

Patterns of Government in Onondaga County

Structure and Services of County, City, Town, and Village Governments



A Report by F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse and the Community Benchmarks Program of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University



FOREWORD

The 2011 revised “Patterns of Government” is an important resource for elected and public officials, citizens, students, businesses, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and the general public. “Patterns of Government” also serves as a textbook for the Citizens Academy, sponsored by F.O.C.U.S Greater Syracuse and classes at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University. This document contains vital information that ordinarily can be found only when one researches multiple sources.

This material will help you to understand how local governments are organized, the services they provide, and sources of funding. You will understand how tax dollars are used, the function and interaction of programs, and “who to call” for service and information. If the material in this document motivates civic trusteeship and mutual responsibility with governments, it has achieved its purpose.

Conscientious care was given to updating the information by Andrew Woodbury, a Policy Studies student at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. His efforts were supervised and guided by Carol Dwyer, Director of the Community Benchmarks Program (CBP), also at the Maxwell School and Charlotte (Chuckie) Holstein, Executive Director of F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse, Inc. Website links and updated information was provided by Chenzi Qian, international student in the Masters Program at the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University. To all of them we express a hearty thank you.

A special thank you is extended to all of the departments that supplied updated information for the 2011 edition of “Patterns of Government.” This document is dependent on the information supplied by the government agencies.

The original “Patterns of Government” was published by the League of Women Voters of the Syracuse Metropolitan Area in 1970 and revised in 1981, 1996, and 2006.

The 2011 edition of “Patterns of Government” is sponsored by F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse, Inc. and the CBP of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University.

Picture on cover: *The Clinton Exchange*- Gavin Keefe Schaefer, February 28, 2010

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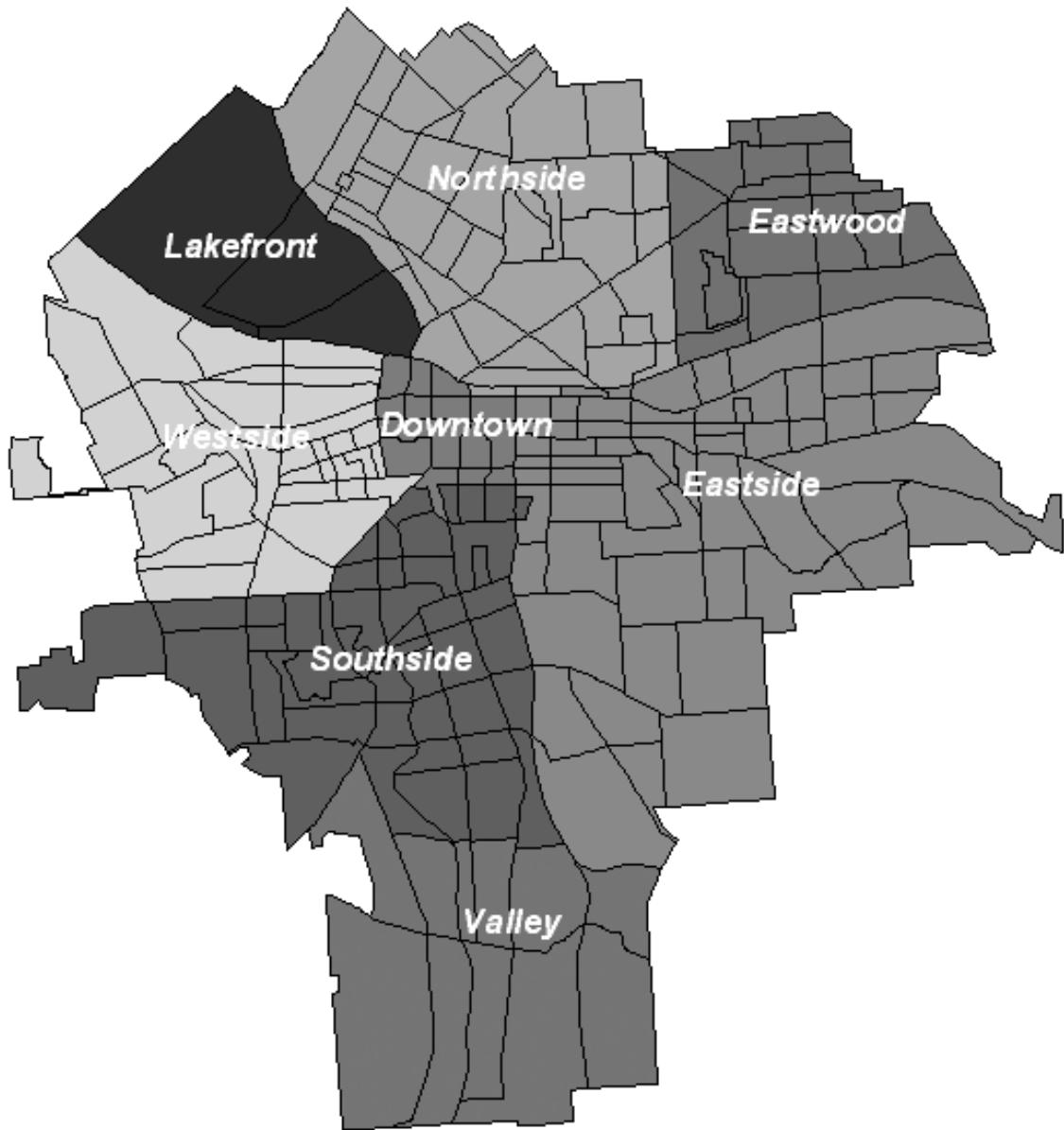
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Map 1
Onondaga County



Source: Syracuse – Onondaga County G.I.S.

Map 2
Syracuse Police Department Division of Neighborhoods in Syracuse



PART I- STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

Fifty years after Columbus arrived in the New World and before the European settlements in Jamestown and Plymouth Rock, the Iroquois Confederacy was formed in Central New York. It was a league of five tribes: Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Cayuga, and Onondaga. This Native American form of government lasted for over 200 years from the beginning of the European conquest of North America and after the American Revolution. The English form of colonial government was introduced to Central New York when the first European settlers arrived, enticed by the area's strategic location at the crossroads of pioneer trade routes.

The first Caucasian settlers traveled by way of the Hudson and Mohawk River valleys. That historic route still provides important canal, railroad, and highway transportation in the state. Salt deposits had made the Central New York area a trade center for Native Americans, and this natural resource furnished material for the early industries of the new settlers. Fertile soil and a plentiful supply of water supported an agricultural economy, while commerce and industry developed along the canals and railroads. Today, Interstate Highways 90 and 81 intersect the metropolitan area that extends to the five counties of the central New York region.

The city of Syracuse and the towns and villages surrounding it make up Onondaga County at the heart of the Central New York region. In the northern part of the county where the land is low and level, agriculture in the last 45 years has given way to industrial and residential development. In the southern area the hilly countryside is still predominantly agricultural but is slowly becoming more developed as people move out of the city of Syracuse and into suburban areas.

Although residential and commercial development seems to spread without regard to political boundaries, the metropolitan area is defined as the city and the communities around it, which draw much of their livelihood from the city and use many city services. This handbook attempts to describe not only the traditional institutions of governments in Onondaga County with its city, towns, and villages, but also the extent of metropolitan growth and its effect upon these institutions. The Syracuse area has unique features and many advantages, as this book will detail. However, Syracuse suffers from problems common to most urban areas in the United States: an aging center city, declining population, a property tax base inadequate to pay for the services needed by its citizenry. This is compounded by the sprawl of the expanding suburbs which can accelerate the deterioration of natural resources and add to the financial burdens of all governments with increased infrastructure needs in the suburbs and a loss of tax base in the city.

In response to these problems the various local governments are adding new departments and services to the structures inherited from colonial times. At the same time they are transferring some of their traditional responsibilities among the various levels of government. Added to this mix is an influx of federal monies in the form of general revenue sharing and grants for specific projects. The money helps alleviate some of the problems, but new ones arise. Many of these new problems can exceed the capacity of a single agency at any level of government. This book attempts to identify the responsibilities at each of the levels of local government—county, city, town, and village—and to provide a framework for understanding how each relates to the other.

Historical Development

Chapter One

Counties and towns are often described as involuntary forms of government; that is, they were established originally by New York State to administer basic state functions within geographical divisions. These divisions are similar to the townships and parishes found in some other states. Cities and villages in contrast, are described as voluntary; that is, they were created by the state at the request of their residents.

Formation of the County

The first permanent European settlements in what is now Onondaga County were founded in the mid-1780s. Under frontier conditions distances were great, population was sparse, and transportation and communication were difficult and slow. Of first priority to both state and settler was the prompt and orderly administration of justice. Following the English colonial example, New York State divided its territory into counties for the purpose of providing units through which courts functioned. Each county had a seat where circuit court sessions were held.

The first Onondaga County officers were mainly those who served the Circuit Court. The first sessions of the court met in local taverns. By 1810 the county seat was officially established in Onondaga Hill and a courthouse constructed. It was not long before the villages of Syracuse and Salina were competing for the designation as the county seat. It was decided to relocate the county seat between the villages of Syracuse and Salina, and Onondaga Hill's influence waned.

The area of Onondaga County was originally about four times larger than it is today. The difficulties that settlers faced in getting to the county seat were a major factor in the steady reduction of the geographical area. From the original county territory established in 1794, the state created Cayuga County in 1799, Cortland County in 1808, and Oswego County in 1816.

Formation of the Towns

New York State also followed the colonial example in establishing towns as taxing units. Onondaga County was at first divided into 11 towns. As they exist today, the towns are subdivisions of five of the original towns. The smaller geographic unit of the town was determined to be more convenient for serving a number of functions.

One of the primary functions of a town was to provide tax revenues to support county courts. Administration of the taxing process was assigned to the supervisor who, because of the nature of the duties, was also the town's chief executive officer. Supervisors of all the towns in the county were required to meet annually and, when authorized by the state, to undertake public projects with the costs shared by the towns. Among the first activities of Onondaga County's Board of Supervisors was construction of the courthouse in Onondaga Hill.

The towns also supervised much of the early road building. For example the town of Manlius had seven road districts in the early years which became 30 by 1807 and 70 by mid-century. The great bulk of the roads during this period were local or town roads, although at the same time state roads were being built east and west. Funds for state highways appropriated by the state legislature were paid to those towns commissioned to build and maintain them. By the middle of the 19th century the main responsibility for road construction and maintenance passed to private turnpike companies and builders of plank roads. Also at this time, canals and railroads carried most of the traffic. The [Erie Canal](#) was opened formally in 1825, and railroads were in place in the 1830s. It was not until the early 20th century that the roads again became an important function of local government. In 1910 counties began to organize county highway departments to share road building responsibility with the state and towns. Today, towns maintain roads, but usually do not build them.

Town's were required to see to the needs of the poor through the office of Overseer of the Poor. The determination of the need was left to the locality. Welfare was sometimes taken care of by a public auction at which the town contracted with the bidder who offered to support the poor at the lowest cost to the town. Later the state authorized counties to build poor houses. The [Onondaga County Poor House](#) was approved in 1827. A century later, in 1938, the responsibility for public welfare was assigned to the county, and the [Department of Social Services](#) was established.

Public education was closely linked to towns at first. State policy mandated that as land was divided for settlement, lots should be set aside for school sites. In 1812 state law required that each town divide its territory into school districts and provide a school for each district. Elected commissioners were responsible for the schools. Early school districts were numerous and small. For example, in 1842 the town of Manlius had 22 districts; Clay, 20; Skaneateles, 18; and Camillus, 14. During the early 20th century the state urged school districts to consolidate. This consolidation was accomplished (not without agonizing controversy) resulting in 18 school districts in Onondaga County. Today, all districts, except in the city of Syracuse, operate independently of the governments whose residents they serve.

Formation of City and Villages

Counties and towns were designed to assist the state in providing basic government services throughout its territory; the purpose of cities and villages was to enable people in areas of dense population areas to provide for their special 'urban' needs. These included fire protection, water supply, streets and sidewalks, and toward the end of the century, electric street lighting.

Nine villages in Onondaga County were incorporated by special state action between 1830 and 1852. Since 1874 villages have been incorporated by procedures outlined by general law instead of by an act of the state legislature. Six of the current villages in Onondaga County were incorporated by general law after 1874. Unlike villages, cities have always been incorporated by special action of the New York State Legislature.

Although a city charter was more difficult to obtain, a city has more local control than a village. For this reason, some settlements preferred to seek city charters. [Syracuse](#), the only city in the county, received its charter in 1848.

Not all communities chose to incorporate. Those that did not are hamlets, a term which has no legal or political significance. There are several rather large communities in the county that are unincorporated hamlets: Jamesville and Brewerton, for example. Many hamlets disappeared, leaving only their names on county road maps, such as Oswego Bitter and Rose Hill.

Growth of Villages

Because population centers grew to serve an agricultural economy, villages were located near the sources of power needed to run the saw and grist mills: Manlius and Fayetteville on Limestone Creek; Marcellus and Camillus on Nine Mile Creek; Skaneateles, Elbridge, and Jordan on Skaneateles Creek.

Their vitality as centers fluctuated with the growth and development of transportation in the state. In the days of stagecoaches, the great turnpikes that crossed the state brought prosperity to villages like Fabius, Tully, Manlius, Marcellus, Camillus, and Elbridge. The Erie and Oswego canals, while generally having a beneficial effect in the county, tended to strengthen the settlements they touched at the expense of the others. Manlius, an early trade center, was hurt when the Erie Canal shifted the flow of commercial traffic to the north. Likewise, Jordan's fortune rose while Elbridge's declined. The era of the railroads, which began in the first third of the 19th century, caused further fluctuations. A major impact on the region occurred in the 1950s with the construction of the two major highway systems, Interstate 81 north and south and the [New York State Thruway](#) east and west.

Growth of Syracuse

From the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 until the Second World War, growth of Onondaga County was measured by the growth of Syracuse, first as a village and then as a city.

Several factors contributed to the rise of Syracuse. The rich deposit of salt, which underlies much of Central New York, provided the source of the earliest industry supporting the villages of Liverpool, Salina, and Syracuse. By the middle of the 19th century, the salt trade was joined by other industries such as pottery and candle making. The Erie Canal was crucial to the development of Syracuse as a major commercial center. Railroads further sustained its growth.

Between 1850 and 1920, the county population outside the city grew from 57,000 to 64,000. During that same time, the city's population grew from 22,000 to 172,000. Growth of the city was accomplished in large measure by a series of annexations. As the population increased and spilled over the city line forming, 'suburban' communities, the city responded by enlarging its jurisdiction to include these communities, many of which were incorporated villages.

The annexed communities lost independence but gained services that they could not easily supply themselves. For example, the city had established the Skaneateles water supply and distribution system and installed some sewers before 1900. The policy of annexation helped to insure the political jurisdiction responsible for providing services to the community also had full access to the community's taxable wealth.

Today's Trends

Data from the [US Census Bureau](#) show that Onondaga County's population declined during the 1990s from 468,973 in 1990 to 458,336 in 2000. The US Census Bureau 2009 estimate reported a decrease of 3,583 people from 2000. The city of Syracuse's population has decreased by 1,265 people since the 2000 census, or just less than one percent.¹

While the population of Onondaga County in the 1990s decreased by about 2.2 percent, the city's population dropped by over 10 percent over the

same time period. The population decreased from 163,860 in 1990 to 147,306 in 2000. Although the estimated population of Onondaga County experienced a small decline in 2007, with it reaching a low of 452,944 people in 2007, the county's 2009 estimated population of 454,753 is slightly higher than the 2005 population estimate of 454,625 people.

The geographic shape of today's urban community bears little resemblance to the boundaries of any local government. It is the decline of annexation and the growth of special benefit districts that have influenced this kind of population distribution. Special benefit districts provide the services cities and villages usually offer to housing developments that are outside city and village limits. Current population growth in areas of the county continues without any correlation to city, town, or village boundaries. Recent economic forces have forced local communities to consolidate services and governments to control costs and lower taxes. Community leaders have confronted the issue of sprawl by encouraging citizens to live in or nearer to the central city.



(Syracuse City Hall)

¹ This number is different than what is reported in the Census American FactFinder due to an error in the reporting of tract 46 discovered in 2011.

