Options Report &
Preliminary Committee Recommendations

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A Call to Action: We Can Do Better

Since January 2014, the Commission on Local Government Modernization has been working to shape a vision for more effective and efficient governance across the Syracuse-Onondaga community.

This summary report on the issues and opportunities we have identified is the next step in developing that vision.

This is not our final set of recommendations, but rather a foundation for community dialogue. In presenting the options and preliminary recommendations crafted by the Commission's committees, we hope to catalyze an inclusive regional conversation on what we – as the residents who call the Syracuse-Onondaga community home – want our local government structures to look like over the next generation.

The report is the product of thousands of collective hours invested by members of the Commission, residents and stakeholders, all made for one reason: A shared desire to improve our community.

As we continue our work, we must recognize that the vision we are creating is about the present, but more specifically about the future. A future in which the Syracuse-Onondaga community is stronger, more competitive and an even better place to live, work and play.

Though our work continues, we know this: Following 18 months of review, discussion, analysis and conferral with leaders in other regions across the country, the Commission has concluded, simply, that we – the Syracuse-Onondaga community – can do better.

Better than 294th in economic performance.[1] Better than highest in extreme poverty concentration.[2] Better than 19 of 35 municipalities losing population in the last Census.[3] Better than an average wage that is 20% lower than the nation's.[4] Better than a 9% decline in jobs since 1990.[5]

Our region's truth – that too many economic opportunities have gone elsewhere, too many residents have left, and too few of our children and grandchildren are in a position to remain here – is uncomfortable, but it doesn't make it any less truthful.

We can do better.

And we can start by creating a local government structure in the Syracuse-Onondaga community worthy of our people. A globally-competitive future depends upon the modernization of each and every one of our governmental

[1] http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2015/01/22-global-metro-monitor
[2] http://apps.tcf.org/architecture-of-segregation
[3] http://www.ongov.net/about/populationTrends.html
[4] http://centerstateopportunity.com/files/9213/8383/3393/CenterState_AEO_Summary.pdf
[5] http://www.bls.gov/lau/

structures. While every level of government – our County, City, Towns and Villages – has found ways to innovate and improve both service delivery and cost-efficiency over the years, it is also true that every level of government has more work to do to transcend what are in some instances centuries-old traditions, practices and ways of doing business.

We know these changes cannot happen overnight. Nor will they be easily achieved. The experiences of peer communities nationwide that have paved the path of modernization tell us as much. Changes of this magnitude require effort, difficult decisions, and a willingness to challenge a "that's the way we've always done things" mentality.

But those experiences also tell us that while change will be difficult, it is, frankly, essential to our region's economic future.

So, too is ensuring that the changes we make are inclusive and respect the voices of our diverse communities. This is especially important for traditionally underrepresented constituencies. Ensuring a place for all at the new regional table is key to our overall success. The experiences of Nashville, Jacksonville and Indianapolis prove these changes can, in fact, enhance the voice and leadership position of traditionally underrepresented communities. We can – and must – do it, too.

There are many reasons the Syracuse-Onondaga community has struggled to compete for the past two generations, and it would be wrong to blame a local government system that has persevered

despite incredibly challenging financial circumstances.

It would be equally wrong to conclude these challenges are exclusive to our central city. We feel them in many corners of our community. And a region performing well in pockets is not a region performing well overall.

Budget deficits aren't exclusive to the City: 15 of our 19 towns face projected deficits based on current spending / revenue trends.

Population loss isn't exclusive to the City: 7 of our 19 towns, and 11 of our 15 villages actually lost population between 2000 and 2010.

Job losses aren't exclusive to the City: The employment base in our towns is down 3.2% in the past 25 years.

Systemic challenges call for systemic solutions, and modernizing how we "do" local government will take systemic change on the part of all of us and all our governments: County, City, Towns and Villages.

We also need the commitment of state government to being a willing partner in our modernization. Not only in relieving our local governments of costly mandates, but actively empowering our efforts to help ourselves and supporting efforts to carve out a more positive direction for our community.

Change is hard, but change we must. The preliminary recommendations in this report require change from each and every unit of local government. Some changes are bold and dramatic and likely to generate significant debate. Others are more subtle, but

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equally necessary. Some changes can and should be made quickly. Others may take years to fully implement.

But two things are constant in each and every case. First, these changes require our well-intentioned public servants to take the risk associated with bold leadership. Second, they require all of us to envision a better and more prosperous future that will only be achieved through a shared commitment to continuous improvement.

Our history tells us we can come together as a community to produce positive change. We have success stories in our past, having already regionally reorganized and modernized services such as 911 communications, public health, solid waste disposal and libraries. That cooperative spirit fuels this effort.

These changes alone are hardly a "silver bullet," but they can be part of a stronger, more vibrant and more competitive foundation for our region and its future. Communities that have gone before us in modernizing their structures have sent important signals about their willingness to improve, compete and grow. This effort offers a greater potential for economic growth.

And for the sake of our children and grandchildren, and those that will call the Syracuse-Onondaga community "home" in the generations to come, they are opportunities we simply cannot ignore.

This report, which sets out the Commission's preliminary committee recommendations, is intended to launch a robust public engagement process. That conversation as important as any the Syracuse-Onondaga community has had.

Now it's your turn. We need to hear from you. What do you like? What don't you like? It matters not whether you support or oppose our findings and preliminary recommendations. What matters is that you engage and help us understand why.

The Commission is committed to producing a final recommended plan in early 2016. Your feedback over the coming months is essential to building on our progress to date.

Working together, we will make this vision for the Syracuse-Onondaga community even better and more reflective of what we all desire for our region.

Our future deserves nothing less.

Process Background

Consensus – the Commission on Local Government Modernization – was launched in 2014 as a partnership of SYRACUSE 20/20, CenterState CEO, the County of Onondaga, the City of Syracuse, FOCUS Greater Syracuse, the League of Women Voters of the Syracuse Metropolitan Area, the Onondaga Citizens League and the Homebuilders & Remodelers Association of CNY, with the expressed goal of shaping a vision for more effective and efficient governance across Onondaga County.

With representatives from Onondaga County, the City of Syracuse, the Onondaga Town Supervisors Association, the Onondaga Village Mayors Association, and the business, nonprofit, higher education and K-12 education communities, the Commission designed a process where residents and stakeholders across the community are taking a leadership role in defining how it wants to be organized and governed locally, with high quality standards at an affordable price.

Complete information on the Commission, its members, reports and public engagement can be found online at www.consensuscny.com.

The Commission's process has been built around two key phases. The first, a "Baseline Phase," was completed in early 2015 with a review of existing conditions across all local governments countywide. The baseline review culminated with the release of a comprehensive report to the community, entitled *Who Does What & What it Costs*, detailing the local government universe in Onondaga County.

Following release of the baseline report and a series of public engagement forums throughout the County, the Commission's process pivoted to a second phase: An "Options Review," during which it has reviewed and critically assessed local governance and municipal services in the County, examined "best practices" offered by peer communities across the country, and explored opportunities to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of Onondaga County's local government universe.

To facilitate its options review and enable further data collection and "deeper dive" analysis, the Commission established committees:

- **Infrastructure,** focusing on street and highway maintenance, water, wastewater, solid waste collection and parks;

- **Public Safety,** focusing on fire protection, emergency medical services, police and corrections;

- **Municipal Operations,** focusing on tax assessment, financial administration, courts, code enforcement, clerk, social services, public health and libraries;

- **Economic Development,** focusing on fiscal and economic relationships among the County's governments, as well as the land use and policy impacts of local government actions; and

- **Governance,** focusing on the overarching structures of local and regional governance and the extent to which the County's key policy issues are adequately aligned with its policy making capacity.

Each committee was chaired by a voting member of the Commission. Committees also sought out technical and service delivery experts to further inform their reviews. In some cases, committees had outside experts serve as regular members of the committee; in others, outside experts served as invited presenters, facilitating more detailed discussions of specific municipal services and the challenges and opportunities relating thereto.

A sixth committee, **Public Engagement,** was established at the beginning of the process to ensure a consistent and robust community conversation takes place regarding the Commission's work, both during the process and following release of the final recommendations.

This Report and What Comes Next

This is not the Commission's final report. It is intended as a new tool for engaging the public in this vitally important conversation about the future of our community. As a launching pad for that conversation, it offers readers the following:

- **Overviews** of information the Commission has reviewed since the release of the baseline report, with its committees having completed more detailed examinations of nearly every local government service provided in the Syracuse-Onondaga community;

- **Highlights** of key issues identified by each committee regarding the current service delivery and governing frameworks serving the Syracuse-Onondaga Community;

- **Options** the committees have reviewed to improve service delivery and governing frameworks within the Syracuse-Onondaga community; and

- **Preliminary recommendations** reached by committees on opportunities to modernize and improve the effectiveness, responsiveness and efficiency of service delivery and governing frameworks within the Syracuse-Onondaga community, along with the rationale for those preliminary recommendations.

Readers should note a critically important point about these Preliminary recommendations. They are, in a very real way, preliminary. They represent the work

completed (or in-process) at the committee level to identify, flesh out and bring forward ideas, concepts and strategies to build a stronger local government system in the Syracuse-Onondaga community.

No recommendations have been officially voted on by the full Commission. No final decisions have been made. No final report has been drafted.

The Commission has done this intentionally in order to benefit from the wisdom of residents and stakeholders in the Syracuse-Onondaga community, all 468,000 of us. Your voice is so critically important over the coming months. Please take the opportunity to engage – be it through a public forum, letter to the editor, feedback to the Commission via our website (www.consensuscny.com), or other medium.

Our goal, following what we hope will be an engaging and powerful community conversation on these issues, is to incorporate your feedback and issue the Commission's final recommendations early in 2016.

Infrastructure

The Infrastructure Committee focused on four critical service areas:

- Street and Highway Maintenance;
- Water;
- Wastewater; and
- Solid Waste Collection.

STREET AND HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Street and highway maintenance is among the most visible services any local government provides, especially so in a community that receives average annual snowfall of 12 feet. From plowing and salting roads seasonally, to repairing drivable infrastructure year-round to ensure access and safety, high-quality public works services are essential to the quality of life, sustainability and growth of the Syracuse-Onondaga community.

**What we have today**

- There are 36 separate service providers in the Syracuse-Onondaga community, including the County, City, 19 towns and 15 villages.

