

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING
CITY OF WATERTOWN
July 7, 2025
7:00 p.m.**

Mayor Sarah V.C. Pierce Presiding

Present: Council Member Robert O. Kimball
Council Member Clifford G. Olney III
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero
Council Member Benjamin P. Shoen
Mayor Sarah V.C. Pierce

Also Present: Eric F. Wagenaar, City Manager
Kristen E. Smith, Bond, Schoeneck & King PLLC, City Attorney

City staff present: Erica Anderson, Michael Lumbis, Brian MacCue

The City Manager presented the following reports to Council:

- Resolution No. 1 - Accepting Bids for Ready Mix Concrete – Products
- Resolution No. 2 - Accepting Bid for Road Striping & Pavement Marking Services – K & T Striping, LLC
- Resolution No. 3 - Adopting the City of Watertown's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program Annual Action Plan for Program Year 2025
- Resolution No. 4 - Sponsoring an Application for Brownfield Opportunity Areas (BOA) Funding to Write a Brownfield Opportunity Area Nomination
- Tabled Resolution - Adopting Rules of Conduct for Public Meetings of the City Council
- Proposed Local Law of 2025 - A Local Law to Create an Exception to the Residency Requirement Under Section 3 of the New York State Public Officers Law as Applied to the Current Holders of the Offices of City Manager, City Engineer, and Superintendent of Public Works

Meeting opened with a moment of silence and Mayor Pierce asked that it be in remembrance of the Honorable Eugene Langone.

Pledge of Allegiance was given.

The reading of the minutes of the regular meeting of June 16, 2025, was dispensed and accepted as written by motion of Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero, seconded by Council Member Clifford G. Olney III and carried with all voting in favor thereof.

COMMUNICATIONS

An email was received from Debbie and Bill Dermady, 118 Seymour Street, requesting that both the Flynn and Thompson Park pools be open and that better signage for the Flynn pool be installed along Hoard and Lansing Streets, as well as the lock on the Flynn Splash Pad be adjusted.

An email was received from Donnie Lee Barrigar, regarding weather modification in Watertown and mentioning geo-engineered weather and the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

An email was received from Joe Semones, 225 Breen Avenue, speaking in support of approving the exception to the residency requirements for certain City Officers.

An email was received from Debbie and Bill Dermady, 118 Seymour Street, speaking in opposition to approving the exception to the residency requirements for certain City Officers.

An email was received from Cody Horbacz, Founder of WatertownFirst, speaking in opposition to approving the exception to the residency requirements for certain City Officers.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Anita Seefried-Brown, Alliance for Better Communities, distributed an informational packet to Council and spoke of concerns regarding youth use of marijuana and E-cigarettes. She said there needs to be local action to decrease this activity.

Christopher Tehonica, organizer of the 1000 Islands Softball Tournament, spoke about the importance of youth sports and the role it plays to help keep children off the streets. He also mentioned that he is an organ donor and spoke of his recent experience.

Patrick Hickey, Pawling Street, provided Council with an update of the Neighborhood Watch Program and expressed concerns with the location of certain sexual offenders.

Peter Monaco, Smith Street, discussed the equalization rate, which is set by New York State and appeared on the FY 25-26 City tax bill, and he expressed concerns with the historical trend of this rate.

PUBLIC HEARING

At 7:15 p.m. Mayor Pierce asked the City Clerk to read the notice of Public Hearing concerning Proposed Local Law – A Local Law to Create an Exception to the Residency Requirement Under Section 3 of the New York State Public Officers Law as Applied to the Current Holders of the Offices of City Manager, City Engineer, and Superintendent of Public Works.

Mayor Pierce declared the hearing open at 7:15 p.m.

Joseph Albinus, stating he is a City Planner, addressed the chair speaking in support of the local law creating an exception to the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

Joseph Butler, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army and former Mayor of Watertown, spoke in support of the local law creating an exception to the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

Peter Monaco, Smith Street, spoke in opposition of the local law creating an exception to the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

John Eyles, Glenfield, stated he is the Custodial Maintenance Supervisor for City Hall and former representative of the CSEA union, and he expressed his support for the local law creating an exception to the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

Anthony Velasquez, Washington Street, spoke in opposition to the local law creating an exception to the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

Erica LeClerc, Town of Alexandria, noted that she is the HR Manager of the City and indicated reasons why Council should remove the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

Robert Avallone, Watertown, stated there was a breach of contract and now everyone is playing the “blame game” and he advised what he felt were flaws in the procedural process and initial contract of the City Manager.