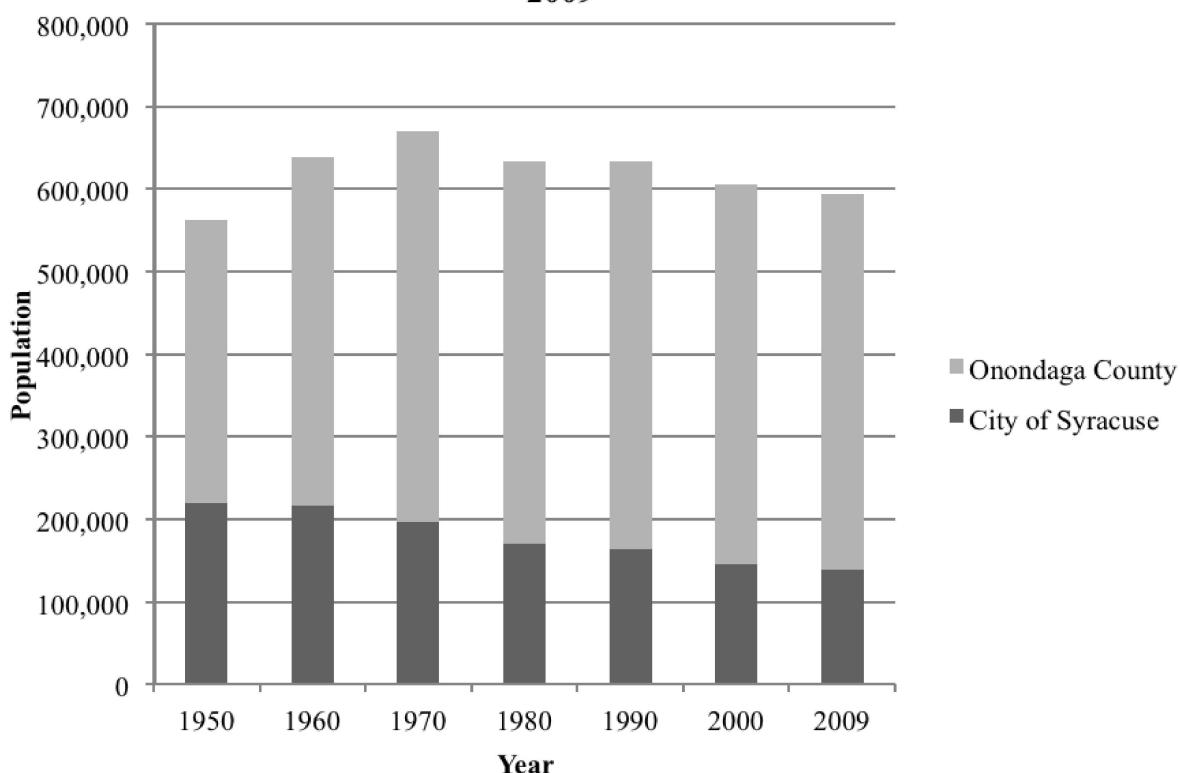


(Citizens Audit Intersections for Safety)



(Farmer's Market in Clinton Square)

Chart 1
**Population of Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse, 1950
-2009**



Source U.S. Census Bureau

Onondaga County Today

Chapter Two

Onondaga County government operates under a home rule charter adopted in 1961 by general referendum. The charter provides for separate legislative and executive branches. The executive branch is headed by an elected county executive who serves a four-year term. The county executive is the chief budget officer, responsible for developing both an annual budget and a six-year capital budget. In this fiscal capacity the county executive also sets the equalization rate among taxing districts in the county.

The Onondaga County Legislature is the law-making body of county government. The legislature meets monthly. It appropriates funds, passes legislation, votes to confirm appointments of the county executive and may override the county executive's legislative vetoes. The legislature has 17 members, elected from districts of nearly equal population. The district lines are adjusted as necessary following the release of the decennial US Census data. Legislators serve two-year terms. Legislators elect a chairperson, who appoints committee chairs and members. There are eight standing committees of the legislature: County Facilities,

Education & Libraries, Environmental Protection, Health, Planning and Economic Development, Public Safety, Social Services, and Ways & Means. The legislature employs staff and a part-time attorney to assist in the evaluation of legislation and the budget.

Onondaga County Government

County government is the administrative arm of the state in the delivery of health care, mental health care, social services, the electoral process, and law enforcement. Onondaga County government provides regional infrastructure, including 829 miles of county roads and highways, collection and treatment of waste water, a water system to bring Lake Ontario water to the suburbs, and maintenance of its parks and two cemeteries.

Onondaga County government also provides programs and services as are necessary, desirable, and within the resources of its residents. These services include long-term health care, economic development, Onondaga Community College, Onondaga County Public Library, 911 emergency communications system, county-wide planning, and the following

Onondaga County Legislature Legislative Process

Proposal	Consideration		Enactment	
From a legislator or legislative body: idea resolution program	1. Assigned to a committee or subcommittee 2. Draft of resolution 3. Review by law Department / Legislative Counsel 4. Information from Legislative Staff	5. Consideration by committee or subcommittee 6. Sometimes - a public hearing 7. Approval, tabling, or defeat of resolution in committee 8. Sometimes consideration by another committee	1. Public notice 2. Regular/special session of Legislature 3. Approval, tabling, or defeat of resolution. 13 vote majority required except for bonding when 16 votes are necessary for passage	4. Approval or veto of County Executive 5. If vetoed, may be overridden by 2/3 vote on Legislature 6. Certification, distribution and filing of Statute
From the Executive Branch/Dept: program resolution request for funding				
External Request				

agencies or divisions: [Community Development](#), [Aging & Youth](#), [Veterans Services](#) and [Human Rights](#).

1. The [Oncenter](#), the convention center complex, and [Alliance Bank Stadium](#) are economic development projects aimed at enhancing tourism in the county. These facilities are being updated, and expanded as economic development initiatives to revitalize downtown. Expansion to the Carousel Center is planned and working its way through the bureaucratic process, with hopes of realizing more jobs and millions of dollars a year in sales tax revenues for the area.

In September of 2010, Onondaga County released its [2011 – 2016 Capital Improvement Plan](#) in compliance with [the 2010 Development Guide for Onondaga County](#). This plan seeks to meet the needs of the county including safe and adequate infrastructure and a clean environment that will attract and retain businesses and provide a high quality of life for Onondaga County citizens. The plan takes into consideration financial impacts as part of an effort by the county to minimize the financial burden of county services and capital spending on taxpayers.

Onondaga County government has downsized and restructured in response to changes in its fiscal environment - a declining population, loss of federal and state aid, and increased mandates. In 2011, the county government workforce had 3,862 full-time equivalent positions, a decrease of 460 positions from 2008.

Improvement of water quality in Onondaga Lake is a continuous environmental and fiscal

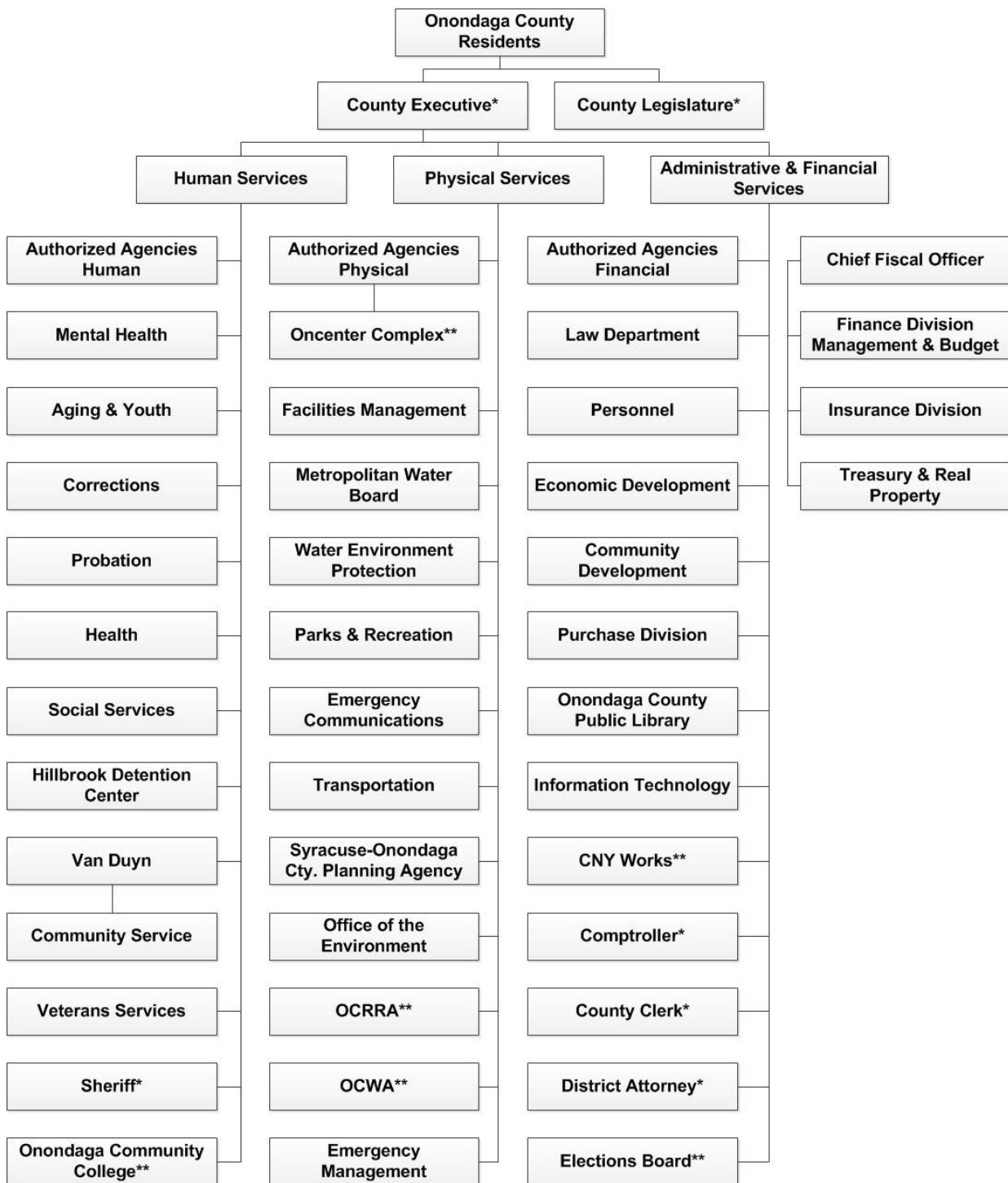
challenge that will continue in the future. County Executive Joanie Mahoney launched a program in 2009 called “[Save the Rain](#).” This comprehensive program has as its goal, cleaning up and restoring Onondaga Lake. The program includes construction efforts to reduce the effects of storm water pollution on the lake and its tributaries. These construction efforts include traditional gray and green infrastructure plans. The magnitude of this mandated expenditure places the county in the position of balancing local needs with federal policy and environmental requirements, along with infrastructure maintenance, while protecting an economic climate that can retain and attract jobs and economic growth.



(The Fourth County Courthouse)

Chart 1

Onondaga County Table of Organization



*Elected Official ** County Liaison

Source: Onondaga County 2011 Annual Budget

Town Government Today

Chapter Three

Structure

The structure and scope of the governmental powers of towns are defined in Town Law enacted by the [New York State Legislature](#) and in the [New York State Constitution](#). In Onondaga County there are 10 first-class towns (population over 10,000) and nine second-class towns (population under 10,000). Because of the pattern of metropolitan growth, the first-class towns are located in a ring around Syracuse and in the northern part of the county.

Town voters elect a supervisor who is the chief executive officer and four to six representatives who, with the supervisor, constitute the town board. The town clerk, superintendent of highways, town justices and the tax receiver or collector are also elected. The exceptions are the town of Salina which has an appointed town clerk and highway superintendent and the town of Clay with an appointed highway superintendent.

Services

Population density and the value of taxable real estate influence the activities of town government, the services it provides, and the taxes it needs to raise to pay for the services. As towns grew in population, there was an increasing tendency by some towns to provide the services traditionally considered to be the responsibility of city and village governments. These services have been made available through special benefit districts and part-town districts. (Chapter 6 provides more information about the financing of these districts).

Special benefit districts are simple taxing units (not usually governing units) set up and administered by a county or town to provide many essential services (water supply, sewers, street lights, etc.). The basic principle of the special district is the same one implicit in city and village incorporation: everyone within the defined taxing unit will benefit equally from the service and share equally in the cost.

The special benefit district has been a significant factor in the decline of annexation and incorporation. It has provided towns and counties with the means for supplying many essential services to heavily populated but unincorporated areas and has relieved many of the pressures which otherwise might have led to more dramatic political reorganization.

The nature of suburban growth has resulted in a great upsurge in the number of special districts. Each new housing tract may require the formation of a sewer, water, drainage, hydrant, and lighting district. The fragment effect of numerous special districts can impose costly administrative burdens on both town and county as well as significant inequalities for the taxpayer. Since initial capital investments vary, it is commonplace for a suburban homeowner to discover his neighbor in another sewer district is paying higher or lower taxes for the same service.

Although the special district has proved an invaluable tool in helping towns and counties make the transition from rural to urban, it may work against the orderly and planned development of a community. It can also prevent the extension of improvements into less densely populated areas where terrain or distance makes total cost unusually high. Town boards are empowered to consolidate special improvement districts subject to the approval of taxpayers in the affected districts, but taxpayers are often unwilling to give this approval.

Part-town districts are commonly used by towns that contain villages that already provide broad municipal services. Very simply, a part-town district includes all the territory of a town that is outside a village. The precedent for such a district was established years ago as a part of the highway system. While the whole town is assessed for certain highway costs (snow removal, weed control, bridges, and machinery costs), only that part of the town outside the village pays for the maintenance of town roads.

Police, zoning and planning, refuse disposal, and parks and recreation are examples of the new uses of a part-town district. Its popularity as a solution to a growing problem caused the state in 1965 to create a new category of state aid which provided payments to towns for their "outside village areas."

The Suburban Town Law allows another method for financing and administering services on the town level. Under a 1963 state law, densely populated towns with accelerated growth may adopt the status of a suburban town. This law permits a town to separate administrative operation from policy-making operations and to establish departments in town government. It also empowers a town board to abandon the special district in extending services and instead to use special assessment areas. The significant differences between the two is that the capital investment costs can be distributed over the much larger tax base of the whole town, with the

Table 1
US Census Population Estimates, 2009

Municipality	2009 Population Estimate
Camillus	23,477
Cicero	30,314
Clay	58,785
DeWitt	24,422
Elbridge	6,058
Fabius	1,965
Geddes	16,859
LaFayette	4,970
Lysander	21,521
Manlius	32,299
Marcellus	6,293
Onondaga	21,655
Otisco	2,523
Pompey	6,769
Salina	32,489
Skaneateles	7,357
Spafford	1,685
Tully	2,710
Van Buren	12,642

benefited area paying a charge for the service itself. A suburban town may also dissolve existing special districts and arrange for their debt payments on a part-town basis. If town and village governments wish to cooperate, they may consolidate financing and provide services throughout the entire town. The law also permits town boards to regulate traffic and share in traffic-fine receipts as cities and villages do. The towns of Camillus, Onondaga, Clay, and Geddes have adopted the Suburban Town Law. However, these towns have not used the full powers under the law.

Local Government Consolidation

During tight fiscal times, the conversation regarding local government consolidation and shared services has become more widely accepted. Rather than large-scale consolidations of towns or villages across the county, many local governments have explored shared services and department consolidations. In some cases, town supervisors and village mayors have looked at ways to eliminate a service or share the cost of a service or equipment with a neighboring municipality.

In recent years towns across Onondaga County have proposed a variety of shared services: property assessment, tax collection, animal control officers and comptrollers among other services. Specific examples of successful shared services recently adopted or currently underway include:

- In February 2011, residents of Salina voted 530 to 55 to eliminate the town receiver of taxes. Previously the towns of Dewitt and Van Buren had eliminated this position.
- Skaneateles residents voted to close its 9-1-1 center
- In 2008, the town of Clay merged its police department with the [Onondaga County Sheriff's Department](#).

Village Government Today

Chapter Four

Structure

Village Law and the New York State Constitution sets forth the structure and powers of village government. Village governments are responsible for providing such services as police and fire protection, sewer, water, highway services and a court system. Villages are governed by an elected mayor and a board of trustees. The mayor and board meet once or twice each month in general sessions open to the public. The office of village justice is an elected position but it is not required under law. In many villages the clerk and treasurer positions are often combined into one position.

Other officials and department heads required to carry on the functions of a village are appointed by the mayor subject to the approval of the board of trustees. Prior to the 1972 re-codification of Village Law, villages were classed according to population. One law now governs all villages. The size (population, land area) of villages incorporated before 1973 varies greatly; there are now criteria established in the Village Law that determines standards for incorporation.

Growth

Most of the villages in Onondaga County have remained outside the main trend of population growth. Only one village, Baldwinsville, has shown consistent population growth since 1960, according to the US Census. In 12 of the 15 villages the US Census population projection for 2009 was less than in 1990.

Most villages have limited space for development while others have made deliberate attempts to avoid being engulfed by suburbia. Through their zoning powers, they have tried not only to preserve their identity, but also to conserve their historical character. Most villages have planning

and zoning boards, with members appointed by the mayor. The current trend is for most villages to develop planning programs to structure future development of village land.

Planning programs are geared to suit different purposes. The village of Fabius limits the size and type of buildings that may be constructed; the villages of Fayetteville and Skaneateles have historical preservation laws. Villages, which once served as commercial centers for a rural population, are now often centers for large suburban communities. This change has meant increased use of village streets, commercial establishments and indirectly public safety facilities, which in turn may increase village costs. At the same time suburban growth often has meant a larger market for village-owned utilities.

Village governments are responsible for providing many of the same services as those required of larger, metropolitan governments.

Because villages are surrounded by the jurisdiction of the town of which they are a part, village taxpayers, who also pay town taxes, may be in a position of paying twice for the same service. Municipal contracts (provision of service by one government to another under the terms of a contract) are often used to avoid a situation where village taxpayers pay twice for the same service. The part-town districting device is also employed for this purpose in some instances. (See Chapter 3 for further discussion of the part-town district). Due to financial constraints across the county many towns and villages have begun sharing services with each other and other municipalities and consolidating governments. This trend is expected to continue as local leaders face budget constraints.

City Government Today

Chapter Five

Structure

A mayor-council form of government with a strong executive was first established in Syracuse in 1938. In 1960 a new city charter was adopted which added new departments and reorganized the administration of finances. During the 1970s, the charter was amended to update the functions of many departments. In 1985 the charter was again amended to restrict a person serving as mayor to no more than two consecutive four-year terms. Throughout these changes the mayor-council form of government has remained intact.

The [mayor](#), elected every four years, serves as chief executive of the city of Syracuse and is responsible for the day-to-day operations of city government. The mayor appoints all department heads, except the commissioners of education and the city auditor, as well as members of various commissions and boards needed to administer the operations of the city. In addition to the commissioners of education and the city auditor, the voters elect city court judges who preside over criminal, civil, traffic, and small claims matters. All of the normal municipal services are carried out by the various departments of city government under the direction of the mayor.

The [common council](#) is the elected legislative branch of government. The common council consists of a president and four councilors-at-large who serve four-year terms. The remaining five district councilors, representing specific geographic areas of the city and serve two-year terms. The common council passes the city budget, and common council committees review all legislation before it goes to the full council for a vote. The mayor must also affirm legislation that is approved by the common council.