- There is vast disparity in the scale of these providers. Land area responsibilities range from ½ mi^2 to 780 mi^2; populations served range from fewer than 400 to more than 468,000; and centerline miles covered range from 1 mile to 794 miles.

- Collectively, street and highway maintenance services had costs totaling $141 million in 2013, making them the third-highest cost function in the community.

Challenges and opportunities

1. The 36 separate service providers have independent workforces, fleets, staff experts and planning processes, which results in some duplication of staff and capital equipment.

2. Service "deadheading" occurs at municipal borders (e.g. snow plow blades being lifted up at the municipal line), with legal boundaries dictating service areas / routes more than considerations of efficiency and responsiveness.

3. Although a material amount of cooperation occurs between public agencies, much of it is informal meaning that it can be subject to interpersonal dynamics rather than what makes the most sense in terms of service delivery.

4. Public works agencies that serve communities with smaller tax bases can find it more difficult – if not cost prohibitive – to fund larger infrastructure investments.

5. There is a statistical correlation between the scale of public works agencies in the Syracuse-Onondaga community and their unit costs, with those serving more square miles and / or larger populations tending to have lower unit costs.

6. Collectively, local governments in the Syracuse-Onondaga community operate 39 public works facilities.

Map of Street and Highway Maintenance Service Providers in Syracuse-Onondaga
(each color represents a separate agency)
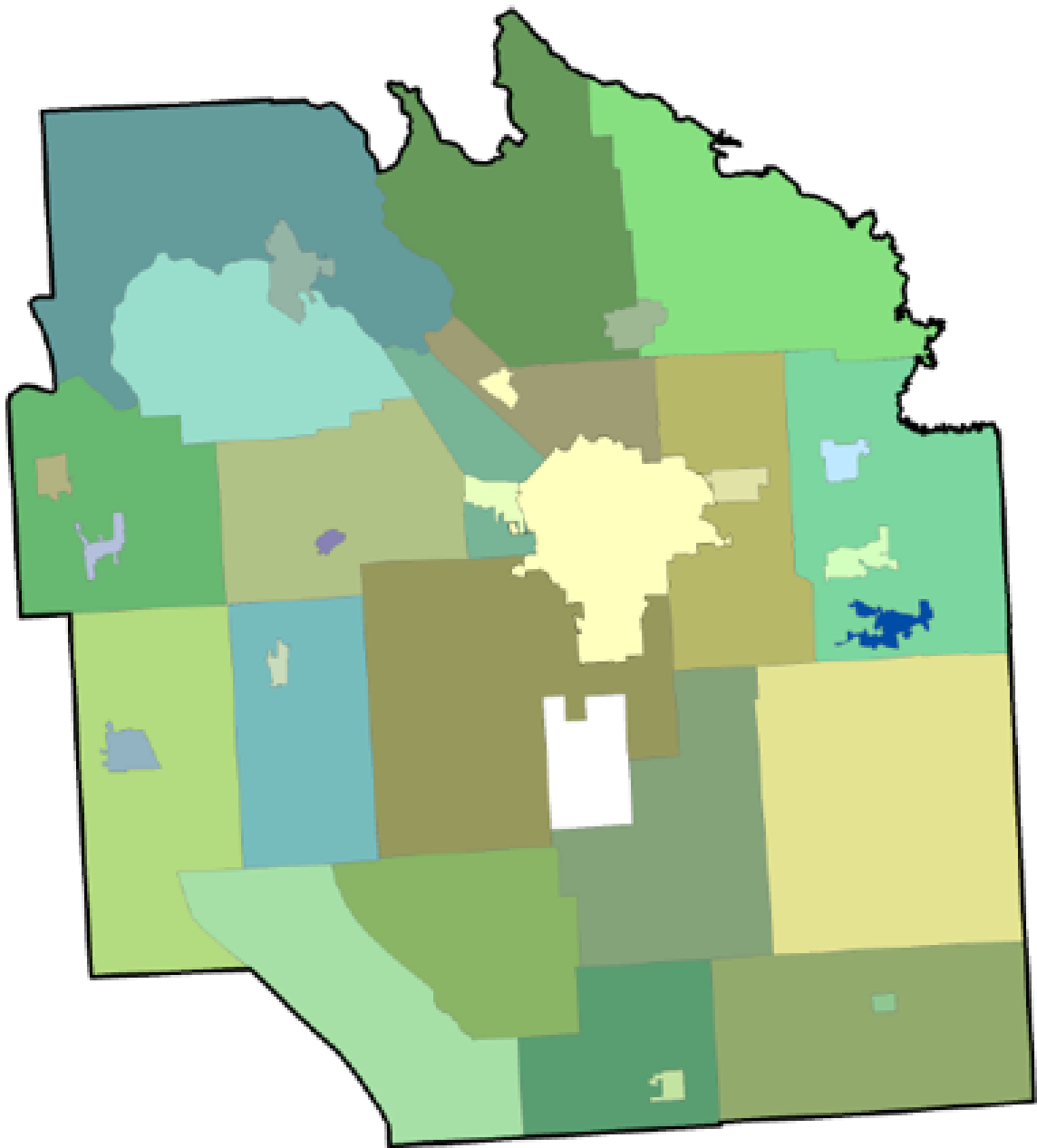
Map of Street and Highway Maintenance Facilities in Syracuse-Onondaga

County   City   Town   Village

Public Works Departments in Onondaga County by Centerline Miles
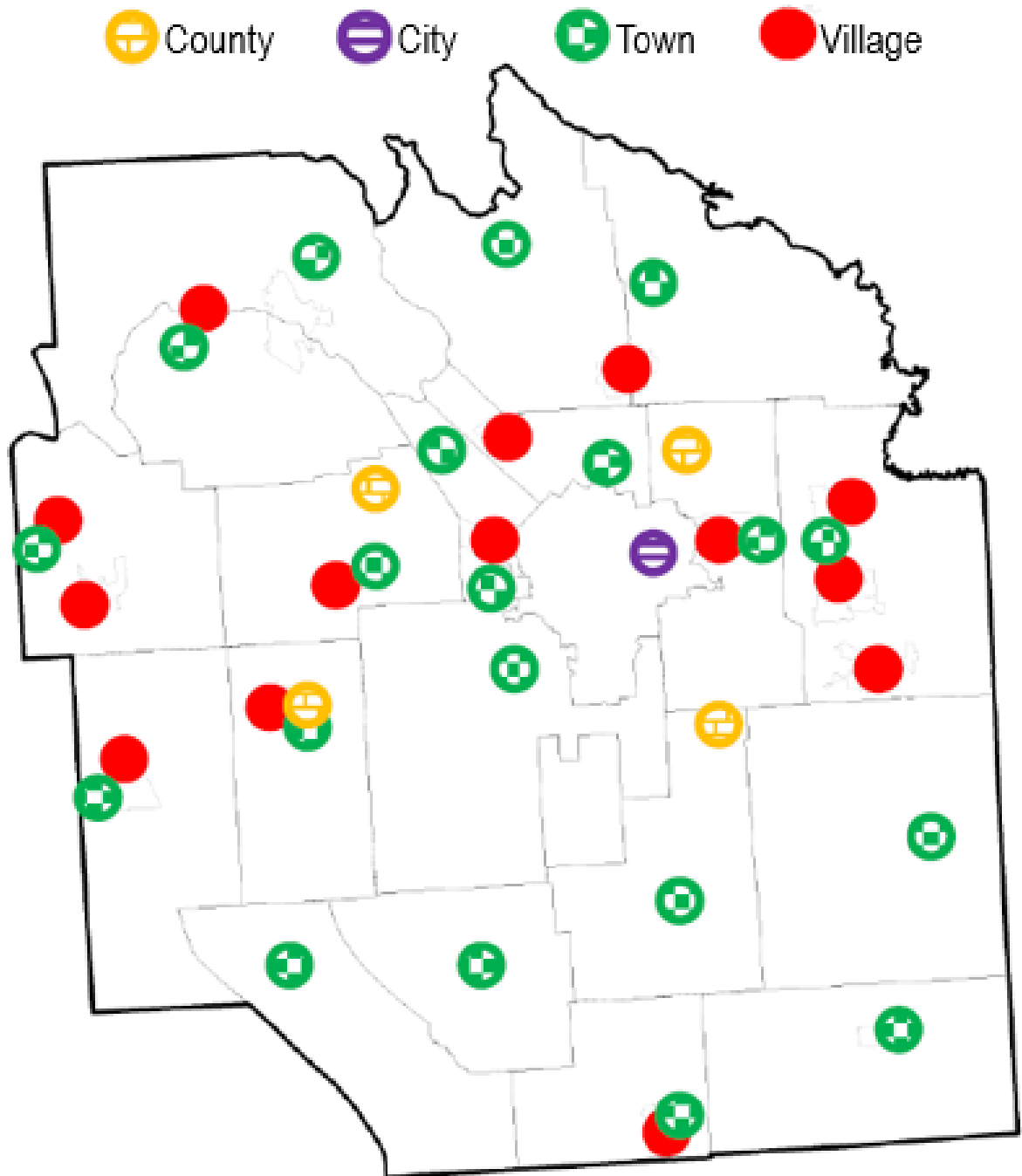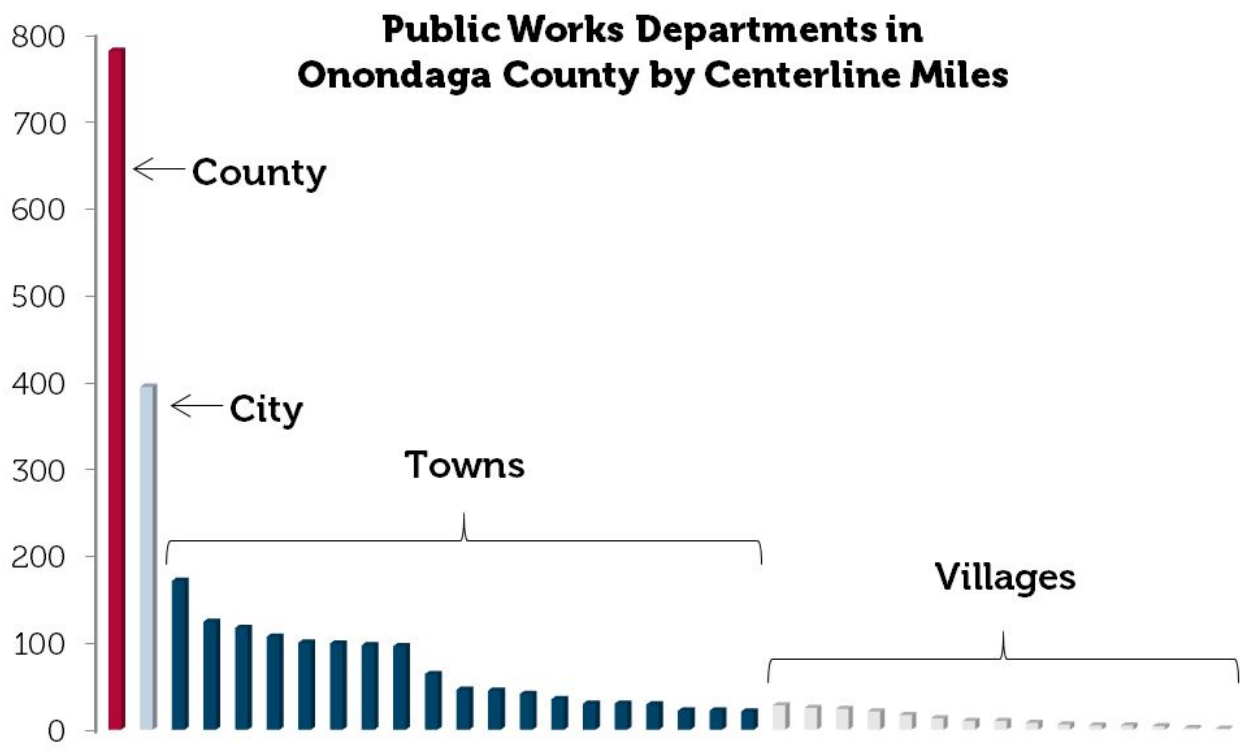
DPW Costs Per Mi² vs. Total Mi²
(Municipalities Only; Excludes Onondaga County DOT)