Jonathan Phillips, 735 Mill Street, provided his reasons why Council should support the local law creating an exception to the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

Christopher Tehonica, Carthage, expressed support for the local law creating an exception to the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

Julie Derrigo, Chaumont, spoke in support of the local law creating an exception to the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

Kerrine O'Donnell, Fort Drum, stated that she is the Secretary to the City Engineer and Planning Department and she expressed her support for the local law creating an exception to the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

Matt Timerman, Lafargeville, spoke as the City's Fire Chief and tried to diminish the concerns regarding the response time during an emergency of an Officer of the City living outside of the City limits.

Jeff Hammond, Brownville, advised that he is an Engineer under the City Engineer and reminded Council how difficult it was to find a person to fill the City Engineer position.

Tina Bartlett- Bearup, Redwood, indicated that she is the City Purchasing Manager and she spoke in support of the local law creating an exception to the residency requirement for certain City Officers.

Eric Wagenaar, City Manager, asked to speak on his behalf. He read from a prepared statement stressing his commitment to the City of Watertown and its residents regardless of his residency being outside the City limits.

Mayor Pierce declared the hearing closed at 8:07 p.m.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR (continued)

Robert Avallone, Watertown, addressed the chair regarding the local law regarding residency requirements, mentioning the importance of changing the City Charter as well.

Frank Battista, Palmer Street, stated Council needs to make serious budget cuts next year, which will effect jobs and services. He also addressed the selling price of houses in comparison to the assessment values.

Jonathan Phillips, 735 Mill Street, spoke of the homeless issue within the City and the need to have more help for individuals suffering from depression.

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 1 - Accepting Bids for Ready Mix Concrete – Products

Introduced by Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero

WHEREAS the City desires to purchase Ready Mix Concrete Products on an as needed basis for the fiscal period of July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026, and

WHEREAS the Purchasing Department advertised and received two (2) sealed bids for Ready Mix Concrete Products, and

WHEREAS on June 18, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. the bids received were publicly opened and read, and

WHEREAS Purchasing Manager, Tina Bartlett-Bearup reviewed the bids received with the Public Works Department and it is their recommendation that the City Council accept the bids submitted by Cranesville Block Co. Inc. and Watertown Concrete, and

WHEREAS the lowest responsive responsible bid and vendor selected for each job will be based upon the cubic yards needed for the job as Cranesville Block Co., Inc. will calculate short load charges if the job is less than 7 cubic yards, thereby making them more costly compared to Watertown Concrete,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Watertown hereby accepts the bids received from Cranesville Block Co., Inc. and Watertown Concrete per the pricing schedule proposed, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Manager of the City Watertown or their designee is hereby authorized and directed to execute any contracts associated with implementing the award on behalf of the City of Watertown.

Seconded by Council Member Clifford G. Olney III and carried with all voting yea.

Resolution No. 2 - Accepting Bid for Road Striping & Pavement Marking Services – K & T Striping, LLC

Introduced by Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero

WHEREAS the City's Public Works Department desires to contract with a qualified firm to provide all labor, equipment, materials, and supervision required to perform all operations necessary in connection with the striping of roads, parking lots, interior approach roads, and special markings along City roads at various locations as well as a bid alternate item for road striping as needed for the City, and

WHEREAS the Purchasing Department advertised and received three (3) sealed bids for road striping and pavement marking services, and

WHEREAS on June 26, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. the bids received were publicly opened and read, and

WHEREAS Purchasing Manager, Tina Bartlett-Bearup reviewed the bids received with the Superintendent of Public Works and it is their recommendation that the City Council accept the lowest responsive responsible bid submitted by K & T Striping, LLC,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Watertown hereby accepts the bid received from K & T Striping, LLC, per the pricing schedule proposed, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Manager of the City Watertown or their designee is hereby authorized and directed to execute the Agreement on behalf of the City of Watertown.
Seconded by Council Member Clifford G. Olney III and carried with all voting yea.