The [Syracuse City School District](#) has seven elected commissioners and is a self-governing body that appoints the superintendent of schools.

The school system, however, is fiscally dependent on city government; that is, its budget is approved by the city council as part of the annual city budget. (Chapter 6 further discusses the city budget and financing of city services.)

The city auditor, elected by voters every four years in a general election, provides the audit function for all departments. This function includes economy and efficiency audits as well as financial audits. The Department of Audit is also responsible for rendering an opinion on the city's financial statements as a whole. All recommendations are communicated to the mayor, city council and appropriate department heads as well as put on file with the –for-

The city clerk's office publishes the proceedings of the city council, processes all requests for common council legislation from city department heads and councilors, and prepares agendas for council meetings. The clerk records and certifies all city ordinances, resolutions and local laws enacted by the council. The city clerk presides over public auctions of city property and is responsible for issuing and recording marriage licenses and fishing, hunting and dog licenses.

The [City court](#), located in the Public Safety Building, is comprised of three main divisions. [Criminal division](#) is responsible for misdemeanors and violations of a criminal nature occurring in the city of Syracuse. The [civil division](#) handles tenant/landlord disputes, civil lawsuits (up to \$15,000 limit), housing code violations, and small claims and commercial claims (up to a \$3,000 limit). The [traffic division](#) processes traffic violations and misdemeanors, and canine violations issued within the city of Syracuse, most of which are handled via mail. City court judges are elected by the voters to preside over all cases brought before city court.

City-County Relationships

Cooperation between city and county government is firmly established in many areas within the framework of both levels of government. In 1938 and 1967, respectively, social welfare and health became departments of county government, with the pre-existing departments serving as the nuclei for the new organizations. In 1968 as a result of a merger, The [Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency](#) was formed. The [Onondaga County Department of Aging and Youth](#) and the [Human Rights Commission](#) were established as joint city-county agencies. The county administers the downtown central library of the [Onondaga Public Library](#) system. City branches are funded by the city. The City of Syracuse and Onondaga County agreed to consolidate economic development departments in 2011.

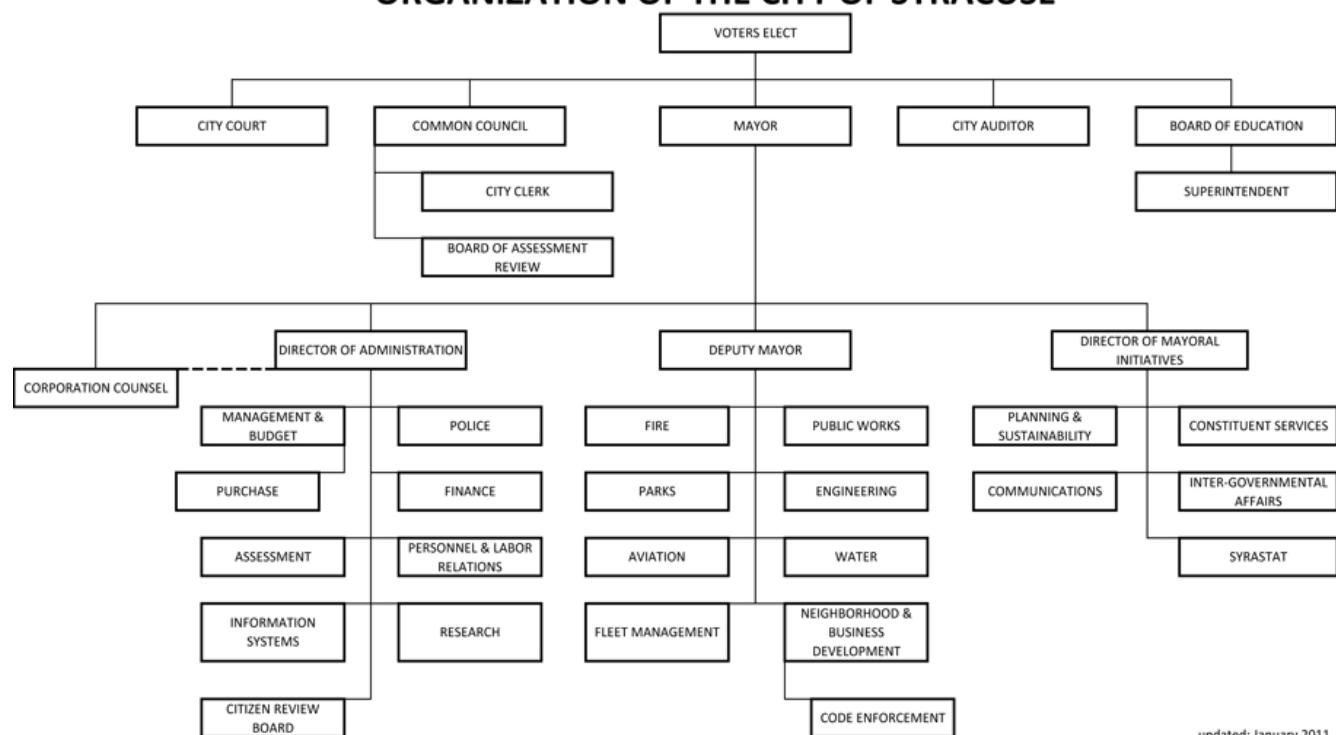
Population and Economic Trends

The 2000 Census showed the population of the city of Syracuse as 146,435, a decrease from the

1990 Census figure of 163,860. The 2010 Census reveals a small but continuing decline with a population estimate of 145,170. The population in the city of Syracuse has continually decreased since the 1950s, with younger and older age groups increasing in population and the number of wage earners in the middle decreasing because of migration to Onondaga County suburbs and elsewhere. The city of Syracuse has become increasingly diverse over the years, a trend that is expected to continue through the next decade. As the core of a metropolitan center, Syracuse provides educational and medical services to the surrounding areas. In 1970 a revitalization effort began which redefined the city's focus toward new economic services and away from the declining manufacturing industry. In 1980 the city of Syracuse began to emerge as an economic service center. New facilities have been built in the fields of aviation, insurance, sports, conventions, and cultural activities.

Chart 2

ORGANIZATION OF THE CITY OF SYRACUSE



Financing Local Governments

Chapter Six

Town/Village Budgets

The process of collecting money and paying for government begins with preparing the annual budget. A budget is a plan of action for the coming year expressed in dollars and cents. Each year the chief officer of each local government must submit a budget to the elected representatives of the citizens. The document outlines appropriations (estimated expenses) for the coming year along with anticipated revenues and their sources. A public hearing must be held so that citizens may ask questions and offer their opinions. Town board members and village trustees can recommend changes. Once agreement is reached, they adopt the budget. State law and the city and county charters set deadlines for submission and adoption of the budget. Once the responsible body has adopted a budget, the administrative officials must follow it, or seek a revision from the town or village board if changes become necessary.

City/County Budgets

In Onondaga County, the county executive submits the budget to the county legislature for review and adoption. The county executive may veto increases made to the budget by the legislative body, which in turn may be overturned by a two-thirds vote of the legislature. The fiscal year corresponds with the calendar year.

In Syracuse, the mayor drafts a budget and submits it to the city council which adopts the budget. The fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. The mayor must submit the preliminary budget to the city council by April 8. The council must accept, amend, or change the budget by May 8. The mayor then has until May 19 to veto any changes. The council has until June 1 to override the veto by a two thirds vote. If the council fails to adopt a budget by May 8, the mayor's budget automatically becomes the city budget.

Because the mayor and county executive do not sit on the legislative bodies of their respective

Governments, a clear separation of powers exists during the budget process. In towns and villages, town supervisors and mayors prepare the draft budget. Supervisors and mayors also serve as members of the town and village boards which vote on the budgets presented.

Town Budgets

Town budgets are primarily divided into four categories: town-wide general fund, part-town general fund, highway fund, and part-town highway fund.

The general fund covers expenses that are provided for and charged to residents of the entire town. The part-town general fund covers expenses charged to only those residents outside of incorporated villages located within the town. Highway funds are those expenses charged to all town residents, and part-town highway funds are those expenses billed to residents outside of incorporated villages.

For example, if a village and a town both had a police force, residents of the village would be responsible for paying the costs of the village police force. The village residents would not be taxed for town police services. Instead, these expenses would fall into the part-town fund, and be paid by the residents living outside the village.

Many expenses are coordinated by the town, but are essentially special district charges, such as fire protection, lighting, and water districts. The districts are established by the town on behalf of residents, but are only billed to those individuals living within the boundaries of the districts that receive the services.

Village Budgets

Unlike town budgets, which have four separate funds, village expenses are included within one general fund and billed equally to all village property owners based on the value of their property. There are no separate funds or

property tax levies for highway expenses or special district expenses.

If the village maintains a water or sewer district, the charges would appear as a separate tax line on the tax bill for those services.

Revenue Sources

Besides appropriations, the budget contains estimated revenues (income) for the coming fiscal year. Most local government revenues in New York State come from property and sales taxes, and aid from state and federal governments.

Property Taxes

The property tax, or real property tax levy, is paid by individuals and organizations who own real estate within a municipality. The property tax is the last item entered into the budget each year. When a budget is prepared, all the appropriations are added to get the estimated total expenditures. The amount of property taxes to be collected is determined by subtracting all other revenue sources from the estimated expenditures. The remainder is the amount to be raised through property taxes.

Constitutional Tax Limit

The [New York State Constitution](#) sets an upper limit of two percent of full value of taxable property averaged over the last five years on the amount of property tax that may be raised by counties, cities, and villages for operating expenses. Towns have no constitutional limit.

Sales Tax

New York State imposes a four percent sales tax on certain purchases. Counties and cities may impose up to a combined total of an additional three percent sales tax. The state legislature can authorize the counties to exceed the additional three percent limit. In Onondaga County there is a four percent sales tax. The revenue from this tax is distributed to the county, city, towns, villages and school districts. In 2010, approximately \$293 million was collected from the four percent sales tax in Onondaga County. The County Legislature determines the sales tax sharing agreement. In 2010 a ten year agreement was made. Prior to this new agreement, Onondaga County collected approximately 72% of sales tax revenues. The

new agreement reduces the County's share to roughly 50%.

State and Federal Aid

State and federal aid remain important sources of revenue for local governments. The largest sources of state aid for localities include revenue sharing, [Consolidated Highway Program \(CHIPS\)](#) funding for roads, and mortgage tax receipts. In 2009, the federal government provided Onondaga County with approximately \$4 million through the [federal Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) for community development and housing funds. These funds aid low income and elderly residents and must be spent within low-income areas of the county as defined by the [Census Bureau](#).

Half of mortgage tax funds go to municipalities, one quarter goes to the [Central New York Regional Transportation Authority](#), and the other quarter goes to the [State of New York Mortgage Agency](#). The amount of these funds, like those for sales taxes, may fluctuate significantly due to changes in the economy or interest rates.

Other Revenues

Other revenues available to municipalities include fines, license fees, permit fees, and fees for services provided to municipal governments, as well as funds from the sale or rental of public property and equipment.

In addition, local governments receive franchise fees and gross receipts taxes on public utilities, such as [National Grid](#) and cable companies. Some municipalities, with the approval of the state legislature, have adopted off-track betting revenues, higher utility taxes, and additional sales taxes.

Special Benefit Districts and Special Assessments

Residential developments, shopping centers, and industries outside of cities and villages are provided with many services by the town government. The special benefit district is the device that allows property owners of an area to finance fire protection, sewers, water supply, and other services without taxing all of the residents of the town. If a majority of owners representing a most of the assessed property

within an area petition the town board, local governments can create a special benefit district. Property owners within the district then pay for the services through a tax called special assessments. This tax may be levied by assessed value, by the frontage length of the property, or as a flat rate called a unit charge.

The finances of each special benefit district must be reported separately from other government income and expenses. There are more than 1,000 special benefit districts in the towns of Onondaga County.

Assessment

After the budget has been approved, the tax bills are sent to the taxpayers. Property tax is based on the value (*ad valorem*) of real estate. The process of determining property value for tax purposes is called assessment. The property inventory is available for inspection by appointment before the tentative assessment roll is filled. Property owners who disagree with the value assigned during the tentative roll may file a grievance. A Board of Assessment Review (BAR) hears grievances for each municipality.

During the BAR hearing, the BAR meets with the property owner while the assessor is present. The owner and the assessor present evidence to support their position on the value of the property. The BAR then meets without the assessor or the property owner present. The BAR may lower the assessment, maintain the assessment, or raise it. Property owners who disagree with the decision by the BAR may file a small claims suit in court.

Before assessing any parcel of property, the assessor estimates its market value. Market value is how much a property would sell for in an open market under normal conditions. To estimate market values, the assessor must be familiar with all aspects of the local real estate market.

Each municipality has an elected or appointed assessor who is responsible for estimating the value of property within a city, town, or village. Assessors must obtain basic certification from New York State within three years of taking office. This requires the successful completion of two assessment administration courses, two appraisal courses and an elective course. The

[New York State Board of Real Property Services](#) prescribes the courses.

Once the assessor estimates the market value of a property, its assessment is calculated. New York State law requires that all property within a municipality be assessed at a uniform percentage of market value. The percentage can range from one% up to and exceeding 100%. Every taxpayer pays his or her fair share as long as every property within the municipality is assessed at the same percentage of value. To calculate the full value of property assessed at 20% of value, the assessment is divided by the percentage of value. For example, a home assessed at \$15,900 in a community assessed at 20% would have a full value of $\$15,900 / 0.20 = \$79,500$.

It is unlikely that any house that sells, when compared to its assessment, will be exactly equal to its assessment converted to full value. What is important is that it be as close to accurate as possible and that there not exist wide variations in the difference between the full value and the sale price. Each year the Board of Real Property Services conducts a market survey of home sales in every municipality. This survey is used to determine how accurately the assessment is in each municipality. This survey is also used to calculate the equalization rate.

The equalization rate is used in conjunction with the assessment to set the tax rate for taxing jurisdictions that cross over assessment jurisdictions. For example, school districts often cross town and village boundaries, and therefore have homes and properties assessed at different percentages of market value. Changes in the equalization rate may cause tax bills to go up or down, even when the tax levy (the total amount of revenue raised through the property tax) remains the same.

Tax Exempt Property

Under state law, property owned by a government or by certain not-for-profit organizations such as hospitals, religious bodies, and educational institutions is not subject to property taxes. In addition, property owned by war veterans and senior citizens may have a partial exemption from taxation.

Veterans' exemptions on real property are of two types. The "eligible funds" real property tax exemption provides a partial exemption when property owned by a veteran has been purchased with pension, bonus, or insurance monies. This exemption generally has a \$5,000 maximum, but state law has provided a "pro-rata" inclusion when a municipality opts for full-value reassessment. The "alternative" veteran's exemption provides a property tax exemption of 15% of assessed value to veterans who served during wartime and an additional 10% to those who served in a combat zone. An additional exemption is provided for disabled veterans.

Senior citizens, defined as persons 65 years of age or older, who meet certain income limitations and other requirements, may qualify for a reduction of assessed value of residential property. This reduction can range from five to 50% of assessed value, depending on income. The state legislature establishes the maximum exemption levels for senior citizens each year, and municipalities have the option of adopting assessment levels lower than those set by the legislature. Senior citizens must apply for their exemption at the town level between January 1 and March 1 each year. In the city of Syracuse, seniors must file for an exemption annually between October and December 31. Senior citizens must reapply for the exemption each year because it is based on income levels.

A few tax-exempt organizations, such as certain public and senior citizen housing developments, as well as some properties under the ownership of [Industrial Development Agency](#), are subject to Payments in Lieu of Taxes, or PILOTs. Tax-exempt properties do make certain other payments, such as sewer unit and water district charges, to municipalities.

Tax Procedures

During the preparation of budgets for municipalities, governing bodies set the expenditure levels for each department of government and calculate the revenue from the various sources outlined earlier in this chapter. All revenue sources other than property taxes are subtracted from the expenses set by the governing body. The remainder is the amount which will have to be raised by property taxes.

The tax rate, expressed as a rate per \$1,000 of the assessed value, is determined by taking the amount to be raised by property taxes and dividing it by the total assessed value of property within the taxing jurisdiction divided by \$1,000. This calculation excludes exempt property. For example, if a municipality needed to raise \$5 million in property taxes and had \$200 million in assessed value, the tax rate would be calculated as follows:

$$\text{Tax Rate} = \frac{5,000,000}{(200,000,000 / 1,000)} = 25.00 \text{ per thousand}$$

In this simplified example, a home assessed at \$80,000 would pay $\$25.00 \times (80,000 / 1,000) = \$2,000$ in property taxes.

Depending on where you live, your property tax bill may look quite different. Many individuals do not see their property tax bill. Individuals with a mortgage on their property generally have their tax bill sent directly to the mortgage holder, which makes the tax payments directly to the municipality. Property owners with mortgages pay a portion of their mortgage into a property tax escrow account every month so that the mortgage holder will have the funds available to pay the tax when it is due.

City of Syracuse Taxes

City residents receive their bill for county taxes, county sewer, and county water charges in December. In July, city residents receive their city tax bill which lists separate lines for city and school taxes.

Town Taxes

For properties in a town outside of a village, the tax bill may contain a number of items. The bill will include the county tax, town and highway taxes. Some town taxpayers may also be billed for the county sanitation district charge, fire protection and/or special benefit district taxes. The town tax is used for the general expenses of town government. The highway tax pays for maintenance of town roads, including the highway equipment and salaries.

Special benefit districts include items such as lighting districts, fire districts, water districts, or any other activity that benefits only a portion of town residents.

Village Taxes

Village taxpayers receive a town and county tax bill in December. In addition, they receive a tax bill in May for their village services. Their town tax bill would not include any special benefit district taxes. These residents pay for those services directly through their village taxes. Street lighting, for example, is accounted for

within the general expenses of the village budget and is paid for by all residents equally.