Ranked by square miles served, the 18 largest DPWs in Onondaga County have a mean per square mile cost of $117,000; the 18 smallest have a mean cost of $610,000
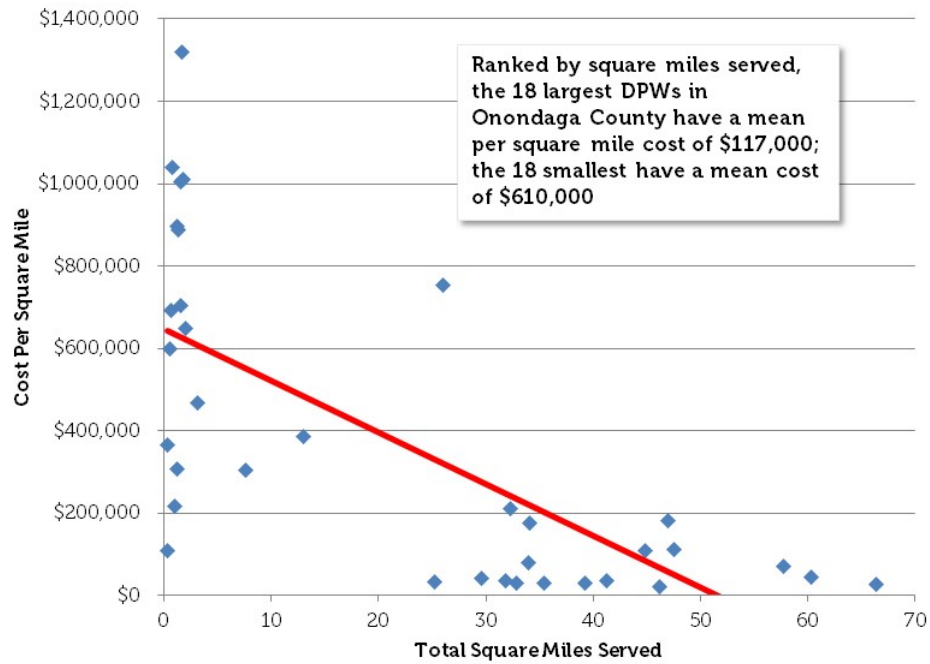
DPW Costs Per Cap vs. Total Population
(Municipalities Only; Excludes Onondaga County DOT)

Ranked by population served, the 18 largest DPWs in Onondaga County have a mean per capita cost of $224; the 18 smallest have a mean cost of $370
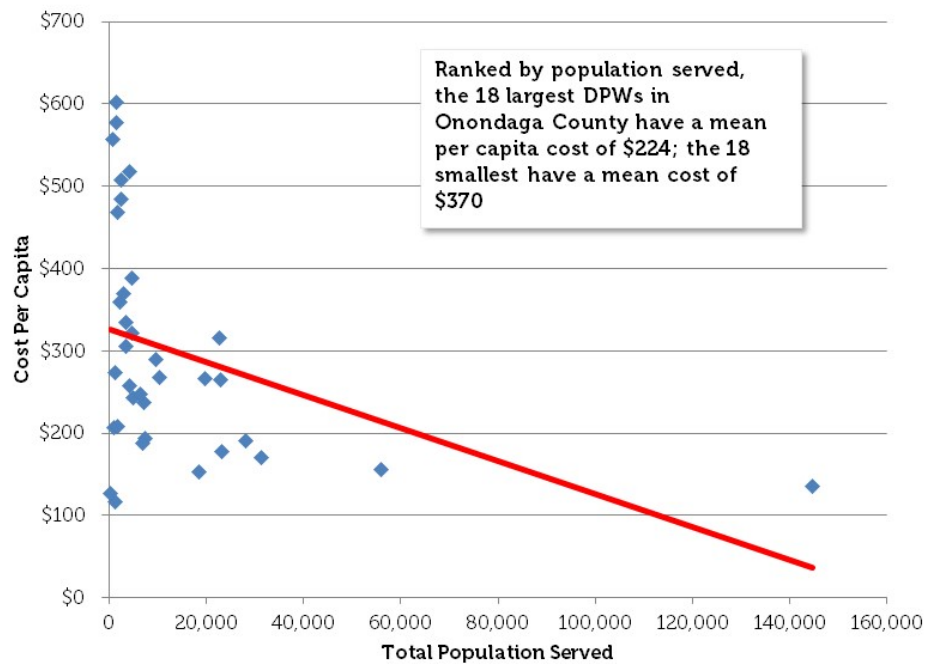
Water Infrastructure

Water is a major economic resource for the Syracuse-Onondaga community. Its importance to our community's vitality is heightened by water access challenges that are increasingly impacting other parts of the country. Ensuring access to clean, cost-effective water is critically important to our future economy and quality of life.

What we have today

- There are three main entities (two major retail providers) with primary responsibility for providing water services in the Syracuse-Onondaga community – The Metropolitan Water Board (and the Onondaga County Water District), the Onondaga County Water Authority and the City of Syracuse Water Department. Collectively, they supply approximately 90% of residents in Onondaga County. The Metropolitan Water Board supplies 2/3 of the water volume and has 32 major industrial users.

- In addition to these primary providers, residents in some parts of the County get their water from local municipal wells (in Baldwinsville and Tully) or individual wells.

Challenges and opportunities

- The current water infrastructure network in the Syracuse-Onondaga community faces significant and growing needs, and deferred maintenance has compromised the system's integrity.

- Federal funding assistance has been waning.

- The fragmentation of the ratepayer base among suppliers and districts can make major investments – even when necessary – cost prohibitive and exacerbate the deferred maintenance problem.

- There is some functional duplication across the two major retail providers in terms of administration, meter reading, billing and treatment plant operations.

WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE

The proper functioning and maintenance of our network of pipes, treatment plants and outfalls are critically important not only to the Syracuse-Onondaga community's economic viability, but our environment and quality of life.

What we have today

- Wastewater treatment for most municipalities in the Syracuse-Onondaga community is provided by the County Department of Water Environment Protection, which operates 6 treatment plants and more than 150 pumping stations in the Consolidated Sanitary District. County sewer service is confined to this district and includes all or portions of 21 municipalities. Several villages own and maintain their own sewage treatment plants.

- Wastewater costs in the Syracuse-Onondaga community totaled $147 million in 2013, making it the second-highest cost of all government functions. County government is responsible for approximately 88% of these expenditures, with the remainder comprised of the City (2%), towns (7%) and villages (3%).

- Reflecting national trends, capital investment needs for wastewater and storm water infrastructure in our community are growing.

Challenges and opportunities

- We are not currently structured to meet the Environmental Protection Agency's "Ten Attributes for an Effective Wastewater Utility" (see following page), which includes elements such as infrastructure stability, operational optimization and financial viability. This creates issues not only for the sustainability of our infrastructure – both in capital and financial terms – but regulatory compliance risks.

- There is a growing number of pump stations in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. In the past ten years the number of stations has increased 36%, from 116 to 158 while population remained flat.

- Eight towns in the Syracuse-Onondaga community are not in the County's Consolidated Sanitary District.

- There is a broad scale in size of sanitary districts, with the smallest covering 19 homes and a pump station.

- Every sewer district bills for services independently, which results in a diversity of approaches.

- External pressure is increasing to upgrade collection and treatment infrastructure, and towns and villages are being pushed to meet more stringent standards.

📣 Aging collection infrastructure in the County has more extraneous groundwater infiltration and inflow, increasing the cost of treatment and general operating costs.

Ten Attributes of Effectively Managed Water Sector Utilities

Source: "A Primer for Water and Wastewater Utilities," U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Product Quality
Produces potable water, treated effluent, and process residuals in full compliance with regulatory and reliability requirements and consistent with customer, public health, and ecological needs.

Customer Satisfaction
Provides reliable, responsive, and affordable services in line with explicit, customer-accepted service levels. Receives timely customer feedback to maintain responsiveness to customer needs and emergencies.

Employee and Leadership Development
Recruits and retains a workforce that is competent, motivated, adaptive, and safe-working. Establishes a participatory, collaborative organization dedicated to continual learning and improvement. Ensures employee institutional knowledge is retained and improved upon over time. Provides a focus on and emphasizes opportunities for professional and leadership development and strives to create an integrated and well-coordinated senior leadership team.