Resolution No. 3 - Adopting the City of Watertown's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program Annual Action Plan for Program Year 2025

Introduced by Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero

WHEREAS on August 5, 2013, the City Council adopted a resolution authorizing the City of Watertown to become an Entitlement Grantee under the rules and regulations of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), and

WHEREAS, as an Entitlement Grantee, the City must adopt Annual Action Plans for its Housing and Community Development Program, and

WHEREAS Annual Action Plans must be developed with community input and citizen participation, and

WHEREAS Staff conducted outreach efforts with local constituency groups and presented an overview of the program and discussed project priorities at the February 10, 2025, City Council work session, and

WHEREAS the City Council held a public hearing on March 3, 2025, to solicit public comments regarding the development of funding priorities and projects to be included in the Program Year 2025 Annual Action Plan, and

WHEREAS a draft of the Program Year 2025 Annual Action Plan was completed and published on June 4, 2025, and

WHEREAS the draft plan was made available to the public for review and placed in various offices at City Hall, at the Roswell P. Flower Memorial Library, at the Watertown Housing Authority offices, and on the City's website, and

WHEREAS a 30-day public comment period for the plan was held starting on June 4, 2025, after a notice of the comment period was published in the *Watertown Daily Times*, and

WHEREAS the plan was finalized after the 30-day public comment period,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council hereby adopts the City of Watertown's CDBG Annual Action Plan for Program Year 2025 and authorizes the submission of the plan to HUD which allocates the CDBG funds as follows:

CDBG Program Year 2025 Budget

<u>Project</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Homebuyer Program	\$ 215,000.00
Division Street East Sidewalk Project	\$ 125,000.00
Black River Trail Western Extension	\$ 450,000.00
Fair Housing Education	\$ 5,000.00
Watertown Urban Mission Food Pantry	\$ 8,000.00
WCSD Food for Families (Backpack) Program	\$ 8,000.00
Program Administration	\$ 49,088.00
Total Funds Proposed for Allocation	\$ 860,088.00

Seconded by Council Member Clifford G. Olney III

Prior to the vote on the foregoing resolution, Council Member Shoen explained his concerns with a large portion of this funding going towards a trail, which may not be heavily used. He stressed that the City's sidewalk system is in need of repairs and would rather see this funding go towards that. He said he would not support this for that reason.

Council Member Olney asked Planning and Community Development Director Michael Lumbis to explain the details of the Homebuyer Program and where the trail extension would connect into the existing trail system. He noted this is a quality of life issue, which would help to develop opportunities along the river and possibly Sewall's Island, and he said he supports it.

Mr. Lumbis confirmed that CDBG funding could be used for sidewalks, listing examples of recent projects, and pointed out that, in the last five years, \$2.1 million dollars of CDBG funding has gone towards sidewalks.

Mr. Wagenaar explained that the trail extension project was committed to by a previous Council and other grant funding, which is attached to the project, would need to be returned if the project was not completed. He pointed out that the CDBG program objectives and priorities could be modified for future plan years.

At the request of Mayor Pierce, Mr. Lumbis explained the grant funding sources for the trail project, as well as the amount the City would be required to pay if the project was not completed.

At the call of the chair, a vote was taken on the foregoing resolution and carried with all voting yea, except for Council Member Benjamin P. Shoen voting nay.

Resolution No. 4 - Sponsoring an Application for Brownfield Opportunity Areas (BOA) Funding to Write a Brownfield Opportunity Area Nomination

Introduced by Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero

WHEREAS §970-r of the General Municipal Law authorizes State assistance to eligible parties for Brownfield Opportunity Areas (BOA) Program grants by means of a State Assistance Contract, and

WHEREAS the City of Watertown deems it to be in the public interest and benefit to enter into a contract therewith, and

WHEREAS a successful BOA Nomination and Plan will support grant applications for future projects, and

WHEREAS the BOA Program will fund planning grants to assist cities in developing a BOA Nomination, which is a plan for a neighborhood or area affected by historical disinvestment or the presence of known or suspected brownfields that will culminate in a nomination for State BOA Designation, and

WHEREAS it is within the scope of services in the City's contract with LaBella Associates for LaBella to prepare an application on behalf of the City for a BOA planning grant,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Watertown intends to complete a BOA Plan (BOA Nomination) for an approximate 1,000-acre area characterized with nine known or suspected brownfield sites that are located primarily in the vicinity of the Black River, where a series of rapids powered the mills and factories of prior decades, as well as historically industrial parts of downtown and the northeast corner of the City, an area hereafter to be referred to as the "Black River Rapids Corridor," and