School Taxes

Residents outside the city of Syracuse receive their school tax bill in early September. In some towns, the school tax bill also contains a line item for a library tax.

Local Political Parties and Elections

Chapter Seven

Political Parties

Individuals may influence government at all levels by activity participating in political parties. Through the party organization candidates are chosen, campaigns are organized, and successful candidates find staff for their administrations.

Recognized political parties in New York State are the [Democratic](#), [Republican](#), [Conservative](#), [Green](#), [Independence](#), and [Working Families parties](#). A recognized party is one whose candidate for governor received at least 50,000 votes in the most recent gubernatorial election. New York State allows fusion candidates, which allows one candidate to be run by multiple parties. Other independent groups or new parties may organize to run one or more candidates in a single election.

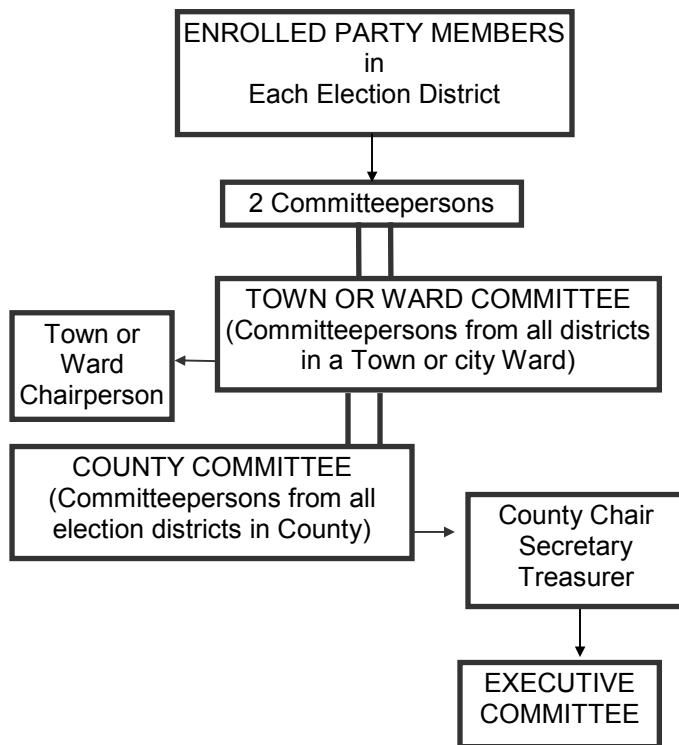
Each of the recognized parties may hold primary elections, although a primary is required only when there is a contest within the party for nomination to party position or public office. The recognized parties are required by state law to maintain county organizations. Only Republican, Democratic, and Conservative Parties have recognized county committees in Onondaga County. Each county organization has great freedom in making party rules to govern its operations.

Party Organization

The basic geographic unit through which the political party functions is the election district. In 2010, there were 464 such districts in Onondaga County, established by the city council in the city of Syracuse and by the town boards of the 19 towns in the county. Five of those districts are non-working districts. The average number of registered voters in each district is 603. Each official political party may designate two committeepersons per election district. In the [Conservative Party](#), three or four committee people may serve in some election districts.

Appointments to the political party's committee may be made at its annual full-county membership meeting. Usually, however, the person seeking a committee post obtains a petition, has it signed by registered members of his/her party, and returns it to the [county Board of Elections](#). If unopposed, the petitioner's election to the committee is automatic. In cases where there is an opposition candidate, voters in the party make the final decision during the primary election. This process is repeated biennially in even years.

Chart 3
Typical County Political Party Organization



Town and ward committees are made up of the election district committeepersons. There are 17 town committees in Onondaga County, reduced from 19 in 2010, and 19 ward committees in the city of Syracuse. Salina and Camillus have established wards as units for electing town councilors, but the political parties do not use

these wards extensively for organizational purposes.

Political clubs assist the town or ward committee by providing workers for the campaign, contributing funds to the committee, and keeping members informed on issues. Ethnic groups and/or geographical location may be influential factors in organizing clubs. Political clubs formed within the [Democratic Party](#) must have written approval of the party's executive committee. Clubs function more loosely within the [Republican Party](#) as adjuncts of the town or ward committees.

The committee people who compose the party's county committee elect a chair and other officers to carry out the year-round political business. A smaller body, the executive committee, may handle housekeeping functions, grievance matters, nomination of candidates for party and public office, and the authorization of candidates not enrolled in the party.

Nomination of Candidates

Party rules and state election law, outlines the manner in which candidates for all public offices are selected and nominated. Parties choose candidates by a petition, caucus, or convention process. The major political parties use all three processes. The respective town committees of each party can decide on their method of candidate selection.

Candidates for Congress, the State Legislature, and for countywide and citywide offices are most often designated by petitions. Petitions bearing the name of the candidate and the office sought are circulated among members of the candidate's party. Depending on the level of office, petitions are filed with either the county or [state board of elections](#) and must be signed by enrolled members of the candidate's party. The exact number of signatures required varies with the level of office sought and the political party of the candidate. Generally, candidates are required to collect signatures of at least five percent of the voters enrolled in their party. There are also petition format requirements and filing deadlines. This information can be obtained from the [county board of elections](#).

[State Supreme Court](#) candidates are chosen by delegates to a judicial convention held in each of the state's 12 judicial districts. Onondaga County is in the fifth judicial district.

Registered voters who are not enrolled in a political party may also run for office. They may circulate independent nominating petitions or be authorized by the executive committee of a political party. A person does not need to be registered to vote in order to be a candidate.

Elections

The Board of Elections

The Onondaga County Board of Elections is a county office administered by two commissioners, one Democrat and one Republican, appointed by the county legislature on the recommendation of the county committees of each party. Commissioners serve for two-year terms and may not hold elected public office (with the exception of certain town and village positions) during their terms. The board of elections is responsible for the registration of all voters within the county, maintaining extensive voter registration records, and the conduct of all national, state, county, city, and town elections. The Onondaga County Board of Elections does not have jurisdiction over village, school district, water district, or fire district elections.

The election commissioners train and appoint four election inspectors, two Democrats and two Republicans, to be present at each polling place in the 19 towns and the 19 wards in Syracuse for primary and general election days. All election inspectors are recommended for appointment for a one-year term by their respective political party chairpersons, and are certified by the board of elections after successfully completing a written test.

Political parties and candidates may have poll watchers present at each polling place. The watchers must be registered voters in the county and appointed by written certification from the party committees or from the individual candidate's committees.

Voter Qualifications

To vote in New York State, one must be a registered voter. To register to vote, a person must meet the following requirements:

- U.S. citizen (by birth or by naturalization)
- 18 years old by the date of the primary, general, or other election
- Reside at your present address for at least 30 days before an election
- Not be incarcerated or on parole of a felony conviction
- Not claim the right to vote elsewhere

Enrollment in a political party is optional; however, to vote in a political party's primary election, one must be enrolled in that party.

A person may enroll in one of the six recognized parties in the state. Voters may also change their party affiliation, but enrollment in a different party will not go into effect until after the general election in the year the enrollment change is requested.

The state legislature sets the date for primary elections during the spring legislative session. The primary is usually conducted within the first two weeks in September; however, the New York State Board of Elections is currently considering moving primary elections to earlier in the year to make it easier for voters to use absentee ballots. [General Election Day](#) is always the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

An individual may register by mail by simply calling the county board of elections and requesting a registration form. Forms are also available at many public agencies and at most post offices. Citizens can also apply to register to vote when they apply for their driver's

license, renew their driver's license, or apply for other state services.

School and Village Elections

The county board of elections does not supervise voting in school districts outside of Syracuse, or in fire districts, water districts, and villages. To vote or run for office in one of those jurisdictions, a person must be 18 years of age by Election Day, a citizen of the United States, and a resident of the state and district or village for thirty days prior to the election.

While the Syracuse City School District is unique in being wholly within the city boundaries, the remaining 17 districts in the county cut across local government boundaries in a quilt pattern. The county board of elections oversees voting for Syracuse but not for other school district offices, which come under the jurisdiction of their respective school boards. School board candidates in districts outside of Syracuse must submit nominating petitions to the school district clerk. District voters determine whether candidates for the board will run at large, with all the candidates competing for all available seats, or if a candidate must seek a specific seat on the board. Depending on district size, school boards consist of five, seven or nine members who hold terms of three to five years.

Under [state election law](#), the village clerk is the "election officer" of the village and has responsibility for the general conduct of all village elections, usually held in March or June. Many candidates for village offices do not run under popular political party labels but under the banner of independent groups such as Citizens' or People's Parties.

PART II - SERVICES

EDUCATION

Chapter Eight

State Supervision

In New York State, the [board of regents](#) determines general policy for all public education. The [state legislature](#) elects 17 Regents who serve for five-year terms. The commissioner of education is the chief executive officer of the board of regents and oversees all education in the state as head of the [New York State Education Department](#).

The department distributes state and federal aid to fund education. New York State provides financial assistance to public school districts using a formula that depends on a combined wealth ratio for each school district.

Local School Organization

Within [Onondaga County](#) there are three types of school districts: the [Syracuse City School District \(SCSD\)](#), 16 centralized districts, and one union-free district, Lyncourt. The centralized districts were formed by combining existing small districts, often from neighboring towns, to provide better facilities and larger areas for taxation and administration. A union-free district is a small district that did not choose to centralize when the state urged small districts to consolidate after World War II.

The SCSD is administered by the [superintendent of schools](#) who is appointed by an elected seven-member [board of education](#). The Board members, since 1980, have received a small stipend for their services. Because the school budget of the city of Syracuse is not submitted to voters for approval, the city school district is dependent on the city administration for its funds. The amount that the city can raise in taxes for all services, including education, (as discussed in Chapter 6) is limited by the [New York State Constitution](#).

Outside the city, voters of the school districts elect people to serve on their board of education, which vary in size from five to nine members. Budgets are prepared by school officials and adopted annually at a meeting of school district voters, or by a special election. Unlike the city school district, these districts are independent of all municipal governments for funds; their physical boundaries do not coincide with town or village lines. All 17 districts in Onondaga County and the union-free district of Lyncourt, are administered by their own superintendent appointed by the district board of education.

BOCES

All school districts within Onondaga County, with the exception of Syracuse, are members of a [Board of Cooperative Educational Services \(BOCES\)](#); 15 districts are members of the [Onondaga Cortland Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services \(OCM BOCES\)](#) district, which also includes parts of Madison and Cortland counties. Jordan–Elbridge and Skaneateles are members of the Cayuga–Onondaga BOCES. State Law intended that each BOCES district serve as a way for districts to cooperate in providing services that they would not, individually, be able to do in a cost-effective manner. That same law excludes the state's Big Five cities from BOCES. The OCM BOCES district has 23 participating member schools. The state government provides aid to school districts that use BOCES services and enables individual districts to share expensive services cooperatively. BOCES provides the following services: programs for about 2200 students in career and technical education, alternative education and special education. Through its programs, BOCES provides to school districts staff development services and technology. BOCES also provides shared services to help districts save money, including cooperative

purchasing, central business office and food service management, and energy management.

School District Characteristics

The 18 school districts within Onondaga County vary widely in size and character. They reflect the diversity of a county comprised of a large urban center surrounded by suburban areas and some underdeveloped rural areas on the outer perimeter. The SCSD is the largest and most complex in the county. In the suburban areas, the districts tend to be compact with relatively high pupil density, while in the rural areas districts are geographically larger with lower pupil density.

Increasingly, local school districts are given mandates by federal and state legislation without funding to provide the mandates. One mandate is the education of physically and mentally handicapped students, regardless of the severity of their handicapping condition, in the least restrictive environment within its own facilities or contracted from other agencies. The ultimate goal is for the local school district to provide appropriate educational services for all children. Although funding for these programs sometimes comes from both federal and state sources, local districts are often left to fund these without assistance.

Syracuse City School District

During the past decade, the SCSD has been forced to face two major problems that have affected its school-age population. One has been to achieve racial balance in the schools. The board of education has responded to this by allowing students to voluntarily transfer to schools outside their neighborhoods. The other problem confronting the school district has been a continuous fluctuation in student population. During the 1980s the district was faced with a declining school population and throughout the 1990's the shift changed and populations began increasing. For the 2010-11 school year enrollment in SCSD schools in grades K-12 was 21,200. Over the last six years, enrollment has only declined by 34 students.

Magnet programs were developed at Dr. Martin Luther King, Danforth, McKinley-Brighton, Porter, and Seymour elementary schools, Hughes (which includes elementary and middle school grades), and Clary Middle School have been successful in attracting racially-mixed groups of students. Special federal and state funds have provided the means to

develop programs, such as specialized vocational programs, pre-K for three- and four-year olds, partially funded by the state, and English as a Second Language for recently arrived foreign students.

Suburban School Districts

The emphasis on raising standards to ensure that students are college- and/or career-ready has been the focus of school districts in the area. Increasing student and staff access and use of technology has increased as has a focus on teaching students 21st century skills.

Private Schools

The [Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse](#) operates a parochial school system in the county. All of Onondaga County is included in the western region of the Diocese of Syracuse. The Western region contains 14 schools and also encompasses parts of Oswego, Oneida, Madison, Chenango, and Cortland counties. A large number of Catholic schools in the area have closed in recent years due to a decline in enrollment and budget constraints. A number of other private schools, both non-denominational and religiously based are available in the county including the Manlius-Pebble-Hill School and The New School.

Higher Education

Many opportunities for higher education exist in Onondaga County. The public institutions, all part of the [State University of New York](#), are [SUNY Health Science Center at Syracuse](#), [SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry](#), [Empire State College](#), and [Onondaga Community College](#). The first two are located near the Syracuse University campus. Onondaga Community College is funded in part by the [Onondaga County Legislature](#). The college offers a two-year program and its campus is in the town of Onondaga.

[Syracuse University](#) is the largest private institution in the area. Other institutions of higher learning include [Cazenovia](#) and [LeMoyne](#) colleges. In addition there are numerous business and vocational schools, which offer specialized training in a variety of fields.

Say Yes to Education

[Say Yes to Education, Inc.](#) is a nonprofit education foundation that aims to dramatically increase high school and college graduation

rates for urban youth in the United States. Say Yes provides comprehensive support, including the promise of free college tuition to one of nearly 100 colleges and universities for those who meet residency, graduation and admission requirements. Although there are Say Yes chapters located in major cities along the East

Coast, the Syracuse chapter is the first Say Yes chapter to embrace an entire city school district, making it the largest school improvement program of its kind in the nation.



(T. Aaron Levy Middle School)

THE COURTS

Chapter Nine

STATE ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCING

The statewide court system is administered by the [Office of Court Administration](#), its policy-making body. Its Administrative Board consists of the Chief Judge of the [Court of Appeals](#), acting as chairperson, and the four presiding judges of the [Appellate Divisions of the Supreme Court](#). The state's geographic area is divided into four judicial departments and 12 judicial districts. Each of the four departments is under the direction of one of the four presiding judges of the Appellate Divisions of the Supreme Court.

The state assumes the costs of operating the courts in New York State, as well as the costs of the Office of Court Administration, which executes the policies of the Administrative Board. Additionally, the [Office of Management Support](#) monitors all expenditures of the courts and oversees an internal audit procedure. The costs of some of the lower courts are still the responsibility of the towns and villages they serve. State law mandates that the county reimburse justices who perform services outside the towns and villages of their own jurisdiction.

The Chief Judge, the state's chief judicial officer, is appointed by the Governor from a list of seven candidates. Judges of the Court of Appeals are appointed from a list of three to five candidates recommended by the [Commission on Judicial Nomination](#) and they must be approved by the state Senate. The Governor also appoints members of the Appellate Division from among justices of the Supreme Court. Judges in the lower courts in Onondaga County are elected.

APPELLATE COURTS

The [Court of Appeals](#), the state's highest court, hears cases on appeal from the other appellate courts. Its review is limited primarily to questions of law.

[Appellate Divisions of the Supreme Court](#) are established in each of the state's four judicial departments to hear appeals concerning civil and criminal cases. The First and Second Departments hear appeals originating from the civil and criminal courts in New York City. In the Second Department, civil and criminal cases originating in district, city, town and village courts are also heard. The Third and Fourth Departments initially hear appeals from city, town, and village courts in the appropriate county court.

TRIAL COURTS

State Supreme Court

Onondaga County is in the fifth judicial district, fourth department of the state Supreme Court. The fifth district also includes Oswego, Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, and Herkimer counties. The [Supreme Court in New York State](#) is the trial court of original, unlimited jurisdiction and hears cases, including civil matters, involving amounts of money beyond the jurisdiction of the lower courts. It also hears all divorce, separation, and annulment proceedings. Voters in the judicial district elect judges for 14-year terms. There are 18 Supreme Court justices in the six county districts.

Court of Claims

Judges of the [Court of Claims](#) are appointed by the Governor with the consent of the [New York State Senate](#). They hear all claims against the State of New York. There are no juries in these proceedings.

County Level Courts

There are three county level courts: [County Court, Family Court, and Surrogate's Court](#). County Court has jurisdiction over criminal cases and civil cases up to \$25,000. Family Court handles neglect and abuse cases, support proceedings for spouses and children, adoptions, paternity suits, family offenses, custody and visitation, and matters relating to [PINS \(persons-inneedofsupervision\)](#).

[in-need-of-supervision](#) and juvenile delinquents. PINS are defined as children aged 7 through 15 who are ungovernable at home or are habitual truants. A juvenile delinquent is a child under 16 who commits an act that would be a crime if committed by an adult. Surrogate's Court admits wills to probate, administers estates, and appoints guardianships.

Judges for each of the county courts are elected by county voters for a 10-year term to a specific court: county, family, or surrogate. Sessions in the courts are public, except in family court where, to protect young people, spectators may not attend without the judge's consent. Each court has a clerk of the court and a court stenographer who records verbatim minutes of testimony in all court sessions in Onondaga County. Only a small fraction of the testimony is actually transcribed.