Operational Optimization
Ensures ongoing, timely, cost-effective, reliable, and sustainable performance

improvements in all facets of its operations. Minimizes resource use, loss, and impacts from day-to-day operations. Maintains awareness of information and operational technology developments to anticipate and support timely adoption of improvements.

Financial Viability

Understands the full life-cycle cost of the utility and establishes and maintains an effective balance between long-term debt, asset values, operations and maintenance expenditures, and operating revenues. Establishes predictable rates—consistent with community expectations and acceptability—adequate to recover costs, provide for reserves, maintain support from bond rating agencies, and plan and invest for future needs.

Infrastructure Stability

Understands the condition of and costs associated with critical infrastructure assets. Maintains and enhances the condition of all assets over the long-term at the lowest possible life-cycle cost and acceptable risk consistent with customer, community, and regulator-supported service levels, and consistent with anticipated growth and system reliability goals. Assures asset repair, rehabilitation, and replacement efforts are coordinated within the community to minimize disruptions and other negative consequences.

Operational Resiliency

Ensures utility leadership and staff work together to anticipate and avoid problems. Proactively identifies, assesses, establishes tolerance levels for, and effectively manages a full range of business risks (including legal,

regulatory, financial, environmental, safety, security, and natural disaster-related) in a proactive way consistent with industry trends and system reliability goals.

Community Sustainability

Is explicitly cognizant of and attentive to the impacts its decisions have on current and long-term future community and watershed health and welfare. Manages operations, infrastructure, and investments to protect, restore, and enhance the natural environment; efficiently uses water and energy resources; promotes economic vitality; and engenders overall community improvement. Explicitly considers a variety of pollution prevention, watershed, and source water protection approaches as part of an overall strategy to maintain and enhance ecological and community sustainability.

Water Resource Adequacy

Ensures water availability consistent with current and future customer needs through long-term resource supply and demand analysis, conservation, and public education. Explicitly considers its role in water availability and manages operations to provide for long-term aquifer and surface water sustainability and replenishment.

Stakeholder Understanding and Support

Engenders understanding and support from oversight bodies, community and watershed interests, and regulatory bodies for service levels, rate structures, operating budgets, capital improvement programs, and risk management decisions. Actively involves stakeholders in the decisions that will affect them.

SOLID WASTE COLLECTION

Sanitation services are critically important to the quality of life and environment in the Syracuse-Onondaga community.
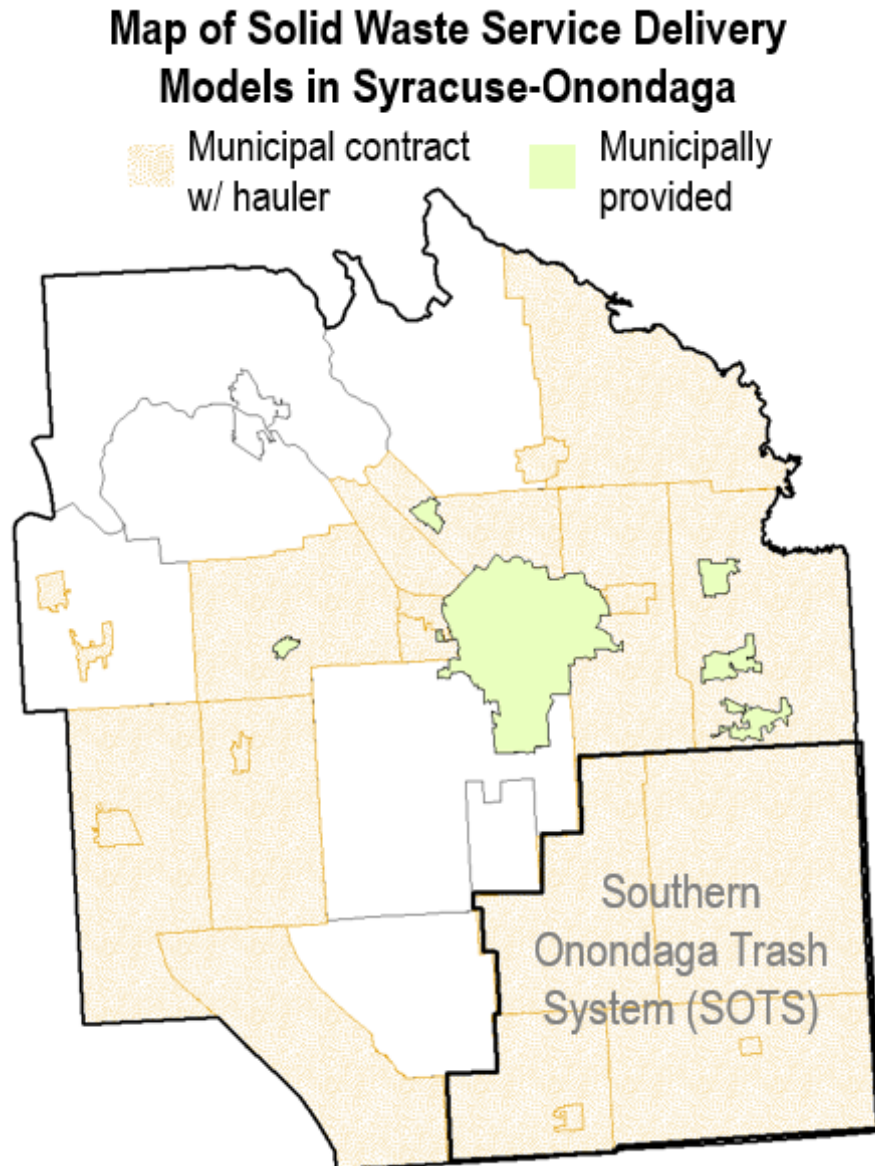
What we have today

- Sanitation services are handled in a variety of ways throughout the Syracuse-Onondaga community. Three basic approaches are used. Some municipalities provide the service directly using their own employees and equipment; others "broker" the service on behalf of their residents by contracting to a private service provider and levying costs on homeowners through property taxes or district-based fees. Further, some municipalities have no involvement in the function at all, in which case property owners can directly contract with private haulers or self-transport their waste to a landfill.

- Six municipalities – including the City and five villages – deliver the service themselves.

- Twenty municipalities – including 13 towns and 7 villages – contract with an outside vendor to provide the service to residents.

- The remaining local governments have no involvement in sanitation services either as a provider or broker.

- Of the local governments in the Syracuse-Onondaga community that directly spend on sanitation and recycling, $22.2 million was spent in 2013. This figure does not include the cost of contracts between individual property owners and private haulers in those communities where the local government is not involved in the service. The true overall cost of the service is therefore higher than this figure.

Challenges and opportunities

- OCCRA – the Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency – is a public benefit corporation created in 1981 under state law and made responsible for implementing the County Solid Waste Management Program, as well as the construction, operation and availability of solid waste management and recycling facilities for municipalities in the County. The Agency is a model regional cooperation framework.

- There is little intermunicipal coordination regarding solid waste services in the Syracuse-Onondaga community aside from the Southern Onondaga Trash System (SOTS), which is a multi-town consortium in the southeast quadrant of the County that jointly contracts for service.

- The diversity of approaches used across the County, and the absence of coordination outside of OCCRA and SOTS, compromises economies of scale that

could otherwise yield lower costs. A previous benchmarking report produced by the Maxwell School at Syracuse University found that, of the varied approaches to handling residential trash services in the Syracuse-Onondaga community, municipally-brokered / contracted was the least costly. By contrast, in those communities where the municipality had no involvement in the service, residents individually contracted for trash collection at roughly double the cost of municipally-brokered communities.[6]

Map of Solid Waste Service Delivery Models in Syracuse-Onondaga

Municipal contract w/ hauler   Municipally provided

Southern Onondaga Trash System (SOTS)

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[6] "Residential Trash Collection in Onondaga County: A Study Comparing Cost and Type of Service," June 1999, Syracuse University, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES

In reviewing street and highway maintenance, water, wastewater and solid waste collection, the Infrastructure Committee explored a range of service delivery options. Although certain options are more applicable in the context of some infrastructure-related functions than in others, the following summary generally outlines the range of alternatives.

Models of local government public works and street / highway maintenance services range from local models in which multiple governments bear responsibility for providing services in individual communities (as is the case in the Syracuse-Onondaga community today), to countywide models in which a single provider is responsible for a broader geographic area.

In the middle of the range are intermunicipal / hybrid models based on intermunicipal shared services, where administrative functions, operations and / or capital equipment are shared between or among otherwise independent government units.

Model 1: Local Approaches

At one end of the continuum is the delivery of public works services using a local model of administration, operations and capital. Under this framework, individual local governments deliver the service independently within their boundaries and retain autonomy over the type, level and cost of services provided. As a result, some service differentiation exists across local governments.

For example, some governments provide trash collection as a municipal service, some contract it out to a private vendor, and others play no role at all. Similarly, some public works departments have the capacity, equipment and expertise to perform major capital repairs in-house; others contract the function out completely.

The local model characterizes most public works services in the Syracuse-Onondaga community today. In total, the county is home to 36 separate public works agencies – one each in the County, City, 19 towns and 15 villages. Though the agencies do collaborate – typically on an informal, as needed basis – they handle administration, operations and capital equipment independent of one another. Examples of collaboration include inter-agency support for large scale jobs, shared facilities, shared fueling depots and bulk bid purchasing of common supplies.

Perceived Advantages

- Department administration is closer to community it serves
- Constituent connection with public works agency
- Local structure creates greater direct tie to communities served
- Greater sensitivity to (and prioritization of) local community service needs
- Quicker response time to local needs
- Local decision-making autonomy over type and level of services provided

- Each government can match its own equipment to its own desires, needs
- Each government has ready access to its own equipment for local use

Perceived Disadvantages

- Administrative duplication across neighboring municipalities
- Administrative cost concentrated on smaller tax base and geographic area
- Services not prioritized based on regional needs
- Operational cost concentrated on smaller tax base and geographic area
- Facilities often in close proximity to one another
- Service delivery can "dead head" at municipal borders, creating inefficiencies
- Equipment redundancy in neighboring jurisdictions and countywide
- Equipment redundancy creates maintenance redundancy
- Absence of pooled purchasing compromises economies of scale
- Municipal-level equipment tracking is often less sophisticated and makes it difficult to determine "life costs" of maintained equipment
- Capital cost concentrated on smaller tax base and geographic area

Model 2: Hybrid / Intermunicipal Shared Services

Next are hybrid models that leverage inter-municipal shared services in administration, operations or capital equipment to collaboratively deliver public works services across otherwise independent governments. This may happen broadly and cover all services (e.g. a full operational or administrative merger of public works agencies), or more narrowly focused on a specific type of service (e.g. county contracting with local governments to handle ice and snow removal on county roads), such as occurs in the Syracuse-Onondaga community on certain street maintenance functions.