BE IT FUTHER RESOLVED that the City of Watertown will request up to \$300,000 in BOA funds, representing no more than 90 percent of project costs, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City of Watertown commits to providing the required 10 percent local share of any project costs if the BOA application is successful, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City of Watertown agrees to complete the BOA Plan in a timely manner and to seek official Designation of the Brownfield Opportunity Area by the Secretary of State upon completion of the BOA Nomination and Plan, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Manager is the representative authorized to act on behalf of all applicants in all matters related to State assistance under §970-r of the General Municipal Law for the Project. The representative is also authorized to: sign and submit the application; execute the contract; request payment advances and reimbursements; redistribute contract reimbursements as appropriate; submit Project documentation; and otherwise act for all applicants in all matters related to the Project and to State assistance.

Seconded by Council Member Clifford G. Olney III

Prior to the vote on the foregoing resolution, Mr. Wagenaar explained, at the request of Council Member Olney, the need for this resolution and the benefit it would provide in applying for potential grant funding.

At the call of the chair, a vote was taken on the foregoing resolution and carried with all voting yea.

OLD BUSINESS

Resolution - Adopting Rules of Conduct for Public Meetings of the City Council. *(Introduced on June 16, 2025; tabled; appears in its entirety in the 2025 Minutes Book on page 12-13 of the 6/16/2025 minutes).*

Motion was made by Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero to remove the foregoing resolution from the table. Motion was seconded by Council Member Clifford G. Olney III and carried with all voting in favor thereof.

Council Member Olney mentioned that at the last meeting there was discussion regarding allowing signs of a certain size. He said that he feels the proposed rules are overly restrictive and feels that an 8x11 inch sign would be appropriate.

Council Member Shoen agreed, stating that there could be a limitation set for the size of signs.

Mayor Pierce suggested language for an amendment.

Council Member Kimball said he had no objection to adding language restricting the size of a sign.

In response to Council Member Olney's question as to why the rules are needed, Mr. Wagenaar mentioned examples of incidents of disruptions occurring during Council Meetings which led to the recommendation of rules to be brought forward.

There was further discussion on how to amend the proposed rules attached to the resolution and Attorney Smith offered advice.

Motion was made by Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero to add the following language to the end of the fifth paragraph of the foregoing resolution:

, with the following edits: Deleting the third bullet stating "Banners, flyers, or signage are not permitted" and replacing it with "Signs, flyers and banners are permitted but shall not exceed the size of 12 inches by 12 inches and/or obstruct the view of other attendees. Signage with profane, vulgar or threatening language is not permitted.", and

Motion was seconded by Council Member Clifford G. Olney III and carried with all voting in favor thereof.

At the call of the chair, a vote was taken on the foregoing resolution and carried with all voting yea.

The resolution now appears as follows:

Resolution - Adopting Rules of Conduct for Public Meetings of the City Council

WHEREAS the City Council of the City of Watertown recognizes the importance of maintaining order and decorum during public meetings to ensure a safe, respectful, and productive environment for all participants, and

WHEREAS the Council affirms the public's right to participate in City government and express opinions, including criticism of City officers, employees, and policies, while also maintaining standards that discourage disruptive conduct and preserve the integrity of Council proceedings, and

WHEREAS the City Council has reviewed and finalized the Rules of Conduct to be observed during Privilege of the Floor and throughout the duration of all City Council meetings, and

WHEREAS these Rules of Conduct shall apply in conjunction with the existing procedures outlined in the Watertown City Code §A3221-3(B),

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Watertown hereby adopts the Rules of Conduct for Public Meetings as attached to and made part of this resolution, **with the following edits: Deleting the third bullet stating "Banners, flyers, or signage are not permitted" and replacing it with "Signs, flyers and banners are permitted but shall not exceed the size of 12 inches by 12 inches and/or obstruct the view of other attendees. Signage with profane, vulgar or threatening language is not permitted."**, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that these rules shall be enforced during all regular and special meetings of the City Council held in Council Chambers or any other designated meeting location, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Clerk is directed to retain a copy of the Rules of Conduct in the official record and ensure the rules are publicly posted and made available to meeting attendees.