City Court

Syracuse has three divisions: Civil, Criminal, and Traffic. The [Civil Division](#) handles civil proceedings up to \$15,000 and oversees [Small Claims Court](#) and [Commercial Small Claims Court](#) up to \$3,000. Criminal proceedings (including most misdemeanors and below) are handled by the [Criminal Division](#). [Traffic Court](#) handles traffic violations and infractions. Judges are elected by city voters to serve a 10-year term and are required to be lawyers. There are also three separate city courts including [community treatment](#), and [domestic violence](#) courts for handling those specialized issues in an efficient and consistent manner

Town and Village Courts

[Justice courts](#) (formerly known as Justice of the Peace Courts) may hear civil cases up to \$3,000 and minor offenses. There are mandated uniform jurisdiction, practices, and procedures for these courts established by the 1967 Uniform Justice Court Act. Judges of these courts are elected by town and village voters and need not meet any special qualifications other than residence within the town or village. Those who are not lawyers are required to complete a special training course. There are one or more justices in each town and village in the county.

Juries

There are two types of juries that function in Onondaga County. The grand jury serves on a countywide basis and is composed of between 16 and 23 members. The appellate division fixes its term. It determines whether an indictment shall be returned in cases of serious offenses and may initiate an investigation into matters of public concern. All felonies must proceed by indictment; all other crimes may proceed by either indictment or information.

The trial or petit jury is usually composed of 12 members in criminal cases and six members in civil cases, although the number of petit jurors may vary in Supreme Court.

Both grand and petit jurors are paid for their service on a per diem rate and receive expenses for transportation. Both types of jurors in Onondaga County are selected to serve in all of the county's courts.

A juror must be a United States Citizen; a county resident at least 18 years old; free of any past felony conviction; able to understand and communicate in English; and not have served on a jury within the past four years or within the past two years in counties where the four-year period has been certified as impractical. Persons may volunteer for jury duty at the [office of the Commissioner of Jurors](#).

In 1995, a new law greatly limited juror exemptions. The only people disqualified outright from jury service are state and federal judges. The law also allows a potential juror to be excused or have his or her service postponed for good reason, as determined by the court. Under the previous law, practicing attorneys, dentists, physicians, nurses, pharmacists, optometrists, psychologists, embalmers, police officers, firefighters, sole proprietors, people age 70 and older, and parents or guardians of children under the age of 16 whose principal responsibility was the daily care of that child were exempt from jury service.

District Attorney's Office

The [District Attorney](#) is elected for a four-year term. To hold this office he/she must be an attorney, a resident of Onondaga County, and a qualified voter. The district attorney is the chief

law enforcement officer in the county and is charged with the responsibility for prosecution of all crimes within the county and with the supervision of the presentation of cases to the grand juries. The major portion of the district attorney's salary is paid by the county with a fourth being paid by the state.

Client Protection

The [New York Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection](#) provides safety for clients who undergo losses due to negligence or malpractice. If an attorney misuses money or property the client must also report the loss to an Attorney Disciplinary Committee and to the local [district attorney](#). Complaints must be filed within two years of the client discovering their loss, and are eligible for up to a maximum of \$300,000 for each loss. Additional information regarding a client's rights and responsibilities can be obtained from The New York Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection.

Related Services

The [Probation Department](#) is responsible for supervising both juveniles and adults on probation. The detention of juvenile delinquents and [PINS](#) is under the jurisdiction of the Human Services branch of county government. Juvenile delinquents may be housed in the secure detention facility at [Hillbrook Detention Home](#) pending the disposition of their cases or they maybe placed in non-secure group homes or foster homes. The Family Court may order detention and decides whether the detention is to be secure or non-secure. [PINS](#) may not be held in secure detention.

[Legal Services of Central New York](#), a not-for-profit antipoverty program, provides free legal services to poor, elderly, and disabled people in Onondaga County. It assists with civil matters such as landlord-tenant problems, public housing eligibility, discrimination in housing, welfare eligibility, family law, and disability. Courts in this state have the power to assign defense counsel to adults unable to afford the services of private attorneys. Those unable to

obtain counsel are entitled to have legal representation at every stage of the criminal process and also in certain Family Court proceedings (e.g. custody, neglect/abuse, paternity). To meet this requirement, Onondaga County contracts with the Onondaga County Bar Association, and the Assigned Counsel Program, a non-profit corporation that administers a system under which private attorneys are assigned to represent indigent clients. In addition, [Hiscock Legal Aid Society](#) represents indigent defendants in Syracuse City Court and in appeals from other courts to the Appellate Division, 4th Dept. Under state law, assigned lawyers are paid from county funds.

Family Court also assigns lawyers ("Law Guardians") to represent children in abuse or neglect, [PINS](#) and delinquency cases. Both Family and Supreme Courts may assign Law Guardians to children who are subjects of custody and visitation matters. These lawyers are paid from state funds. The fee schedule for all assigned lawyers is set by the state.



(The John H. Mulroy Civic Center)



(Syracuse Community Health Center-East)



(Syracuse Community Health Center-East)

Health and Mental Health Services

Chapter Ten

Health

State law regulates health services in New York State. The [New York State Department of Health](#) sets standards and procedures through the Sanitary Code and the Hospital Code. It also provides local health departments with consultation services and state and federal funding. In Onondaga County, the Health Department is an agency of the county government and operates in accordance with the Onondaga County Sanitary Code, the County Charter, the Code of Procedure, and local law. The [Onondaga County Health Department \(OCHD\)](#) was created in 1967. The [county executive](#) appoints the [commissioner of health](#) for a four-year term. The local policies of the department are determined by the [county legislature](#) and by the Health Advisory Board. The mission of county health department is to protect and improve the health of all residents of Onondaga County through health promotion, disease prevention, public health preparedness, and assurance of a safe and healthy environment. In 2010, the [OCHD](#) had a \$78 million budget with over \$42 million supporting Special Children's Services. As of January 2011, the OCHD no longer provides health care services at the correctional facilities in Onondaga County. With this change in services, the OCHD had approximately 280 full-time and 20 part-time employees. [OCHD](#) offers numerous health care programs and services for county residents. The health department is committed to protecting and promoting the health of the public in the face of ever-changing needs through the offering of both traditional public health programs such as Communicable Disease Control, as well as more recent programs such as [Public Health Preparedness](#). Other programs and services include:

- Center for Forensic Sciences including the [Forensic Laboratory](#) and [Medical Examiner's Office](#)
- [Environmental Health Services](#) which include disease prevention, food protection, residential sanitation, land development, water quality control, air monitoring, rodent

control, mosquito control, weights and measures.

- [Facilitated Enrollment Program](#) that provides assistance for families applying for public health insurance programs
- [Family Planning Services](#) including clinics for males and teens
- Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, which includes programs for [cancer screening](#) and education, healthy living to reduce the impact of obesity, health education, injury prevention, [lead poisoning control](#), and [tobacco control](#)
- Healthy Families including programs for home visiting services to support healthy pregnancies and birth outcomes, Special Children Services such as Early Intervention, [Physically Handicapped Children](#), and Preschool Special Education Programs, [immunization clinics](#), and [WIC clinics](#).
- [Surveillance and Statistics](#) including birth and death records
- Volunteer Services

Planning of Health Services

The [Central New York Health Systems Agency \(CNYHSA\)](#), a private, not-for-profit corporation is responsible for making collective decisions regarding the allocation of health care resources and the maintenance and enhancement of the health care system in the Central New York region.

The primary tasks of the agency are to assess current health care services and programs in the region, to identify present and future needs for health care, and to promote community participation in allocating scarce health care resources. These tasks are accomplished by developing plans which recommend action promoting changes in the health care system and by reviewing proposals to alter current programs or to add new ones.

CNYHSA also provides planning and consulting services to public and private entities through grants and service contracts.

Through its extensive databases and research capabilities, CNYHSA offers planning and consulting services that include:

- Strategic Planning
- Needs Analysis
- Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation
- Forecasting
- Grant-writing
- Utilization and Market Research
- Small Area Analysis
- Benefit Design
- Survey Design

CNYHSA is able to tailor its services to meet the unique needs of its clientele. CNYHSA's staff includes people with backgrounds in such areas as planning, health care administration, health systems research, and public health.

Mental Health

The [Onondaga County Department of Mental Health \(OCDMH\)](#) was formed in 1961 under the then newly adopted County Charter and is regulated by the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene. The Commissioner is

appointed by the county executive, who also appoints up to a 15-member [department of mental health](#).

The mission of the [OCDMH](#) is to enable those citizens of Onondaga County that have a mental illness, cognitive impairments, or chemical dependency, as well as their families, to achieve their maximum potential.

The department is divided into contracted and direct services. Contracted services include [mental health](#), [developmental disability](#), and chemical dependency. There are 24 providers that the OCDMH contracted with in 2010 including, [ARC of Onondaga](#), [ENABLE](#), and [Syracuse Behavioral Healthcare, Inc.](#). The direct services of the OCDMH include correctional and behavioral health services, children's clinic, children's day treatment, student assistance program, and assisted outpatient treatment.

Social Welfare and Social Services

Chapter Eleven

The [Onondaga County Department of Social Services](#) (DSS) was established by the consolidation of city and town social welfare programs in 1938. The New York State Legislature and the New York State Department of Social Services set functions and policies for the Department. Adherence to state and federal standards insures financial support from state and federal sources.

In addition to establishing uniform rules for all local departments, the New York State Department of Social Services supervises local departments and distributes all federal and state funds.

Each [local DSS](#) is required by state law to establish an advisory council of at least 20 members. The members are appointed by the local commissioner of social services according to the following criteria: providers of social services, medical services, and domiciliary care; members of the general public; and recipients of public assistance, who must comprise at least 25 percent of the council membership. Council members volunteer their time and advise the commissioner on policy development, program planning, and program evaluation.

Administration

The commissioner of social services, who is appointed by the county executive, heads the department. The commissioner's office is responsible for the overall administration of the department and includes administration, staff development, personnel, and the Access Center. In 2010, the department employed 720 people.

The major divisions within the department are: (1) Temporary Assistance; (2) Medicaid; (3) Adult & Family Services; (4) Children's Services; (5) Child Support/Enforcement; (6) Systems; (7) Administration Services; (8) Legal/Resources; (9) Personnel & Staff Development; (10) Food Stamps.

Temporary Assistance

[Temporary Assistance](#) provides for food stamps, [Home Energy Assistance Program \(HEAP\)](#), and [day care](#). Its mission is to effectively provide services and financial benefits needed to assist and allow families and individuals to achieve the greatest degree of self-sufficiency while maintaining fiscal and program integrity.

HEAP administers financial assistance to low-income households to defray the cost of home energy. Beneficiaries of the program include public assistance, food stamp and low-income non-public assistance households. Community agencies participating with the DSS in the HEAP program are the Metropolitan Commission on the Aging (MCOA) and the Volunteer Center at the United Way of Central NY.

The [day care program](#) is designed to provide low-income individuals with childcare.

Medicaid

The [Medicaid program](#) pays for the medical, hospital, nursing care expenses of the poor. Eligibility standards are established New York State and are the same in Onondaga County in every county in New York State.

Adult & Family Services

Provides individuals and families access to safe, affordable housing, emergency assistance to recipients of [Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\)](#), and protects impaired adults from neglect, abuse, or arrange services for adults who have difficulty caring for themselves.

Children's Services

Provides, investigates, and prevents child maltreatment, and protects children while supporting a safe, nurturing, permanent home environment. Children's Services performs the following activities: preventative services, foster care/adoption, and investigations.

Preventative services provide services to children and their families for the purpose of preventing a disruption of a family, which will or could result in a placement in foster care. It also enables children who have been placed in foster care to have a safe, expeditious return to their family. Foster care/adoption provides services to children who are in need of protection due to being at risk of maltreatment by a caretaker, or having no viable living arrangements. For investigations Children's Services investigates, determines, and make referrals for reports of children who are alleged to have been maltreated by caretakers.

Child Support/Enforcement

Child Support Enforcement is a federal and state mandated program enacted to ensure that children are supported by their parents. The mission is to provide children with the financial support necessary to maintain self-sufficiency thus eliminating their need for public assistance programs.

Systems

The Systems Division integrates departmental information systems with the State Welfare Management Systems (WMS); operates and maintains centralized information systems such as WMS, Benefits Insurance Control Systems (BICS) and local area networks; designs and manages all new automated systems; provides systems-related staff training; manages the department statistical library; manages the program records and case files of the department; and coordinates a variety of publications requiring centralized information gathering and analysis.

Administrative Services

The Administrative Services Division is charged with the financial management of department expenditures and revenues and assisting with fiscal policy development. Activities include: budget and forecast preparation, accounting, mail and stock services, customer identification, contract development, claiming, revenue collection, and program and administrative payments.

Legal/Resources

The Legal Division is responsible for legal advice and representation for the DSS in all areas except Family Court. The department's mission is to provide prompt, accurate, and beneficial legal counsel and representation, and to establish and implement effective fraud control and recover programs, all with the central goal of insuring that the department incurs no unnecessary or improper costs, expenses or responsibilities in the provision of legally required program services to its clients.

Personnel & Staff Development

The Personnel Department is responsible for supporting employees and management in the interpretation and appropriate application of employment policy, guidelines and work rules. Staff Development is responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing training programs.

Food Stamps

The mission of the Food Stamp Program is to reduce hunger and malnutrition among the members of low-income households. Food stamps were and are intended as a supplement to other sources of income such as Public Assistance, Social Security and Unemployment benefits, and wages.

Community Services

Provides assessment for enrollment into and case management for Medicaid funded home care and residential long-term care programs. It arranges for and has oversight responsibility for the delivery and quality of service and authorizes Medicaid payments and enters the authorizations for provider billing. Community Services provides information and referral non-Medicaid eligible individuals to direct them to appropriate services with the goal of developing the best care plan for them at the least cost to the payer. The division must evaluate all Onondaga County residents prior to enrollment into one of the programs.

Planning and Development

Chapter Twelve

Planning and development are concerned with the use of land and natural resources to best meet the needs of people. These needs include houses, factories, communities, highways, airports, water, open space, parks, and natural beauty. Other planned land uses may include the more agricultural needs of cropland, pasture and range, as well as woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife areas.

Many agencies at all levels of government are involved in planning and development: municipal planning agencies, highway departments, parks and recreation departments, as well as many private groups. This section deals with planning agencies at the state, regional, county, city, town, and village government levels. The plans of these agencies are only advisory; they are translated into law by zoning ordinances or regulations. Only city, town, or village governments may pass zoning ordinances.

Planning

The function of governmental planning is to provide guidelines for the physical, social, and economic development of the community. Planning should be a continuous process, although in practice the time and expense involved in drawing up complete plans results in a time lag behind growth and the changes that take place in a community. To be effective, planning should come first followed by zoning and development according to accepted plan. Historically, however, zoning ordinances have often occurred first, based on existing land uses.

New York State authorizes a local government to set up a planning board or commission of local citizens who need not be technically trained. The board's primary duty is to advise the local legislative body on community development. The board may employ a professional planning staff.

Planning boards are authorized by state law to prepare a comprehensive master plan, which is an official statement of policy on future growth

and development. It includes population growth, housing, transportation, commercial and industrial development, education, recreation, municipal services, and methods of financing.

Most towns and villages in Onondaga County have adopted a master plan to be used as a guideline in planning and zoning decisions. The county also has a [2010 Development Guide](#) adopted by the Onondaga County Legislature. Although a master plan is not binding, the actions of a planning board, in theory, should fit the framework of the master plan.

Town and Village Planning

Most towns and villages in Onondaga County have planning boards, although town board members in a small town may perform this function. Typically, expertise is provided by municipal engineers, building inspectors and other staff and consultants may be hired to provide expertise. Planning boards have either five or seven members appointed by the town board or village mayor. Planning boards usually meet once or twice a month or as needed. Planning board members may be paid a small fee by their municipalities, but many are unpaid.

A town board may, but does not have to, authorize the planning board to approve or disapprove subdivision plats (plans for subdividing a piece of property). The county or city may have review over certain subdivisions.

Most towns and villages have a comprehensive master plan or are working on such plans. Only the towns of Geddes, Fabius, Spafford, and Otisco and the villages of Fabius, Solvay, and Jordan have no plan. NYS mandates classes for planning and zoning boards.

City Planning

Syracuse Commission members are appointed by the mayor for five-year terms. The commission must approve or deny all applications for subdivisions and re-subdivisions

in both the city and within a three-mile radius outside city boundaries.

The [Syracuse](#) drafts and approves zoning ordinance amendments for approval by the [Syracuse Common Council](#). Affirmative decisions of the planning commission may be overruled by a majority vote of the common council, except for decisions concerning the changing of streets, which require a two-thirds vote by the council.

The [Syracuse Bureau of Planning and Sustainability](#) is responsible for major planning and urban design projects and planning and executing sustainability initiatives created by the Mayor.

County Planning

The Onondaga County Planning Board consists of five people appointed by the county executive for three-year terms and two voting ex-officio members, the county comptroller, and the county commissioner of transportation. The planning board assists all municipalities in the county in planning and zoning matters and reviews certain planning and zoning actions taken by them. The Onondaga County Planning Board has no power to pass zoning ordinances, but it can review all city, town, and village zoning actions which affect real property lying within 500 feet of the boundary of the city, a village, or a town; the boundary of a county or state park; the right-of-way of county or state roads; and certain other county or state uses of land. County planning boards are also empowered to enter into agreements and limitations on the types of zoning actions referred to them by municipalities. The Onondaga County Planning Board has enacted such limitations.

Under state law, a county planning board may have jurisdiction over subdivisions lying within 500 feet of the above noted physical features, if authorized by the county legislative body. The county planning board reviews highway access of roadways within subdivisions and overall relationship to county or state highways, as well as drainage and topographical patterns. Subdivision plans must also be reviewed by the [county department of transportation](#) and the [county health department](#).