An examination of select hybrid models within New York illustrates the diversity of inter-municipal approaches:

- **Onondaga County** contracts with several towns and villages to provide snow and ice removal on county-owned roads during the winter.

- **Monroe and Jefferson Counties** provide technical assistance to local governments throughout the county, while local governments maintain all local- and county-owned roads within their boundaries.

- A large number of public works agencies throughout the state, including in the **Town of Philadelphia** and **Town of Addison**, operate fuel depots that are jointly used by public works agencies of the counties, towns and villages, as well as the local school districts.

- **Chemung County** has provided public works administrative and staff supervision under contract to the Town of Big Flats for the past year. More recently, the county announced in January 2015 that it had reached agreement with the City of Elmira to consolidate the two governments' public works agencies. Under that plan, city

public works employees will become county employees, yielding a geographically larger and more streamlined public works agency. Efficiency savings to the city from merging administrative functions are estimated at $1.8 million.

Chemung County's experience offers an additional model that, had it been fully implemented, would have represented a first of its kind in New York. In 2010, the county released a study of highway services that recommended a regional-hybrid model of administration and operations. It consisted of three main components.

- First, a consolidated "urban highway services area" (UHSA) would have been created among the county, the City of Elmira and the city's dense inner-ring neighbors, including the towns of Horseheads and Elmira, and the villages of Elmira Heights and Horseheads;

- Second, a mechanism for providing certain common and specialized highway services on a countywide basis instead of on a municipal basis, capitalizing on the benefits of larger scale service delivery; and

- Third, transferring routine seasonal maintenance and repair duties on county-owned infrastructure to municipal public works agencies in an effort to better coordinate local road maintenance.

Though the Big Flats and City of Elmira administrative consolidations with the county have moved forward, the broader tenets of the plan have not.

Perceived Advantages

- Collaboration where efficiency opportunities can be leveraged
- Individual local governments retain some autonomy over services, levels
- Mitigate administrative, operational duplication where it exists
- Mitigate some service "deadheading" at municipal boundaries
- Mitigate some service duplication in neighboring jurisdictions
- Standardize services and equipment across communities
- More coordinated and broader capital equipment replacement strategy across communities can yield economies of scale
- Enlarged / joint tax base over which to spread capital expenditures, some of which are significant (e.g. dump trucks, plows, trash collection trucks)

Perceived Disadvantages

- Reduced accountability as administrators are further from constituents
- Local governments relinquish some authority / control over services, levels
- Loss of service differentiation among communities
- Service delivery can still "dead head" at municipal borders, creating inefficiencies
- Shared or jointly-owned equipment can be complicated to schedule and maintain equitably

Model 3: Countywide

At the other end of the continuum are services delivered through a countywide model by a single government / service provider. Under this model, all public works services are consolidated into a countywide organization, with local presence established through "satellite" facilities strategically located throughout the region. A unified, streamlined administration oversees the entire operation and deploys personnel and capital resources in response to both regional and local service needs.

Perceived Advantages

- Countywide coordination of services, personnel, equipment and facility deployment
- Standardized policies and procedures to ensure consistent service levels, job training and safety
- Mitigate administrative duplication
- Deeper organizational capacity for jobs requiring concentrated expertise or manpower
- Mitigate operational duplication
- Eliminate service "deadheading" at municipal boundaries
- Enlarged tax base over which to spread expenditures
- Standardize services and equipment across county
- Larger pool of personnel allows for specialization and more technical projects to be done in-house
- More efficient facility distribution throughout county
- More coordinated and broader capital equipment replacement strategy across region can yield economies of scale through single procurement agency
- Reduced duplication of specialized equipment
- Enlarged tax base over which to spread capital expenditures, some of which are significant (e.g. dumps, plows, trash collection trucks)

Perceived Disadvantages

- Reduced accountability as administrators are further from constituents
- Loss of service differentiation among communities
- Loss of local decision-making authority over services, levels
- Less responsiveness to local / neighborhood-level concerns
- Local governments relinquish control over services, levels
- Loss of service differentiation among communities
- Local governments relinquish control over equipment, supplies
- Asset distribution may be less responsive to community / neighborhood needs

PRELIMINARY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Infrastructure Committee has developed the following preliminary recommendations regarding street and highway maintenance, water, wastewater and solid waste services. These have not yet been formally accepted by the full Commission.

Street and Highway Maintenance

1. Create a coordinated "Core Highway Services Area" (CHSA) that integrates the City of Syracuse and more densely developed suburban communities to its North, East and West, in order to leverage highly consistent service delivery menus, equipment needs and the public works service similarities that result from density.

    a. Standardize equipment

    b. Share services

    c. Coordinate capital planning for equipment and infrastructure

    d. Revise operational plans to address municipal border areas where services often "dead head"

    e. Standardize all contracts

2. Deliver common specialized / technical functions on a shared countywide basis instead of within each agency, via intermunicipal agreement.

    a. Engineering

    b. Purchasing

    c. Pavement marking and striping

    d. Bridge and culvert maintenance

    e. Sign fabrication and maintenance

    f. Salt storage and equipment barns

    g. Insurance, HR, development and training

3. Appoint a Highway Advisory Services Committee to provide oversight countywide.

4. Transfer (or maintain, where applicable) routine seasonal maintenance on County-owned infrastructure outside the CHSA to municipal street and highway departments.

    a. Build on precedent of County-municipal snow removal agreements that are already in place

5. Establish a "model intermunicipal agreement" to facilitate additional collaborations and mitigate planning / implementation barriers.

6. Move to appointed street / highway administrators instead of elected officials.

Water Infrastructure

1. OCWA has been incrementally taking over the assets and operations of smaller water districts; this process should continue and be expedited.

2. Merge OCWA and the City Water Department to leverage internal efficiencies in administration and operations, and to broaden the ratepayer base.

3. Digitize the entire countywide system to provide a basis for planning in a more comprehensive way.

4. Create a countywide comprehensive plan for water infrastructure.

Wastewater Infrastructure

1. Prepare an Asset Management System for treatment and collection systems countywide to serve as the basis for integrating and evaluating systems countywide.

2. Access Department of State planning grant to conduct a system audit and develop an asset management system / plan.

3. Develop a plan to retire / assume debt carried by districts not already part of the Consolidated Sanitary District.

4. Shift engineering, system planning / design / construction and map maintenance to the County Department of Water Environment Protection.

5. Create a single countywide basis for billing.

Solid Waste

1. Expand the Southern Onondaga Trash System into contiguous towns that already have contracts with a private hauler.

2. Pursue bulk bidding of hauler services across multiple municipalities to increase collection volume and drive down unit costs.

3. In towns with no current involvement, develop service districts and bid collection services in aggregate to drive down costs for individual property owners who are currently paying direct to private haulers on a property-by-property basis.

Additional Recommendations

In the course of the Infrastructure Committee's work, several additional areas were examined and opportunities to improve were identified. The following preliminary recommendations are therefore offered:

1. <u>Parks Maintenance</u>: All agencies in the Syracuse-Onondaga community should be merged under a single roof, in a way that retains individual community / park identities but maximizes economies of scale.

2. <u>Broadband Access</u>: This is a crossover issue with the Economic Development Committee. The opportunity should be pursued to provide high speed access to all in the community. The State of New York currently has a funding opportunity of $50 million for expansion of broadband to underserved areas.

3. <u>Mass Transit</u>: There should be regional discussion to support CENTRO – the Central New York Regional Transportation Authority – and work together on a sustainable long term plan. Research vouchers and contract models for effectiveness.

Public Safety

The Public Safety Committee focused on four critical service areas:

- Fire Protection;
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS);
- Law Enforcement; and
- Corrections.

FIRE PROTECTION

Fire protection is not only one of the most visible services provided by local government, but one of the most essential. A robust and effective response system is necessary to protect life and property.

What we have today

- The Syracuse-Onondaga community is served by nearly five dozen separate agencies. Excluding the Onondaga Nation Fire Department, 57 agencies provide fire protection to portions of the County.

- In 2013, 57 different fire departments responded to 55,286 requests for service in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. This amounts to about 150 calls per day and about one call for every 8.4 residents. Fifty percent of calls were answered by the City of Syracuse, 19% by the next 8 busiest departments in the neighboring suburbs (each with more than 1,000 calls per year), and 20% by 18 departments that handle between 400 and 1,000 calls per year each. The remainder are handled by 29 agencies that each respond to about a call per day or less.

- The agencies serving the Syracuse-Onondaga community represent a variety of types. There are municipal departments, where the City and some villages directly provide the service themselves; there are fire districts, which are separate units of local government with their own elected boards of commissioners, some of which have their own fire associated fire departments; and there are fire protection districts, which are geographic areas created by towns to receive service pursuant to a formal contract between the town government and one or more fire service providers.

- In cities and villages, fire services are funded by property taxes. In fire protection districts, the town government levies the property tax on properties in the areas served. In fire districts, town governments levy (and collect) the district tax but otherwise have no direct input into the district budget.

- Although Onondaga County itself is not formally involved in the actual delivery of fire services, its Office of Emergency Management plays a coordinating and oversight role.

- Among the agencies serving the Syracuse-Onondaga community, service areas range from less than 1 mi^2 to more than 38 mi^2.

- Fire departments already cooperate heavily on the hardest part of their job – working at emergency scenes.

Challenges and opportunities

- The Syracuse-Onondaga community is served by a large number of fire departments with rising costs.

- There is a challenge in recruiting and retaining volunteers, exacerbated by the need to spread that limited base across 57 agencies.

- There is lack of inter-agency coordination in purchasing apparatus and planning capital facility projects, which results in higher costs and inefficiency distribution of assets serving smaller geographic areas.

- Response resources are not always matched to location.

- Resource distribution challenges are compounded by the decreasing availability of volunteers, especially during daytime hours.

