDA COUNTY
PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE**

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CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM:

DATE: February 25, 2021
TO: Oneida County Town Chairpersons
FROM: Oneida County Public Works Committee
RE: Upcoming County Highway Construction Referendum Questions

The Oneida County Public Works Committee respectfully requests the following to be read into the minutes of each town's March, 2021 town board meeting:

This memorandum is to serve as a request of the Oneida County Public Works Committee to help provide information to Oneida County residents regarding the two referendum questions on the April 6, 2021 ballot, why the funding is needed and how the outcome affects taxpayers.

The first referendum question is a binding referendum **requiring** the County Board to increase the tax levy by \$500,000 the fiscal years 2022 through 2031. If approved, will result in a property tax increase of approximately \$6.50 per \$100,000 of valuation for the 2022 budget (it is not possible to determine the increase for the remaining years).

The second referendum question is an advisory referendum and **does not require** the County Board to take action in conformity with referendum results. If approved, advises Oneida County the voters approve of cutting \$500,000 dollars of County programs and services in the 2022 Oneida County Budget and applying that \$500,000 to the County highway road and bridge construction budget.

History

The Highway Department is responsible for developing road specifications, replacement schedules and road maintenance. The Public Works Committee then awards the reconstruction projects to private companies with a portion of the work performed by the County.

Oneida County has just over 172 miles of county highways requiring reconstruction after 20 years, or 8.6 miles per year. In 2005, the average cost to reconstruct one mile of road was approximately \$76,000 but by 2014 those cost increased to \$180,000 per mile. However, the tax levy has not increased reducing the number of miles reconstructed below the 8.6 miles per year needed to maintain the yearly average and over time, compounding the problem. Implementing best maintenance practices, the Highway Department can help extend the expected road life

from 20 to 25 years helping make up some of the difference but not all. In order to get into a 25-year cycle it will require \$1.6 million annually with the County appropriating approximately \$600,000 per year from the levy plus an additional \$1 million needed.

In addition, the County Board through the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), has granted requests for additional funding from the General Fund, however, this is not a sustainable practice as there is no guarantee funding will be available from year-to-year as this money may be needed for other programs or is simply not available.

Present Day

The current cost to reconstruct one mile of road is \$200,000, however, in 2011 the Highway Department budget was reduced by 5 percent then followed by a 0 percent increase through 2021. For 2021, the highway department budget accounts for about \$377,000 requiring additional CIP funding of just over \$1 million to meet the minimum necessary to maintain the twenty-five year cycle.

The referendum, if approved, will provide the additional funding Oneida County needs to maintain the County Trunk Highway system twenty-five year replacement schedule while reducing its reliance on the General Fund to ensure safe roads. The Public Works Committee is keenly aware of the importance for the public's feedback on how tax dollars are allocated to maximize the return on those investments and welcomes their questions.

cc: Town Clerks