City-County Planning Agency

The [Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency \(SOCPA\)](#) is the combined city planning commission and county planning board. It was established in 1968 by a change in the city charter and a change in the county charter and administrative code. An annual municipal cooperation agreement is negotiated between the city and county to determine the scope of services SOCPA will provide and the payment it will receive.

While SOCPA board members may or may not have professional planning experience, the staff is composed of 17 professional, technical, and administrative personnel. The planning director is jointly appointed by the mayor and the county executive. SOCPA provides a variety of planning and development services to the city, county, municipalities, industries, businesses, private agencies, and the general public. In addition to planning and development services, SOCPA maintains and distributes information for use in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs and services in the county. SOCPA is an affiliate of the [New York State Department of Economic Development](#), which is a cooperative program with the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).

SOCPA has worked since 2009 on the [Onondaga County Sustainable Development Plan](#). This plan promotes responsible planning and growth countywide. The focus is on the importance of good land use planning as a critical component of sustainability.

Zoning Regulations

While planning occurs in all levels of government, the adoption and enforcement of zoning regulations are within the jurisdiction of city, town, and village governments. The purposes of zoning, as stated in the state enabling legislation, include promotion of public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community.

By law, zoning regulations must be made in accordance with a comprehensive plan or, in the case of a city, with "a well considered plan." New developments often have been zoned piecemeal as they grew on the outskirts of cities and villages. Towns are not empowered to zone

for villages within their boundaries. Zoning regulations vary widely from one municipality to another and can conflict with each other.

Town and village planning boards must submit certain proposed zoning actions to the county planning board which then has 30 days to study the proposed actions and make recommendations. If it does not act within 30 days and does not respond to the municipality before the referring board is ready to vote on the proposal, the referring board may act without the agency's response. If the county planning board disapproves a proposed zoning action, or recommends modification, the municipal body can overrule the county's recommendations by a vote of a majority plus one. It must also adopt a resolution setting forth the reasons for the contrary action and must file a report of its final action with the County Planning Board.

Zoning Commissions

The town or village legislative body appoints a zoning commission to draw up zoning regulations. The commission is a temporary board but may become the planning commission once the zoning ordinance is accepted. If a planning commission already exists, it is often appointed to act as the zoning commission. Towns and villages must hold public hearings before passing zoning ordinances. Enforcement of zoning ordinances is the responsibility of a local building inspector or enforcement officer.

Zoning Board of Appeals

Towns, villages and cities must establish a Zoning Board of Appeals. The board may grant variances to the zoning law. It also interprets the intent of the zoning ordinances in special cases, since all contingencies cannot be written into the zoning ordinances. The board may also grant permits for special uses, such as gravel excavation, trailers, and golf courses. The city of Syracuse as well as most towns and villages have zoning boards, with the number of members ranging from three to five (seven in cities under certain circumstances). Members are appointed by the mayor in the city and by the town or village boards, sometimes with recommendations from the chief executive officer. Members of the zoning board of appeals are usually un-paid, and meet only as required to hold a hearing. Their meetings must

be advertised and open to the public. Their decisions are subject to review by the courts. State law establishes the authority of zoning boards. A town board appoints the members of the zoning board for three- or five-year terms and may remove a member for cause only after public hearings. Other than appointive powers, city, town, and village governments have no direct control over the zoning board of appeals.

Building Codes

The state has a model building code which has been adopted in local ordinances by the city and many towns and villages. Several municipalities have developed their own building codes. These codes give detailed technical specifications for materials and methods of building and provide for fire and sanitary safety. Zoning, on the other hand, are concerned with site control and land use. Zoning ordinances and building codes may occasionally overlap or conflict.

Enforcement of the building code depends on periodic inspection of construction in progress as well as approval of initial plans. The [Syracuse Department of Community Development](#) enforces the building code in the city. In towns and villages, enforcement of building codes is the responsibility of the local building inspector or code enforcement officer. All towns and villages in Onondaga County employ a building inspector or code enforcement officer, but most are not full time. Adequate review and inspection may not be achieved unless there is strong citizen interest and support for enforcement.

Other Agencies Involved in Planning

The legal division of the [Department of State](#) provides assistance in interpretation of state planning laws, training local planning officials and revising state planning laws. The NYS Department of State also receives copies of all new zoning and subdivision ordinances passed in the state, and is a resource for municipalities seeking help in writing new local planning legislation.

The [Legislative Commission on Rural Resources](#) proposes legislation to revise state

land use statutes. The commission is assisted in this effort by the NYS Land Advisory Committee and staff who hold regional workshops and submit draft bills for consideration by the commission and the state legislature.

The [Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board](#) is made up of five participating counties; Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga and Oswego. A board or directors is appointed by the five member counties. The board employs a staff of professional planners and other administrative personnel funded by contributions from member counties, state and federal grants, and contract service revenue.

Development

[Program](#) (CDBG) was established and is funded through the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) (HUD). Under the guidelines of the program, Onondaga County is an entitlement community (urban county). The level of funding received by the county is determined by a nationally applied formula rather than on a competitive basis.

The county's participation in the CDBG program makes it eligible for other grant programs whose principal purpose is housing construction and rehabilitation or programs to assist the homeless.

The city of Syracuse and the 34 towns and villages in the county participate in the CDBG program; however, the town of Clay's situation is unique. Clay exceeded the minimum population threshold of 50,000 for participation in the CDBG program, thereby qualifying to receive its own annual grant, much like the city of Syracuse.

In 2009 the CDBG was funded by the [American Reinvestment and Recovery Act \(ARRA\)](#), which was created to provide affordable housing, stimulate economic growth and create jobs. In 2009 the city of Syracuse received \$1,650,797, Onondaga County, \$586,066, and the Town of Clay, \$77,553 in funding.

Infrastructure Improvements

Approximately 50 percent of the CDBG is spent on capital projects in towns and villages. Eligible activities include public works projects such as construction of water lines, drainage, and sanitary

sewers; central business district improvements such as sidewalks, curbing, landscaping, benches, and lighting; reconstruction of roads; improvements to neighborhood facilities such as community centers, senior centers, and libraries; park improvements, sewer studies, handicapped accessibility improvements, clearance, and demolition for low income housing; and provision of enriched housing opportunities for the elderly who can no longer care for themselves in their own homes.

Projects must be located in areas of low income with high concentrations of substandard housing. Typical target areas have been Mattydale, East Syracuse, Solvay, Baldwinsville, Bridgeport, Jordan, Memphis, and Warners.

Onondaga County allocates about 20 percent of the CDBG for housing activities and the funding is used to match other housing rehabilitation and construction funding programs. About \$3 million per year is allocated to the following programs:

The [Onondaga County Homeownership Program](#) provide new construction or the rehabilitation of existing houses for sale to first time, low-income homebuyers in the county. Prospective buyers who qualify are selected through a lottery system and can purchase the new or rehabilitated homes with a subsidy of up to \$40,000.

Housing Rehabilitation

Housing rehabilitation assistance is provided by Onondaga County to approximately 150 low- and moderate-income homeowners each year through the following programs:

1. [Safe Housing Assistance Project for the Elderly](#) offers eligible homeowners a maximum grant of \$10,000 to cover the costs of various home repairs.
2. [Neighborhood Rehabilitation Program](#) offers grants to repair privately owned residential structures in targeted low and moderate-income neighborhoods.
3. [RAMP Program](#) for handicapped accessibility
4. Sewer Hookups

Onondaga County also provides relief to victims of natural disasters in the form of housing rehabilitation or relocation.

Commercial Rehabilitation Program

A relatively small portion of the grant is spent on the [Commercial Rehabilitation Program](#), which is structured on a matching basis with CDBG matching the owner's contribution dollar for dollar. The maximum grant from CDBG is \$15,000 and is for exterior improvements only within designated low-income target areas.

CDBG's program to revitalize low-income business areas is highly visible and has resulted in the retention of shops and small businesses which in turn provide a consistent tax base and job opportunities. Central business districts in East Syracuse, Mattydale, Jordan, Camillus, North Syracuse, Tully, and Manlius among others have participated in the program.



(Citizen Engagement in Action)

Parks and Recreation

Chapter Thirteen

Parks and Recreation

Local governments in Onondaga County have varying responsibilities for providing parks, recreational facilities, and programs. All levels of government and volunteer agencies are involved to some degree.

State and Federal Governments

New York State provides both state park lands and funds to local communities to develop their own parks and recreation programs. In Onondaga County, two major parks are administered by the [New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation](#) -

Central Region: [Green Lakes State Park](#) and [Clark Reservation State Park](#). Also, a 36-mile linear park along the [Old Erie Canal](#) has its beginnings in DeWitt and runs along the canal towpath to Rome, New York. The central region of New York State parks offers a full range of recreational opportunities year-round including boat launches, beaches, camping, and a variety of winter sports. Also included is the operation of six historic sites.

Federal and state funds for recreation and conservation come to state and local governments, non-governmental agencies, organizations, and individuals in the form of grants-in-aid, technical assistance and loans.

Onondaga County

A diverse system of over 6,000 acres of parks and historic sites are administered by the Onondaga County Department of Parks and Recreation. Led by a professionally certified commissioner; the department's organizational structure focuses on recreation and public programs, planning and development, natural resources, and operations and maintenance. Policy and budgetary issues are decided in liaison with the Environmental Conservation and Parks Committee of the county legislature.

[Onondaga Lake](#), [Rosamond Gifford Zoo](#), and [Beaver Lake Nature Center](#) are the cornerstones

of a year-round operation which also features [Carpenter's Brook Fish Hatchery](#), three forest parks, [Alliance Bank Stadium](#), two beaches, [Sainte Marie among the Iroquois](#), [the Salt Museum](#), a softball complex, two cemeteries, and several historic sites and memorials.

Scores of major special events and programs, highlighted by the Golden Harvest Festival, Lights on the Lake, and a hot air balloon festival are produced to enhance the quality of life for county residents and to creatively promote awareness of the parks as a year-round adventure.

Features of the park system include the [East Shore Recreation Trail at Onondaga Lake](#), with tram service and in-line skate rentals; boat launches and a marina; 50 miles of cross-country ski trails; youth camping at [Highland Forest Park](#); 18 reserved picnic shelters highlighted by the [Skyline Lodge](#); and horseback and horse-drawn sleigh riding opportunities.

Nearly a dozen organized Friends groups support the Parks operations and help cover a portion of the costs associated with running sites like the [Rosamond Gifford Zoo](#) and [Beaver Lake Nature Center](#). Onondaga County Parks hosts nearly three million residents and tourists on an annual basis.

City of Syracuse

The [City of Syracuse](#) offers city residents year-round active and passive recreational opportunities. The city of Syracuse has approximately 172 municipally-owned and maintained parks, fields, inactive cemeteries, medians/traffic islands (most of which are landscaped and contribute to neighborhood green space), and natural areas. The city also operates two golf courses and three winter ice-rinks, including one in the center of downtown in [Clinton Square](#).

A parks commissioner, appointed by the mayor, administers the department, and is advised by a parks and recreation committee of the Syracuse Common Council. In addition to athletic and aquatic programs, the department offers arts and crafts for all ages from preschoolers to senior citizens. Band concerts, holiday programs and Dancing Under the Stars are annual events while neighborhood facilities make recreational activities available in all areas of the city.

The responsibilities of the department cover such diverse areas as dog control, an Adopt-A-Lot Program and entertainment series. The Department also assists many neighborhood and community recreation organizations.

Towns and Villages

The towns and villages vary widely in the recreational opportunities they support for their residents. Some provide financial support or park land but rely on volunteer community recreation councils to organize any recreation programs. A few have made recreation a town or village responsibility and have a recreation

commission and paid professional director. In many towns and villages, community recreation councils plan and organize such activities as summer swimming and playground programs, Little League baseball, ice-skating, and basketball. Membership for these councils is drawn from other community organizations. Often, village and town government, school district, community council, and other voluntary agencies cooperate to provide recreational activities and facilities.



(Onondaga Lake Park)

Table 2
2009 Onondaga County Park Attendance

Park	Volunteer Hours	Park Attendance
Alliance Bank Stadium	405	394,565
Beaver Lake Nature Center	10,770	298,944
Carpenter's Brook Fish Hatchery	2,134	44,023
Highland Forest	5,500	61,956
Hopkins Road Park	50	87,310
Jamesville Beach	418	100,273
Jordan Level	500	22,250
Oneida Shores Park	580	141,946
Onondaga Lake Park	4,780	1,380,003
Otisco Lake Park	-	4,450
Pratt's Falls Park	156	30,575
Rosamond Gifford Zoo	30,088	343,645
Ste. Marie among the Iroquois	3,630	6,894
Salt Museum	292	14,568
Veterans Cemetery	250	25,750
Totals	59,553	2,957,152

Source: 2009 Annual Report

Public Safety

Chapter Fourteen

Fire Protection

Professional firefighters staff city of Syracuse fire departments. Towns and villages have either all-volunteer or a combination of volunteer and paid firefighters. New York State and Onondaga County provide training at local fire stations as well as at the Public Safety Training Center at [Onondaga Community College](#) (OCC), a component of the college's Division of Continuing Education. In addition to providing training, the county government, through the [Onondaga County Department of Emergency Management Fire Bureau](#), maintains a hazardous materials response team, fire investigation unit, and juvenile fire setter intervention program. The director of the fire bureau enforces and administers the [New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code](#) in county-owned or operated facilities.

Onondaga County

The director of the Onondaga County Department of Emergency Management Fire Bureau oversees the mutual aid and training in Onondaga County. Mutual aid reciprocal agreements are established for personnel and equipment between county fire departments. Central dispatching through the county's emergency center facilitates this function.

Mutual aid also provides staff services that would normally be found within the framework of a large municipal fire department to smaller departments outside the city.

Training includes administration of the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control field fire training program and funding [National Fire Protection Association](#) compliant-training at OCC, the Public Safety Institute and instruction at individual fire departments by members of the fire coordinator's staff.

Onondaga County has a staff of New York State certified fire investigators, available upon request to any fire department. Approximately 200 fire investigations are conducted each year.

Those determined to be incendiary are pursued by a police agency and the district attorney's office. In the case of juvenile fire setters, a joint city/county program is funded through the fire coordinator's office to provide intervention services. Access to the program is through the Volunteer Center Helpline.

The county's [Hazardous Materials Response Group](#) is a cooperative effort among six fire departments, the health department and the office of emergency management. It is directed by two deputy fire coordinators and provides technicians to remove hazardous materials or otherwise protect against them. The team is available upon request of the local fire department.

Fire prevention for all county facilities (more than 250 buildings) is the responsibility of the fire coordinator. A code enforcement officer inspects all areas of public assembly, ensures compliance with the code for all new construction and renovations and makes other fire inspections as deemed necessary.

All Emergency Medical Service (EMS) training and coordination is done through the [county EMS Bureau](#), now a unit of the Department of Emergency Management. Specialists in advanced life support (ALS) can provide emergency care in the field under direct physician supervision through the county's radio network. Eastern Paramedics provide primary ALS in the city and immediate suburbs. Through cooperative agreements among all ambulances and fire departments, ALS is available throughout the county and is dispatched immediately when dictated by initial information received at the 911 center.

City of Syracuse

Currently 390 firefighters are responsible for the job of fire protection in the city. The mayor appoints fire chief. Under the city charter the fire department has the following responsibilities: fight fires, investigate the causes of fires, and

enforce the fire prevention code. Daily in-service training is provided for firefighters.

The [Syracuse Fire Department](#) was reorganized between 1972 and 1977. In 2011 there were 12 fire stations in the city, compared to 18 in 1969. The department maintains a rescue squad and hazardous materials response unit. The city also has an automatic mutual aid arrangement for fire calls to the Van Duyn Home, Community General Hospital, Bristol-Myers Squibb, and Crouse-Hinds.

An elaborate fire prevention program is also sponsored by the fire department. This includes code enforcement; in-service inspections of residences and businesses; fire awareness programs in homes, schools, and on request; fire prevention activities; and dissemination of information, i.e., at the New York State Fair.

With the exception of mechanics, fire department personnel are selected and promoted based on the results of their civil service exam scores. Retirement plans are provided through the city by the [New York State Police](#) and Fire Retirement System.

In 2010 the city fire department answered over 23,000 alarms of which 100 were major fires.

Towns and Villages

Outside the city of Syracuse, fire protection is provided through special fire protection districts. Like school districts, these districts may cross county lines, town, and/or village borders. All of the 19 towns receive fire protection through these districts.

There are three types of fire districts. The first is a municipal corporation that has the legal power to borrow money and collect taxes. These districts obtain funding from real estate taxes and fund-raising activities. The second type of fire district is a private corporation, a nonprofit entity that contracts with a town to provide fire protection. It has no independent authority to assume debt. The department elects officers and is responsible for the budget. The town provides revenue for the department by adding a fire tax to all property tax bills. The third type of district is a village department, with the fire department serving as an arm of the village government.

As of July 2011 there are 56 fire departments serving throughout Onondaga County. That number could decrease as some departments have discussed mergers with some nearby departments. Some districts sponsor more than one fire department. Some towns and villages are protected by part-volunteer and part-paid departments. Anywhere from one to eight fire departments can provide protection in each town with the average being three. Not all villages in the county support village fire departments. Some village fire departments may serve areas outside the village through arrangements with the town government. Each town contracts for protection individually with its fire district(s), resulting in significant variation in tax rates.

Many fire districts have fire prevention programs, including speakers, and tours of fire stations. Enforcement of state and municipal fire codes as well as the [New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code](#) is a responsibility of municipal government, cities, towns, and villages

Fire protection in the towns and villages of the county also depends on several paid fire agencies. Hancock Field has a crash rescue/fire service which is not part of the Syracuse Fire Department. The [Air National Guard](#) also has a paid fire service composed entirely of its own members.

Most large industrial organizations and plants, such as Carrier Corporation, have their own fire brigades. Brigade members usually function in other capacities, but are trained as fire fighters. Some large companies also have their own fire equipment.