- Any decisions about changes in the fire service need to consider the large number (and variable characteristics) of the different fire agencies and acknowledge the challenges to enacting change.

- There are coverage differentials across the Syracuse-Onondaga community, with the City and inner ring suburbs closer to fire response resources than the ex-urban areas on the County's outskirts.

Map of Fire Protection Agencies
in Syracuse-Onondaga
(each color represents a separate agency)
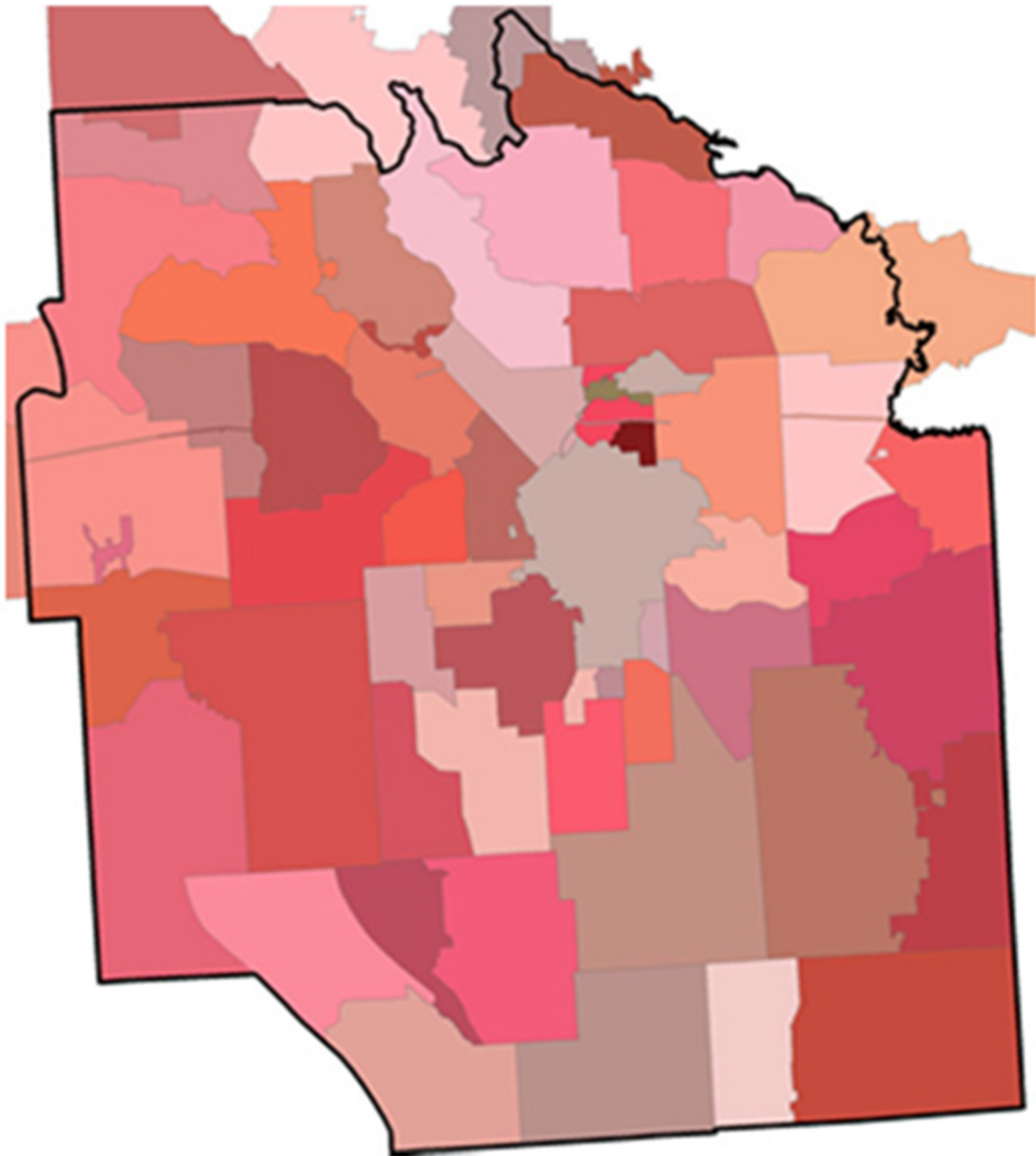
FIRE PROTECTION: SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES

Options range from local models in which multiple service providers cover smaller geographic areas, often a single municipality or portions of a single municipality, to regional models in which service delivery is consolidated across many or all municipalities in the region. In the middle of the range are intermunicipal / hybrid models where multiple municipalities share the function in an effort to generate economies of scale and produce efficiencies through higher call volume.

Model 1: Local

The local model characterizes the current approach to fire protection in Onondaga County. Fifty-seven different fire protection agencies serve the County, each with primary jurisdiction over a small geographic area consisting of one city or village, or a portion of one town. Many of these agencies are operated outside of the general municipal governments – in fact, 48 of the 57 agencies serving Onondaga County are not municipally-based but rather are independent companies or districts. Each is responsible for administering its own operations from recruiting appropriate human resources to acquiring the necessary equipment for suppressing a fire.

In Onondaga County, each department sets its own policy for responding to calls, identifies the "necessary" equipment for its department and is responsible for budgeting its own capital costs. There is substantial local control, with each department having a chief that is empowered by state law with certain authority and the ultimate responsibility to mitigate emergencies in their jurisdiction. Each department supplies its own personnel and equipment for emergencies in its territory, but will request outside assistance as needed.

Within the local model, is important to acknowledge the cooperation that exists between and among departments. Fire agencies have a long history of providing mutual aid to each other when responding to an event that requires resources or capacity not available in the home community. Examples include:

- Tanker relays in rural areas where water is scarce
- Rapid Intervention Crews to assist at working fires
- Aerial apparatus to large fires
- Pooling equipment / personnel for specialty teams, such as hazardous materials
- Additional manpower and equipment for long term incidents

A number of departments also have "automatic aid" whereby a neighboring department is automatically dispatched for certain types of events under specific conditions. An example would be one department requesting a neighbor to automatically send a ladder truck for reported house fires or two departments sending resources to each other's calls during hours when there might be fewer volunteers.

Model 2: Hybrid / Sub-Regional or Collaborative

Between the local and regional models are examples of communities where restructuring or merger has resulted in new provider combinations serving multiple communities. In New York, this has generally been the result of fire district consolidation or joint contracting with a single service provider.

Under state law, the most common result of a consolidation or merger is either a "joint fire district" or a new fire district with larger borders. Although the governance of the two is slightly different, the result is a special purpose governmental unit providing services to a slightly larger area. Towns can also enable the expansion of a fire department's territory by changing how they contract with fire departments to provide services to their fire protection districts. Towns can adjust their contracts so that individual departments have larger service areas.

Model 3: Countywide or Regional

Under the regional model, a bigger geographic area is serviced through a single unified provider.

Variation A: Models in which a single government serves essentially as the exclusive fire service provider in the entire county. While this model is seen in New York City, it is also found in many areas of the country outside of the Northeast and Midwest. It is common to find fire departments covering entire counties in Florida, California, Virginia and Maryland.

One such county with comparable size to Onondaga is Brevard County on the east coast of Florida. Brevard County Fire Rescue (www.brevardcounty.us/FireRescue) provides fire and EMS transport services for a county of about 540,000 people in 1,500 square miles. The department utilizes some volunteers in auxiliary roles including emergency preparedness and wild land firefighting.

Kern County, California, (including the city of Bakersfield) has a single fire department that provides service for 8,100 square miles (including several large parks) and about 840,000 people. The department has some seasonal personnel to assist with wild land firefighting, but otherwise it is an entirely paid department (www.kerncountyfire.org).

Variation B: Models in which a regional approach to fire service exists alongside a local approach. This form has a variety of different origins and is common across the country. One variant is a county government providing services to much or all of the area outside of a city while the city operates a separate department.

> 📣 *Fairfax County, Virginia:* The County began providing paid staff to support volunteer fire departments in the 1970s. The County fire department has been invited by volunteer fire departments to provide additional services over time. There are some cities in the county that maintain their own separate departments. The County department now staffs 42 paid fire apparatus (including paramedic ambulances) while the volunteers staff 12 county-owned apparatus. Some of the

stations are owned by separate volunteer departments while others are owned by the County. The volunteers maintain their "branding" on many stations, uniforms and apparatus. However, all turn out gear is owned by the County and has consistent markings; all members (paid or volunteer) need to meet consistent training standards; and all operate under a single unified command structure. All essential functions are funded through County funds and patient billings, while the volunteer departments have separate fundraisers to support their activities. The County department provides both fire and EMS transport services. In sum, this model is the result of "regionalization by evolution" as volunteer departments have slowly turned to the County for support over many decades to the point where the majority of services are provided by paid staff, but volunteers still play an important role. (www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fr/)

- *Indianapolis:* The city and surrounding Marion County merged in 1970 by act of the state legislature. Eleven "included towns" that existed outside the former City of Indianapolis were permitted to retain some autonomy and local governing / service delivery responsibilities. Some of these towns provide their own fire protection, while others contract with the Indianapolis Fire Department. The city fire department only provides fire and rescue services; EMS transport is performed by a separate regional organization. (www.indy.gov/egov/city/dps/ifd/)

PRELIMINARY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Public Safety Committee has developed the following preliminary recommendations regarding fire protection. These have not yet been formally accepted by the full Commission.

Note

Decisions about changes to the fire service need to consider the large number and variable characteristics of the different fire agencies and acknowledge the challenges to enact substantive change. While a broad change in the service model might ultimately provide better service in a more cost effective manner, it will likely require incremental change to develop and move to that model.

Initial Steps

Over the next 3 years, the fire service should consider the following steps that will not require a substantial change in their operations:

1. Group specification and purchasing of apparatus and equipment on a countywide basis. In particular, turnout gear, hoses, SCBAs, radios and computers could all be purchased in bulk at a discounted price leading to standardization and reduced costs. Group specification and purchasing could be

accomplished under existing organizational structure using Onondaga County Division of Purchase.

2. Share resources for the training of firefighting skills including the construction of props and development of in-service education. Develop strategically located and centrally managed training facilities to assist both paid and volunteer firefighters develop and maintain their skills.