Proposed Local Law of 2025 - A Local Law to Create an Exception to the Residency Requirement Under Section 3 of the New York State Public Officers Law as Applied to the Current Holders of the Offices of City Manager, City Engineer, and Superintendent of Public Works. (Introduced on June 16, 2025; public hearing held this evening; appears in its entirety in the 2025 Minutes Book on page 17-19 of the 6/16/2025 minutes).

Council Member Kimball indicated that he was in favor of the local law as it is written and he discussed his reasons. He also recalled the City Manager interview process, in which Council Member Shoen and himself were invited to participate prior to being sworn into office, as well as the later discussions when Mr. Wagenaar requested to continue to live outside the City. He said that this Council failed to correct the issue at that time.

Council Member Olney thanked City staff who spoke and explained their support for waiving the residency requirement. He expressed his support for waiving the residency requirement for the affected employees as well as for all City positions, and he stated it would open the pool of qualified candidates.

Council Member Shoen said it was nice to hear the positive comments about the employees affected by this and he also feels they are doing a good job. He explained the reasons why he was not in full support of waiving the residency requirement and suggested tabling the local law, stating he would rather vote on each position separately.

Council Member Ruggiero agreed with Council Member Shoen but said the people who spoke at the public hearing showed a true testament to Mr. Wagenaar's leadership. She suggested that Council revisit the Charter Commission's recommendations and consider making one to two changes at a time, noting that the City Charter is very outdated. She added that she is in favor of tabling this to ensure the language is correct.

Referring to Council Member Shoen's suggestion to separate the positions, Mayor Pierce said that this was similar to the comments that she had received. She explained that most people were not as concerned with department heads living outside the City as they were with the City Manager. She added that previous City Managers who lived elsewhere had rented apartments within the City limits.

Further debate and discussion ensued.

Motion was made by Council Member Benjamin P. Shoen to table the foregoing resolution. Motion was seconded by Council Member Clifford G. Olney III and carried with all voting in favor thereof, except for Council Member Robert O. Kimball voting nay.

NEW BUSINESS

Recent Events and Ceremonies

Council Member Kimball indicated that he attended the Police Academy Graduation, Downtown Block Party, and the July 4th Concert and Fireworks in the Park.

During the other members of Council's New Business, the attendance and success of these events and ceremonies were mentioned as well, and staff were thanked for their contributions and work.

Neighborhood Watch

Council Member Olney thanked Mr. Hickey for the update and expressed his concern with a recently released sex offender being homeless in the area.

Homelessness

Council Member Olney mentioned that he has seen more homeless individuals, and he encourages them to seek assistance from Northern Regional Center for Independent Living (NRCIL).

Youth Sports

Council Member Ruggiero thanked Mr. Tehonica for speaking, stating he is very passionate about providing sports for children.

101st City Golf Tournament

Council Member Ruggiero mentioned that this tournament is now taking place.

Council Member Shoen indicated that the championship round is this week.

Marijuana and E-cigarettes

Council Member Shoen thanked Ms. Seefried-Brown for bringing this issue to Council's attention and discussed the concern with smoke shops and legalization of marijuana.

City Tax Bill

Council Member Shoen mentioned the due date was cut off the bottom of some tax bills that were recently mailed due to the paper being printed upside down. He reminded the public that they are due on August 5th.

County Purchase of the Prior Arsenal Street Fire Station

Council Member Shoen expressed his concern with the County purchasing this property, which will make it tax-exempt and remove it from the tax roll. He discussed the Exemption Impact Report contained within the Adopted Budget book.

Trash of High and Factory Street

Mayor Pierce reported a complaint she received about trash on property on High and Factory Streets.

Motion was made by Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero to move into Executive Session to discuss the following:

- Proposed acquisition, sale or lease of real property when publicity would affect the value thereof
- Proposed, pending or current litigation
- Employment history of a particular corporation
- Collective bargaining

Motion was seconded by Council Member Clifford G. Olney III and carried with all voting in favor thereof.

Council moved into Executive Session at 9:50 p.m.

Council reconvened at 10:18 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

At the call of the chair, meeting was duly adjourned at 10:18 p.m. by motion of Council Member Benjamin P. Shoen, seconded by Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero and carried with all voting in favor thereof.

Ann M. Saunders
City Clerk