Police Protection

Traditionally, the job of law enforcement has been the responsibility of local police forces. In Onondaga County, police protection is provided by 20 governments, including the state, county, city, some towns, and most villages.

New York State's Role

State government's role in criminal justice concentrates on the New York State Prison System, the Parole Board, and the State Police. Two troops of the [New York State Police](#) operate within the boundaries of Onondaga County. One troop patrols the Thruway while the other polices other state highways and county areas where few local police services exist. State Police not

patrolling the Thruway serve Onondaga County residents from stations in Elbridge, Liverpool, Lafayette, and Radisson. State Police work within the city only at the order of the Governor or the request of the mayor. The State Police operate a scientific laboratory, a pistol permit bureau, and a communications bureau in Albany.

State law sets regulations governing the local police. It requires that local police personnel of town, village, and city governments come under state civil service. It also stipulates that all new peace officers and supervisory personnel attend training at the special regional Police Academy at Onondaga Community College.

County

The Onondaga County [Sheriff's Office](#) is the chief law enforcement agency of county government. The department is responsible for civil custody, police divisions as well as administration of the county jail. The budget in 2010 was \$76.6 million.

The department has 572 personnel. The sheriff, who is an elected official, appoints employees to all positions from Civil Service examination lists, and all new appointees must attend the police, custody, civil, or courts training academy.

The Onondaga County Sheriff's Office primarily patrols areas of the county outside the city of Syracuse. It has three community police stations in the towns of Onondaga, Salina and Clay, and several micro stations at various locations. In 2010 deputies responded to more than 95,803 calls for service and drove over three million miles on patrol.

The county police division is comprised of the following components: Patrol and Criminal Investigations divisions, [Abused Persons Unit](#), Records and Special Enforcement sections (includes helicopter pilots and observers, divers and boat patrols, snowmobile patrols), Canine, Traffic and Community Response units, Community Relations Section officers, Crime Prevention deputies, School Resource Officers, [SWAT](#), and the [Explosive Disposal Unit](#).)

The sheriff's office, city police, State Police, and town and village police agencies use the

[Onondaga County Department of Emergency Communications](#) (911) as the centralized communication center. The 911 center is responsible for receiving and dispatching all emergency calls and communications. This county department has an oversight board consisting of representatives from all participating police, fire, and EMS agencies and has been a model for public safety communication centers around the United States.

The sheriff's office staffs the Justice Center, the county's maximum security holding facility, which is used by all law enforcement agencies in the county as well as state and federal agencies. In 2010, there were 10,949 inmates at the Justice Center. The facility utilizes the 'podular' direct supervision design, which has a custody division deputy directly responsible for 60 inmates within a given pod. Research on direct supervision shows, this model provides a safer environment for both staff and inmates. Men and women are kept in separate pods, youths under age 16 are referred to the Youth Aid Section (which has a temporary holding facility at [Hillbrook Juvenile Detention Center](#)). Patients with mental illnesses are confined in a Behavioral Health Unit supervised by both custody division deputies and [Correctional Medical Care, Inc. \(CMC\)](#) by contract.. An infirmary with staff from CMC also provides for inmates convalescing, limiting the need for hospital details by custody division staff. Persons are held in the Justice Center only until trial, and if found guilty, are then transferred to the [New York State Department of Corrections](#), the [Onondaga County Correctional Facility at Jamesville](#), or to a federal prison.

The Sheriff's police division participates in Operation Impact with deputies patrolling the city of Syracuse alongside State Police and Syracuse Police Department officers. They also participate in numerous State and Federal Task Forces.

City of Syracuse

The [Syracuse Police Department](#), a New York State accredited police agency, is under the command of a chief of Police appointed by the mayor, a first deputy chief and three deputy chiefs, who are appointed by the police chief. The department employs 481 police officers and 118 civilian personnel.

The mission of the Syracuse Police Department is to protect the lives and property of all who live, visit, and work within the city of Syracuse, to prevent crime, to detect and arrest offenders, to facilitate the movement of people and vehicles, to preserve the public peace, to identify problems that have the potential for being more serious problems for the individual citizen, to create and maintain a feeling of security in the community, and to enforce all federal, state, and local laws over which the department has jurisdiction.

Police employees must meet physical requirements, pass a Civil Service examination, and have a high school diploma for appointment. Promotion through the ranks for police officers is determined by civil service examinations, length of employment, and review by the police Chief. The training division is responsible for basic police recruit training as well as coordinating in-service training to all sworn personnel.

The [uniformed bureau](#) is the largest bureau within the department; over half of all city police officers are currently assigned here. There are several specialized divisions recently created within the uniform bureau that respond to the needs of specific city neighborhoods. The [directed patrol division](#) and the [community policing division](#) work closely with community leaders and neighborhood residents to coordinate and provide community oriented police services to blighted areas. These efforts have been so successful that the New York State Bureau of Municipal Police Training has incorporated the community policing strategies developed by the Syracuse Police Department in a statewide community police-training program.

The [investigations bureau](#) is responsible for the continuation of felony investigations initiated by the uniform bureau as well as confidential narcotics and vice investigations. This bureau also contains the crime laboratory, which is one of only six full service crime laboratories in New York State. It is staffed exclusively by city police officers and civilian personnel. The [special investigations division](#) conducts undercover narcotics and vice operations and participates in several countywide and regional drug trafficking enforcement efforts.

The department is involved in youth programs such as traffic and bicycle safety, DARE, Officer Friendly, Scout Explorer Post #70, Internships, Job Shadowing, and Career Day. Other programs include, but are not limited to: Neighborhood Watch, Operation Safeguard, involvement with senior citizens with staff from the Metropolitan Commission on Aging, and the STOP DWI Program.

Towns and Villages

The towns and villages of the county vary widely in the amount of police protection they provide. Five of the 19 towns have police departments: Cicero, Camillus, DeWitt Geddes and Manlius. Eleven of the 15 villages have departments. The villages without departments are Tully, Fabius and Camillus. The five towns with departments have large public safety budgets. In 2008 the town of Clay merged its police force with the Onondaga County Sheriff's Office in an effort to control expenses. This merger reflects a growing trend of government service consolidation in the county and the state.

Most towns and villages require Civil Service examinations for the position of police chief, but some require only a certain level of education and/or experience. For example, the villages of Baldwinsville and Marcellus require a college degree. Most of the larger towns and villages require Civil Service examinations for police officers and may require experience and/or special training. Most have medical requirements. Some have investigators and youth officers. Salaries vary widely.

Metropolitan Progress

For the past decade there has been a definite move toward centralization of certain police functions within the county in order to reduce overlapping of services that increase costs and decrease efficiency. The [911 Center](#) is a prime example of this cooperation. Syracuse no longer has a helicopter and shares this service with the county. Town and village police departments have also been upgraded and modernized during the past 10 years.

Water Supply

Chapter Fifteen

Role of the State

Water quality standards are set by the [New York State Department of Environmental Conservation \(DEC\)](#). The agency classifies the water of New York State according to its suitability for various uses from N (all uses) to D (fish survival) for surface water, and from GA (potable) to GSB (waste disposal) for groundwater. The classification given to a particular lake, portion of a river or stream, or groundwater depends on whether the water meets certain quality standards which, with the exception of those for drinking water, are determined by the DEC. Safe water levels for, and the amount of water that can be withdrawn from, surface waters are also regulated by the DEC. The DEC grants permits to public water suppliers who must develop a water conservation program in order to obtain a permit. Drinking water standards are set by the [New York State Department of Health \(DOH\)](#). These standards can be more, but not less stringent than standards set by the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#). Water suppliers must test their water according to schedules and guidelines set by the DOH. The DOH also approves watershed rules and regulations, which public water suppliers may use to protect their supplies.

Water Suppliers

The City of Syracuse, [Onondaga County Water Authority \(OCWA\)](#), and [the Metropolitan Water Board \(MWB\)](#) supply approximately 90 percent of the residents of Onondaga County with water. The remaining 10 percent get their water from local municipal wells in the villages of Baldwinsville, East Syracuse, Marcellus, Tully and Pompey, private community systems, or their individual wells.

The Metropolitan Water Board, which administers the Onondaga County Water District, acts as a utility wholesaler providing

source water, treatment, and major distribution facilities. It does not sell directly to any retail customers. The MWB is the administrative body of the [Onondaga County Water District](#), which is administered by the Metropolitan Water Board and serves municipal corporations and public authorities. OCWA and Syracuse are its wholesale customers in Onondaga County and all Lake Ontario water that is distributed by OCWA and Syracuse is treated and supplied by the MWB.

There are also smaller municipal and private suppliers of water, whose sources of water are primarily wells and springs. Rural residents generally rely on their own wells or springs. Residents of more heavily populated town areas may be part of, or may petition for formation of, a town water district for the purpose of purchasing water from the suppliers. The cost to the consumer of water from other than personal sources is usually based on metered sales.

The Onondaga County Water District was established by the county legislature as a means of financing major water supply, distribution and treatment projects that are proposed by the MWB and determined by the legislature to be of importance to the county as a whole. It is administered by its own board, the Metropolitan Water Board. The creation of the district provides access to the county tax base as a means of financing these projects. The district comprises the entire area of the county with the exception of the towns of Skaneateles and Spafford, which were excluded based on their claim that they would not benefit from the improvement. The OCWA, a public benefit corporation created by the state legislature, does not have the ability to tax and can only raise revenues for its projects through the sale of services to customers.

The district was established after a public referendum in 1962 authorizing a \$45 million

bond issue to construct a supply and distribution system from Lake Ontario at Oswego. The system became operational in June 1967. Completed and operational by the end of 1968 were three pumping stations, the [Lake Oswego Water Treatment Plant](#), two 30-million gallon reservoirs (Terminal Reservoir in Clay and Eastern Reservoir in Manlius), the Alexander F. Jones Administration Center, and about 55 miles of large diameter pipelines in Onondaga and Oswego counties.

In subsequent years, a 100-million gallon reservoir in the town of Van Buren was constructed, as well as a pumping station on Seventh North Street, pumping and small storage facilities south of Syracuse and pumping and small storage facilities in the Manlius-Pompey area. Additional pipeline was also extended to various areas of Onondaga County. An additional \$10 million authorization was approved for the expansion of the water system in 1976.

The district is financed in two ways: by benefit assessment on all real estate within the district and by water sales. For purposes of equitable benefit assessments, the district is divided into three zones with different rates set for each. The amount that must be raised by assessment is determined by district expenses and revenues generated by water sales. Currently water sales support all operational costs and therefore, the debt service for the construction of the system is paid by benefit assessments.

In 1980, the supply capacity of the distribution system was increased from 36 million gallons per day to approximately 54 million gallons per day so that future demand can be met.

As a result of an act of the Syracuse Common Council, Lake Ontario and Otisco Lake water has been fluoridated since 1969. Syracuse's supply of water has been treated with sodium fluoride since 1965. All communities now have fluoridated water supplies.

[OCWA](#), a public benefit corporation, was created in 1951 by the New York State Legislature. The authority acquired the water rights to Otisco Lake through condemnation of a water company in 1955. The system had been

developed early in the century by private enterprise to provide water to Solvay Process and the New York Central Railroad.

After acquiring the system, OCWA expanded and modernized the facilities and now can deliver 20 million gallons of water a day from Otisco Lake by gravity. Over half of the water distributed by OCWA comes from Lake Ontario, purchased wholesale from the MWB, and transmitted through the OCWA's mains. A filtration plant for the Lake Ontario water supply was built in 1967.

In 1986, OCWA built a filtration plant for the Otisco Lake water supply. As of 2006, the [EPA](#) required all surface water supplies to be filtered. However, the state [DOH](#) has given the city of Syracuse an exemption to avoid the filtration requirements on their water supply from Skaneateles Lake due to water quality and watershed protection measurements.

The OCWA supplies water to its 340,000 residential customers. OCWA purchases approximately 17 million gallons of water per day from Otisco Lake as well as water from the city of Syracuse to supply areas south and west of the city. In general, the OCWA water lines distribute water from Otisco Lake to the towns of Camillus, Geddes, Marcellus, Onondaga, and parts of Salina, Dewitt, and the village of North Syracuse. It also distributes Lake Ontario water to the towns of Cicero, Clay, Lysander, Manlius, Pompey, Van Buren, and parts of Salina, Dewitt, and North Syracuse.

The Onondaga County Water Authority sells water to village and town water districts for resale. In 1980, Onondaga County Water Authority delivered over 40 million gallons of water per day through more than 700 miles of pipelines to more than 30 points of delivery. The Authority sold to more than 40,000 customers and provided safe drinking water for 200,000 people. In 2007 OCWA supplied over 40 million gallons daily to its 340,000 residential customers

The [City of Syracuse](#) oversees the distribution of water from Skaneateles Lake to supply the needs of the city. City water lines distribute water from Skaneateles Lake to the village of Skaneateles and several water districts in the town of

Skaneateles, a few customers in the villages of Elbridge and Jordan, the city of Syracuse, parts of Dewitt, and two districts in the town of Onondaga. The water supplied to these last two districts is water supplied by the MWB from Lake Ontario.

During 2009, the total amount of water entering the city of Syracuse water system was 12,578 million gallons, all from Skaneateles Lake. The amount purchased from the [MWB](#) may increase in times of drought if Skaneateles Lake water levels decline. This occurred in 2005 where increased summer demand raised the average daily withdrawal from Lake Ontario to more than 26 million gallons a day. This amount is well within the WMB's state DEC permit, which limits withdrawal to 62.5 million gallons per day. Water flows through three conduits that run from Skaneateles Lake to Syracuse (the first was laid in 1894, the third in 1927). Law limits the amount that may be withdrawn from this lake. If the needs of the city should exceed the maximum amount allowed, the city has

arrangements to purchase additional water from the MWB.

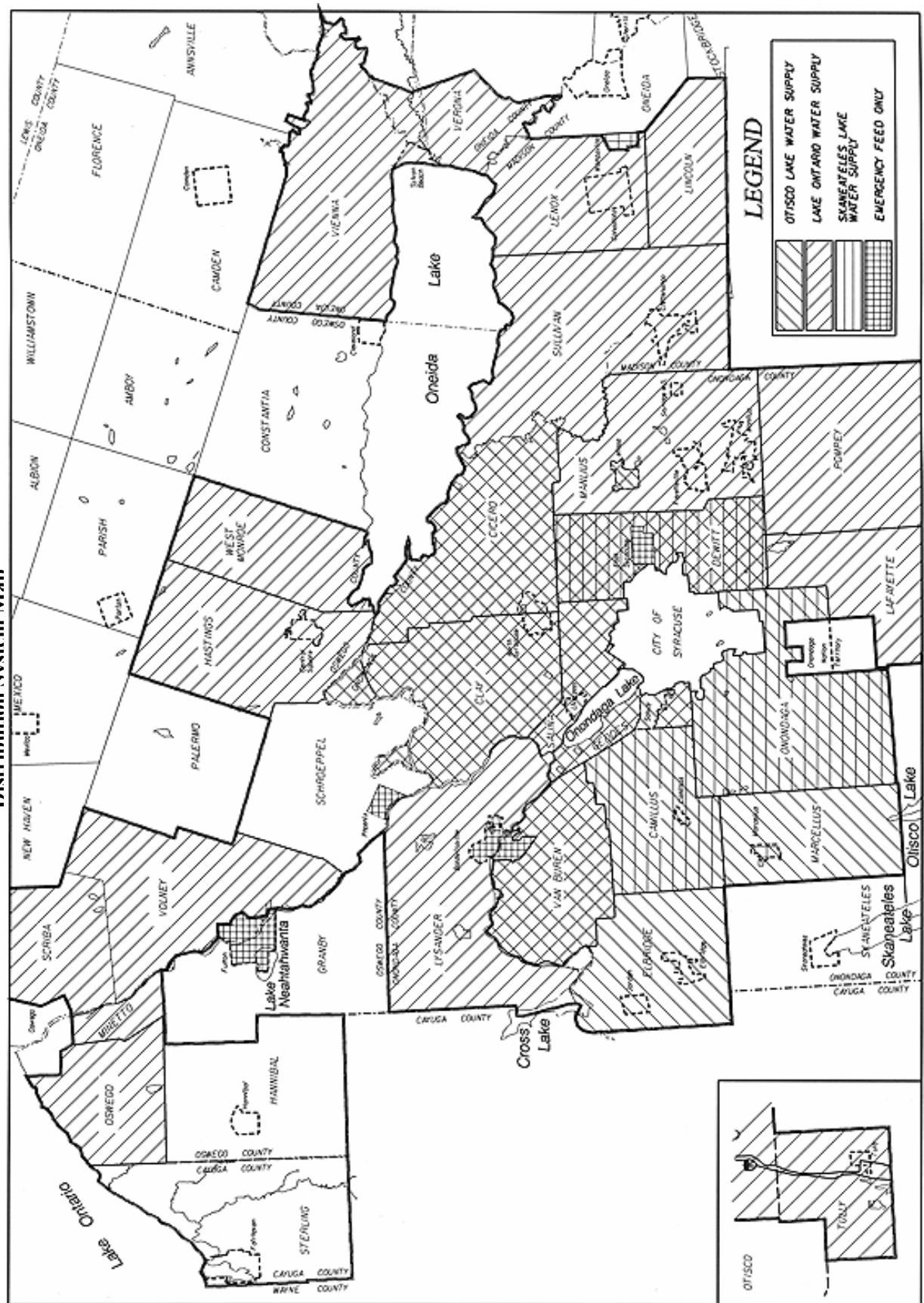
Supply, Treatment & Quality Assurance

Trained water treatment plant staff continues to achieve the highest quality water that is possible. The most important contributor to attaining this objective is having a high quality source. The MWB has been collecting water quality data that exceeds the scope of regulated parameters for 30 years. They stay ahead of developing regulations by analyzing the water for contaminants as soon as they are identified as potentially harmful. The water that supplies Onondaga County has been confirmed to be of excellent quality. The treatment processes further improve the quality through coagulation, filtration, fluoridation, and disinfection. In 2004 a granular activated carbon filtration system was implemented and continues to operate. It proves to be an effective technique in removing naturally occurring organic compounds that can cause undesirable tastes and odors in drinking water.