3. Develop community wide performance measures for responding to emergencies, training, and recruiting with a standardized method for reporting to the community.

4. Focus responses on calls where fire department resources are truly needed by eliminating response to low priority EMS calls and service requests that can be handled by other organizations.

5. Lobby for the expanded presence of residential sprinklers in new one- and two-family homes.

6. Centrally coordinate and fund the provision of specialized fire response assets such as hazardous materials, confined space, high angle, and trench rescue. Syracuse Fire Department already performs many of these functions.

Intermediate Option

In order to improve coordination of service and address escalating costs in service provision, a metropolitan fire authority should be created. This authority would have commissioners that represent the diverse stakeholders of the fire service including elected officials, other government representatives, volunteer firefighters, and career firefighters. Planning for this option should begin quickly, but it is not anticipated to take effect for at least five to seven years.

The authority would support the existing service providers through providing administrative support, long term planning, and coordination of capital expenses, recruiting and training of firefighters. One of the objectives that could be facilitated by this organization would be to reduce the number of separate government and taxing jurisdictions among the agencies serving ex-urban portions of the county. This could be accomplished through a merging of fire districts and / or towns redrawing fire protection district boundaries in a way that results in a quadrant-type district system outside the City / inner ring.

Reducing the number of separate districts would improve upon two issues. First, fewer districts reduces capital / apparatus needs (e.g. ladder trucks) by planning over a larger geography.

Second, it would mitigate the current reality that response resources are not always effectively matched to location; that is, occasionally the system responds to calls with something other than the closest resource, simply because of the extent of territorial boundaries created when the area was sparsely populated.

Note: As much as possible under this option, fire departments should retain their current names and stations to continue to foster tradition and community connection.

Long-Range Option

While certain departments are an exception, most volunteer fire departments are facing a long term decrease in the number volunteers and consequently may soon have growing difficulty in responding to emergencies appropriately. For the more densely populated, commercially developed suburban areas adjacent to the City of Syracuse, a transition to a predominately career, centrally-managed metropolitan department would be the best solution. This alternative would need to be cost effective and provide at least the same level of service to the communities, with no decrease in objective performance measures. In the outlying areas, the strategic allocation of paid resources from the metropolitan department would augment the existing volunteer departments. The long term option would be an "opt-in" system whereby fire departments could choose to join based on their ability to sustain their current operations. The "opt-in" system would focus on ensuring services in areas where volunteers need assistance and departments could choose to have assistance only during certain periods of the day.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS)

Emergency Medical Services is a distinct public safety service that is provided by a combination of commercial ambulance services, non-profit combination paid / volunteer services (including fire departments), and completely volunteer services (primarily in rural areas). The system has already been evolving in the Syracuse-Onondaga community, to a point where remarkably few calls in the Syracuse-Onondaga community are currently handled by purely volunteer organizations.

What we have today

- In 2013, 17 different EMS providers responded to 72,815 EMS calls in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. This amounts to 200 calls per day and about one call for every 6.4 residents. Sixty percent of calls were answered by Rural / Metro Medical Services and another 20% by three large non-profit ambulance companies with substantial paid staff.

- More than 90% of EMS calls were answered by agencies that bill for service and pay at least a portion of their staff.

- Nearly all agencies respond with their own advanced life support (paramedics) or have arrangements for that service from an immediate neighbor.

- Advanced life support is present in all communities.

- A substantial paid staff is spread throughout the Syracuse-Onondaga community, with most of them being purely EMS professionals employed by private organizations (non-profit and commercial). The remainder are dual EMT-firefighters employed by municipalities, which are more expensive than single purpose employees.

Challenges and opportunities

- In general, the Syracuse-Onondaga community has a relatively rapid response from qualified providers. However, additional coordination of resources and other organizational changes could lead to improved services.

- Service levels in the City and pockets of the inner suburbs meet the expectations of the communities and are close to industry high performance targets. The goal should be to get 80% of the total population up to a "high" level of service, rather than just having high service in specific pockets of the county (e.g. City, Fayetteville, portions of Clay and Dewitt, East Syracuse). There are coverage challenges in more rural areas where limited call volumes make high service levels less economically viable.

- Absence of dynamic positioning of ambulances and personnel resources reduces system efficiency.

- Territorial boundaries represent a real inefficiency. State public Health law prohibits agencies from sharing resources across these boundaries prior to there being a call request, so the more territorial boundaries that exist, the lower the efficiency / effectiveness of the system. Reducing the number of boundaries would yield a more efficient deployment of ambulances and personnel. Specifically, fewer boundaries would allow for more dynamic positioning of resources and reduce response times.

- There is no central measurement of performance in the Syracuse-Onondaga community for key indicators such as appropriateness of care, survival rates, transport to correct facilities or cost of operation.

- There is no reliable data on EMS workforce in the Syracuse-Onondaga community including pay rates, level of certification, hours worked / volunteered and the agencies that volunteers work for in the community.

- Anecdotally, there are fewer EMS volunteers than just a few years ago and the existing paid workforce is spread thinly across multiple agencies, with the majority of employees working for multiple organizations.

PRELIMINARY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Public Safety Committee has developed the following preliminary recommendations regarding emergency medical services. These have not yet been formally accepted by the full Commission.

Note

The EMS system has already been evolving to become more efficient and improve operations because of market forces and changes in funding sources. The suggested alternative is a further step along the path that they have already traveled.

Preferred Model

A countywide system in which there are fewer service providers serving larger territories. The future agencies would preferably be independent nonprofit agencies, private commercial agencies (under a contract with specific performance criteria), or a combination. A sample model could include dividing the County outside the City into quadrants. Each area would be served by a single large organization that would benefit from economies of scale, efficiencies in management, resource allocation and planning across a broader geography and population. A central coordination entity would set levels of service and provide essential support such as purchasing, human resource management and fiscal planning.

Note: A single service provider for the whole county would face challenges in maintaining adequate staff. The existing system functions because individual EMS workers work for multiple employers, allowing the employers to limit benefit and overtime costs.

To address the challenges of serving rural areas, the opportunity exists to "tie" the rural areas to more dense suburbs by reducing the number of boundaries through use of the quadrant system. Coverage challenges abound in the outlying areas precisely because their limited call volume does not make a robust service economically viable for any service provider absent a subsidy (or significant taxpayer expense). As part of this system, the primary source of funding should be fee-for-service with municipal funding being limited to support areas that need a subsidy to provide appropriate service.

Other Opportunities to Enhance Service

Group specification and purchasing of equipment, ambulances, insurance coverage, billing for service and benefits on a countywide basis. Group specification and purchasing could be accomplished under existing organizational structure using Onondaga County Division of Purchase. Establish performance standards for response times, call coverage, staffing minimums and adequate training.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Syracuse-Onondaga community is served by 15 local law enforcement agencies that span two levels of government: The County, through the Onondaga County Sheriff's Office, and those municipalities which maintain and fund their own police departments. Among the municipal agencies, the City of Syracuse Police Department is the largest in force size, budget and call volume.

The accompanying map illustrates the distribution of police departments throughout the Syracuse-Onondaga community. Although the County Sheriff's Office technically has countywide jurisdiction, it serves as the primary law enforcement agency only in those localities not otherwise covered by their own municipal department (in the map, those areas shaded in light gray). Including the City of Syracuse, there are fourteen such municipal departments, concentrated generally in the northern half of the County (in the map, those areas shaded in color).

What we have today

- In 2013, and including the State Police, 17 different law enforcement agencies[7] responded to 407,564 calls for service in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. This amounts to an average of 1,117 calls per day and about 870 calls per thousand residents.

- Based on calls for service, the Syracuse Police Department, Onondaga County Sheriff and New York State Police were the top 3 busiest agencies. They accounted for roughly two-thirds of all calls for service and served more than 60% of the county's population as primary responder for law enforcement calls for service.

- The total expense for law enforcement (excluding State Police) was over $88 million or about $188 per capita in 2013.

- Village and town police officials interviewed in the course of the project report that their rapid response time and detailed knowledge of the community are valued by residents and worth the additional cost. All residents in the County pay taxes for both the Sheriff's Office and State Police; individual municipal police departments are property tax funded in addition to paying for these two services.

- In many areas the different agencies work well together through both formal and informal arrangements. Some examples include joint training, criminal investigative

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[7] There are several other law enforcement agencies that serve specific locations such as the Syracuse University Public Safety Department and the Onondaga Community College Public Safety Department that are excluded from the report because they primarily serve only a specific small area and do not routinely respond to 911 calls. They are an important part of law enforcement in the community, but their responsibilities would not change based on report recommendations.

task forces, using the closest resource for serious calls and information sharing. Other specific operational examples include the availability of Air One to all agencies, joint training for tactical teams, and coordinated traffic safety and enforcement campaigns such as Buckle Up and Stop-DWI.

All law enforcement agencies are dispatched through the Onondaga County 911 Center, and all law enforcement vehicles have automatic vehicle locator technology. This technology works in parallel with computer aided dispatching and a mutual assistance agreement to ensure that the closest police agency is dispatched to high priority calls.
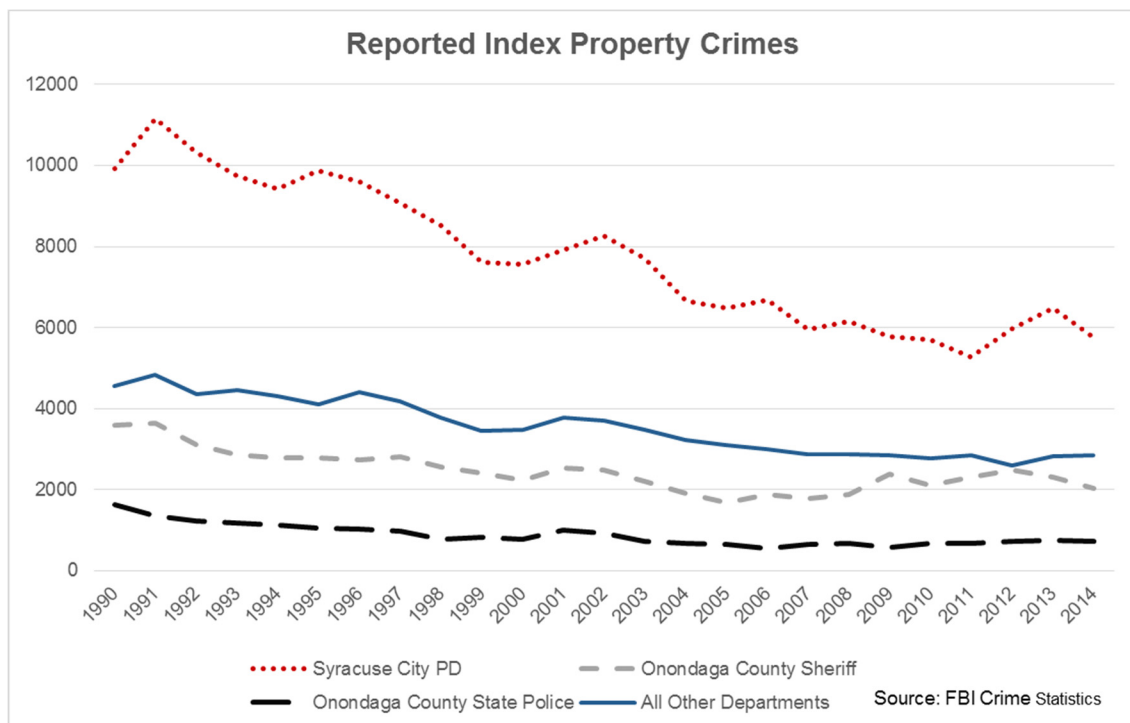
Challenges and Opportunities