(Metropolitan Waste Water Treatment Facility)

Map 4
Distribution System Map



Waste Control

Chapter Sixteen

Sewage Disposal

State and Federal Role

Standards regulating the discharge of pollutants into state surface and ground waters are determined by the [New York State Department of Environmental Conservation \(DEC\)](#). The standards for water quality are set forth in amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972 the [Clean Water Act of 1977](#), and Article 17 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law. Based on these laws, municipal treatment facilities have been required to achieve secondary treatment since 1977. Most of the treatment plants in the county have consistently achieved secondary or advanced levels of treatment.

PL 92-500 included provisions to provide 75 percent federal aid to municipalities for the construction of wastewater facilities. The 1970 Environmental Bond Act provided funds for New York State to award 12.5 percent grants to municipalities. The total federal and state aid previously available to municipalities was 87.5 percent of eligible project costs.

The Federal Water Quality Act of 1987 phased out the federal grants program and replaced it with a "State Revolving Fund" (SRF) loan program. The [New York State Revolving Fund program](#) is currently administered by the [New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation \(EFC\)](#), a public benefit corporation. Interest-free short term loans, as well as low interest rate long-term loans to municipalities are available to finance planning, design, and construction of water pollution control facilities. As the loans are repaid by the municipalities, the money is redistributed by the state to other municipalities. In addition to the SRF, various grant and loan programs for wastewater pollution control projects are available from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Rural Development Agency (RDA) and the Farmers Home Administration (FMHA).

In Onondaga County, most of the major treatment plants and other wastewater treatment appurtenances were constructed during the 1970's and 1980's under the federal and state grants programs that provided 87.5 percent of funding.

The majority of recent wastewater projects have been constructed with local funds. Some select grant monies have been received from the [Amended Consent Judgment projects](#). Since the cessation of the federal Construction Grants Program, the county has financed dozens of projects under the State Revolving Fund program.

Local Government's Role

Several different levels of local government share the responsibility for the collection, treatment, and disposal of sewage in most of the county's urbanized area. The county provides and maintains all major trunk sewer lines and treatment plants, while the towns and villages provide lateral connecting sewers. Individual building or subdivision contractors provide sewer lines from homes and buildings to the lateral lines. The city's sewage, collected in the city's system, is treated and disposed of at facilities operated by the county. Onondaga County's services are provided through the Onondaga County Sanitary District and are the responsibility of the [Onondaga County Department of Water Environment Protection \(WEP\)](#). The district was consolidated in 1979 and replaced 24 sanitary districts and two sewage treatment plant districts.

The WEP commissioner can propose an expansion of the county sanitary district. After a public hearing for the affected property owners, the recommendation is sent to the county legislature where it is considered by the Public Works Committee and full legislature. If approved, the county legislature expands the district after another public hearing.

Within the county district, small districts provide lateral sewers between homes and the county trunk lines. These districts are organized and administered by town boards and are called town sewer districts. They may be proposed by a town board or more commonly by a petition of property owners. Unlike the county sanitary district, the formation of town sewer districts may be blocked by a majority vote of the property owners within the proposed district.

Outside the area presently served by the county sanitary district, sewage facilities may or may not be available. Most villages maintain their own sewers, but few of them maintain and operate sewage treatment facilities. Villages that have treatment facilities must achieve the standards of at least secondary treatment levels. There are currently four village sewage collection and treatment systems in Onondaga County: Minoa, Marcellus, Skaneateles, and Tully. Other communities outside the county sanitary district are currently serviced by individual residence on-site wastewater treatment systems.

The majority of villages requested inclusion in regional treatment plant service areas within the county sanitary district. Among the villages connected to the regional facilities are Baldwinsville, Fayetteville, Manlius, and North Syracuse.

Refuse Collection and Disposal

Solid Waste Collection

Historically, New York State gave the responsibility for the disposal of trash to local government. In the mid-1970's, 15 local landfills were operated by municipalities in Onondaga County; gradually, these landfills were closed by state DEC because of the advent of stringent rules and regulations governing the construction and operation of landfills.

When the city of Syracuse closed its last landfill some 30 years ago, the city and county governments began exploring other options for trash disposal. This led to the creation of the Onondaga County Solid Waste Disposal Authority (SWDA), a public benefit corporation, which built shredders and later provided transfer stations for the acceptance of trash which was trucked to various landfills.

Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency

SWDA was dissolved in 1990 when the [Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency \(OCRRA\)](#) was established. Also a public benefit corporation, it was created at the request of the Onondaga County Legislature by the New York State Legislature to handle the responsibility for municipal solid waste in Onondaga County.

Through Solid Waste Agreements signed with 33 of the County's 35 municipalities, Onondaga County assumed responsibility for providing for a range of solid waste services and facilities to meet the solid waste management needs of these communities. In turn, the municipalities pledged, to have all municipal solid waste delivered to the OCRRA facilities for processing and handling through what is called contractual flow control. In 1990, county government assigned these contracts to OCRRA for implementation.

A 15-member board of directors oversees the operation of the trash agency. The volunteer directors are appointed by the county executive (four appointees), the mayor of Syracuse (six), the chair of the Onondaga County Legislature (three) and the towns of Van Buren and Onondaga (one appointee each). Members' terms are three years; they are eligible to serve no more than two consecutive terms.

Solid Waste Disposal

OCRRA's management of trash follows the [NYSDEC](#)'s hierarchy as described in the [state's Solid Waste Management Plan of 1988](#). The agency has waste reduction and recycling programs to decrease the amount of trash thrown away, a waste-to-energy plant to reduce the volume of non-recyclable trash by 90 percent through combustion into energy, and burial of the ash in a [NYSDEC](#) permitted landfill. The agency administers the county's July 1, 1990, Source Separation Law (Operation Separation) which mandates recycling for homes and businesses.

Onondaga County has a 95 percent participation rate and reduces the amount of trash generated by more than 64 percent. Onondaga County

residents and businesses have recycled over eight million tons of mandatory and voluntary items since 1990. The Onondaga County Legislature also banned yard waste from the trash April 1, 1992. Each year, over 30,000 of county residents use OCRRA's two yard waste compost sites, located in Jamesville and Amboy (in the town of Camillus). For a one-time seasonal fee of \$10, homeowners in OCRRA's service area can drop off grass clippings, leaves, and brush up to 10 inches in diameter. Residents can also pick up mulch and compost for their gardens.

The 990 ton/day waste-to-energy facility on Rock Cut Road in the town of Onondaga is operated by Covanta Energy through a contract with OCRRA, opened in 1994. The plant's NYSDEC permit allows the burning of 361,350 tons of solid waste annually.

Other programs operated by [OCRRA](#) include a construction debris processing operation at the Ley Creek Transfer Station, a delivery point for trash from households and small users at the Rock Cut Road Transfer Station, household hazardous waste events, and a household battery collection.

Delivery of Trash

Delivery of trash to the OCRRA system occurs through two dozen private trash haulers and eight public haulers. The public haulers are the city of Syracuse and a number of villages, both units of government that provide a wider level of services to their residents than towns. Besides Syracuse, the villages of Camillus, East Syracuse, Manlius, Minoa, Fayetteville, Liverpool and Solvay operate trash pick-up services through their highway or public works departments. Some town and villages contract with private haulers to provide collections. Among these are the towns of Geddes, Clay, Dewitt, Manlius, Cicero, Camillus and Salina as well as the villages of Elbridge, Jordan, North Syracuse, and Marcellus.

In the remaining towns and villages of the county, residents arrange for trash removal by private haulers. The only exception is the town of Spafford where residents can deliver trash to the town transfer station; from there the trash is delivered into the disposal system operated by OCRRA. Towns that allow private haulers to complete trash pick-up require the haulers to have local permits to operate. One condition of these permits requires any hauler who collects trash within its area to deliver all trash into the OCRRA system and to provide a recycling collection to its customers.



(Metropolitan Waste Water Treatment Facility)

Table 3
WEP Plant Descriptions

	Areas served	Treatment
Metropolitan Syracuse Wastewater Treatment Plant (Metro)	Metro provides high quality treatment for 270,000 people and many industrial and commercial customers in the City of Syracuse and some areas outside the city in Onondaga County.	Metro treats an average of 84 million gallons per day. Full secondary and tertiary treatment can be provided for up to 126 million gallons per day. Metro has a total hydraulic capacity of 240 million gallons per day during wet-weather events such as rainstorms.
Baldwinsville-Seneca Knolls	Baldwinsville, Radisson, Seneca Knolls, Interstate Island industrial area, and River Mall.	Flexible design allows for activated sludge operation in either single- or two-stage mode. Current mode is single stage with the second stage used for polishing. Pure oxygen is generated onsite and used in the first-stage aeration basins and aerobic digester. Total phosphorus is removed on a year-round basis, while disinfection and nitrification are employed seasonally according to permit.
Brewerton	Brewerton and Town of Cicero (Lakeshore from Brewerton to Bridgeport).	Secondary treatment using contact stabilization modification of the activated sludge process. Design volume = 3.0 MGD (peak = 7.5 MGD). Fine bubble diffusers are used for the aeration system. Total phosphorus is removed year-round.
Meadowbrook-Limestone	Portions of Syracuse, Village of Manlius, Village of Fayetteville, and towns of Manlius and Dewitt.	Conventional activated sludge with phosphorus removal and nitrification. Anoxic zones added at head end of each aeration tank in 1994 for filament control to improve settling in final clarifiers.
Oak Orchard	Cicero, Clay, and North Syracuse.	Pure oxygen activated sludge plant. Pure oxygen aeration generated on-site by pressure swing adsorption. Plant capacity: design = 10 MGD (peak = 24 MGD).

Source: Onondaga County Department of Water Environment Protection

Transportation

Chapter Seventeen

Streets, Roads, and Highways

All levels of government are involved in providing for streets and roads in Onondaga County. The federal government (through the [US Department of Transportation](#) and its Bureau of Public Roads) assists all states with money for highway planning, design, and construction, including safety projects. Roads are built and maintained by state, county, and town governments. Streets are built and maintained by the city and the villages. The towns, while maintaining the town roads within their borders, require private developers to build new roads to specification before turning them over to the town. The units of government involved with road maintenance contract with each other to provide snow removal and ice control in parts of their respective road systems.

State and Interstate Highways

The design, construction, and maintenance of state highways in Onondaga County is the responsibility of the New York State Dept. of Transportation, Region 3, which has its headquarters in Syracuse.

There are 480 miles of state highway in Onondaga County. Designated Routes 81, 90, 481, and 690 all run through Onondaga County.. Interstate 90, known as the New York State (Thomas E. Dewey) Thruway, is a toll road operated and maintained by the [New York State Thruway Authority](#). State highway crews service and maintain the other interstate highways and most state highways, except for certain areas where the work is done by various local governments under contract with the state. For example, snow and ice control on state highways in Onondaga County may be cleared by the [Onondaga County Department of Transportation](#) under contract with the state. The county, in turn, may choose to subcontract part of the work on certain county highways to town and village highway departments.

Since 1969, the federal government, reinforced by state policy, has required public hearings at the planning and design stages of state and interstate highway construction. The hearings give local governments and other interested parties an opportunity to participate in decisions involving use of land for highways. The federal highway program provides 90 percent of the land and construction costs of interstate highways. The remaining 10 percent is paid by state government, which also bears the entire cost of maintaining interstate routes.

Portions of I-81 are nearing the end of their lifespan. The elevated sections over downtown Syracuse that will need repairs or reconstruction are of increased interest. Over the next decade, portions of the road will need to be replaced, reconstructed, removed, or otherwise changed at a significant cost. The New York State Department of Transportation and the [Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council](#) are leading an effort called "[The I-81 Challenge](#)," which is encouraging community members to be a part of the planning process.

County Roads

[Onondaga County's Department of Transportation \(DOT\)](#), headed by a commissioner, has the responsibility for maintaining 808 miles of the county roads and 210 bridge structures. The county legislature provides guidance to the department. The county DOT has four shops located in Jamesville, North Syracuse, Camillus, and Marcellus.

The functions of the county DOT include:

1. Reconstruction and widening of roads
2. Resurfacing (including pavement on county roads within villages)
3. Maintaining shoulders and drainage ditches
4. Providing guide rails and traffic control devices
5. Removing snow and controlling ice on portions of state roads (except interstate highways) and on approximately three-

quarters of county roads. Town highway departments clear the rest of the county road system under contract.

The traffic control program is responsible for providing traffic signals, traffic signs, and pavement striping. The department's paint shop at Jamesville prepares and erects signs and designs the layout of the road striping program. Preparation of an official road map, approved by the county legislature, is the responsibility of the commissioner of transportation. A [road map of Onondaga County](#) is available at the office of the Department of Transportation.

performs all engineering, surveying, planning and design, land acquisition, construction supervision, and traffic engineering required for the maintenance, construction, and reconstruction of county roads. The department is also responsible for engineering work for other branches of county government.

Much reconstruction is subcontracted to private road builders. No public hearing is required for construction and improvements of county roads unless federal aid is used.

The [Consolidated Highway Improvement Program](#) is the mechanism by which funds come from the state to local municipalities for highway work.

The amount of aid received is formula-driven, based on center line and lane miles of locally maintained highways, vehicle registrations, and vehicle miles of travel. The aid is determined on a yearly basis by the state legislature.

The federal government grants secondary road funds, which are distributed to state approved county projects through the Syracuse and the [State Department of Transportation](#).

Many road projects in the 1980s were financed by the county through sales of municipal bonds, which are repaid by county taxpayers.

Town Roads

In Onondaga County there are 1,863 miles of town and city roads. In each of the 19 towns, highway superintendents have a responsibility for maintaining and improving these roads. Taxes to support highway costs are collected

through four separate highway funds that cover general maintenance, bridges, machinery, snow removal, and miscellaneous. Village residents are exempt from paying the general maintenance tax and, in some instances, some of the other funds. Road costs are often a major expense of town governments.

Towns usually have very limited power to control traffic within their borders. They may erect stop signs at the intersections of town roads, subject to a public hearing. Where town and county roads (or town and state roads) intersect, the higher level of government has the authority for placing stop signs or traffic signals. Speed limits and parking restrictions must be approved by the New York State Department of Transportation, although local officials must initiate requests for these limitations. Suburban towns (as described in Chapter Three) have greater traffic control power and may share in traffic fine receipts, as do cities and villages.

City Streets

The [Syracuse Department of Public Works \(DPW\)](#) is responsible for over 400 miles of city streets. Responsibilities are divided between several DPW divisions.

The maintenance and repair of streets and sidewalks is the responsibility of the Division of Design and Construction. Snow and ice control is a separate division within the DPW. The Division of Mapping & Surveying is responsible for surveying, designing, and constructing city streets and sidewalks. This division also has responsibility for the official city maps. Planning for new streets and rerouting or closing existing streets are functions of the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency (SOCPA) and the Syracuse Department of Community Development with the concurrence of the city DPW.

In October 1980, Syracuse became the first municipality in the county to have its own asphalt-recycling plant. This plant uses old street material (asphalt) combined with small amounts of virgin asphalt and chemicals to produce enough material to meet all street repair and reconstruction needs.

The Division of Transportation is concerned with the movement of people and vehicles within and through the city. The responsibilities of this division include traffic control, parking (lots, garages, and meters), advisement on bus routes and schedules, street lights and signs, and the parking program for the handicapped. The commissioner of public works collaborates with SOCPA, the Syracuse Community Development Department, and city police department, to improve the safety and efficiency of traffic flow.

Village Streets

In Onondaga County, there are over 150 miles of village streets. Most village boards of trustees appoints a superintendent of public works who is responsible for building and maintaining the village streets. In some villages the titles and responsibilities may be different. These costs along with other costs including streetlights, sidewalks, street cleaning, and traffic control are included in the general fund of each village. Towns and villages may supply curbing and sidewalks along county and state roads that pass through their jurisdiction. State and county governments are responsible for paving these village roads and for paving and maintaining shoulders and drainage in town areas outside villages.

Other Transportation Services

Although streets and highways account for the greatest part of government activity in transportation, there are also other areas where government money and control are important in Onondaga County. The New York State Thruway Authority administers the Barge Canal System and maintains and operates the locks and navigable portions of the rivers and lakes that are connected with it. Federal and state agencies regulate and at times give financial assistance to the private carriers of passengers and freight. The city of Syracuse built, operates, and

maintains Hancock Airport through its Department of Aviation.

Transportation Authority

In 1970 the Central New York Transportation Authority Regional Transportation Authority (CNYRTA) was established by the New York State Legislature with responsibility to develop, improve, and operate mass transit facilities. The transportation district of CNYRTA includes Onondaga, Cayuga, and Oswego counties. Four other counties, Cortland, Jefferson, Madison, and Oneida may join the authority by a vote of the respective county legislature.

CNYRTA is comprised of six subsidiary corporations: CNY Centro, Inc., Centro of Cayuga, Centro of Oswego, Call-A-Bus Paratransit Service, Centro Parking, and the Intermodal Transportation Center, Inc. About 40 percent of the authority's operating costs are supported by revenues received from passengers; federal, state and local funding comprise the difference.

Since its inception, the authority has instituted projects to encourage people to use bus transportation. Services include shuttle buses to community events, holiday and seasonal promotions, shopping and school service, transportation for disabled and senior citizens, and parking convenience services.

CNYRTA opened an Intermodal Transportation Center, the William F. Walsh Regional Transportation Center, during the 1990's. In addition to CNY Centro Inc., tenants at the center include, Amtrak, Greyhound, Trailways, and Central. The intermodal transportation center provides seamless service for any form of transportation in and out of the Syracuse area, making travel throughout the area more convenient and efficient.

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