The total number of sworn officers in the community has decreased by 10%, or 102 officers, from 2007. The City's force has shrunk by 7.8%, or 38 officers over the same period. The Onondaga County Sheriff has lost 11.2%, or 29 officers. The total loss of officers for every other department in the community was 13.4%, or 35 officers.

Sworn Officers by Year

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total	1008	1009	1044	949	987	902	932	906
All Other Departments	261	252	250	237	248	212	248	251
Onondaga County Sheriff	258	274	289	228	245	245	244	229
Syracuse City PD	489	494	505	484	494	468	440	451
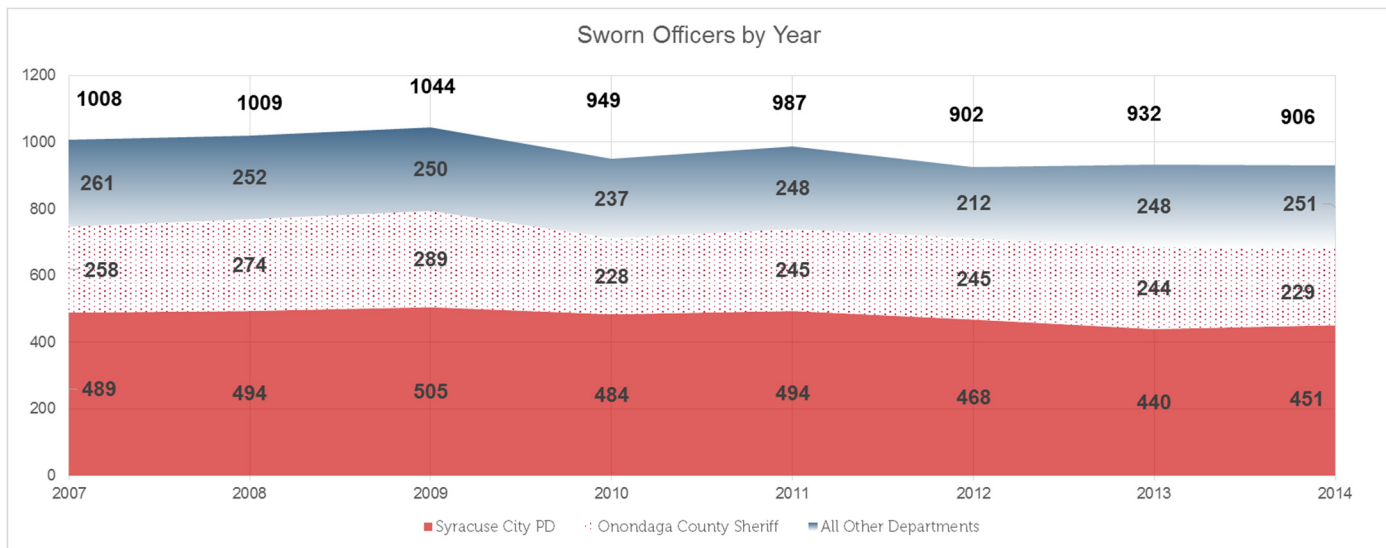
The number of law enforcement calls for service has been relatively steady for the last eight years while the number of officers available for all agencies in the County to respond is going down. The result of the steady demand and the declining staff has been an increased workload by about 10 percent, as measured by calls per officer. The result is that officers are spending more time responding to calls and less time conducting proactive police work such as foot patrols or establishing community rapport.

Calls for Service Per Officer
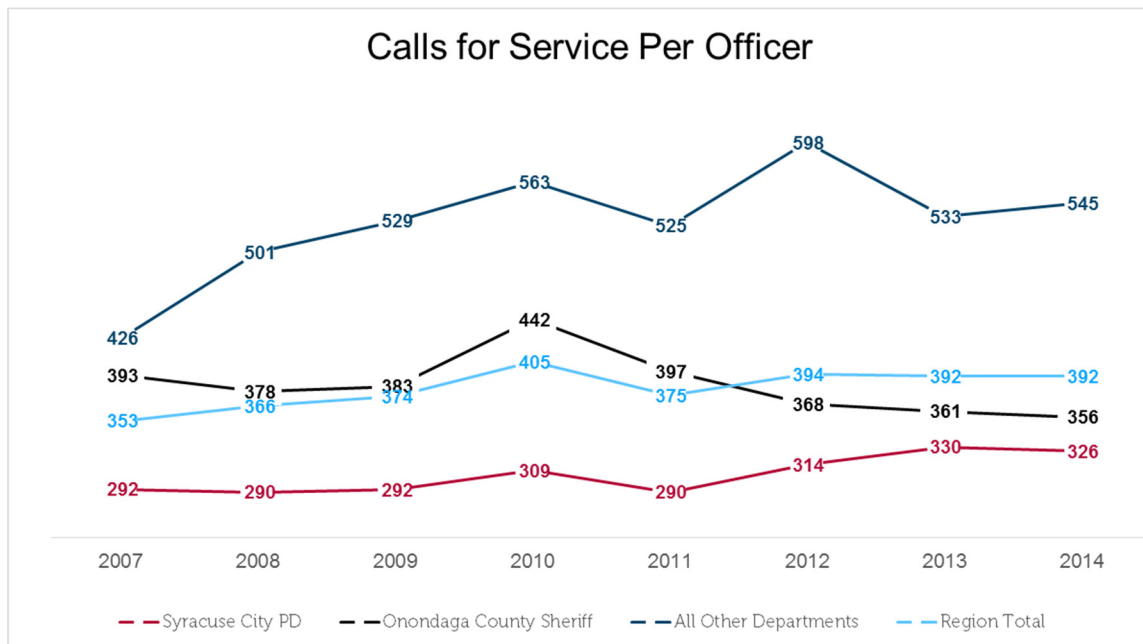
Federally reported serious crime data for the last 25 years shows that the rate of reported property crime has decreased sub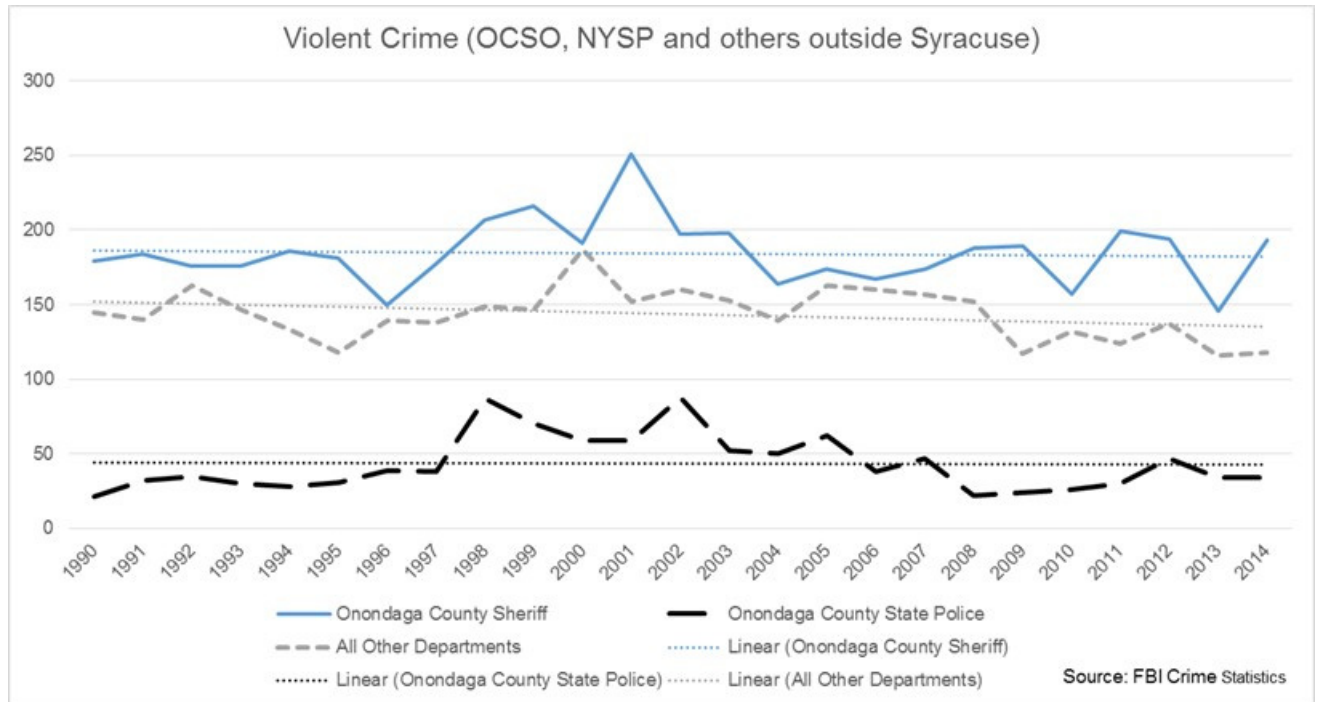stantially in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. The amount of serious crime reported is, on average, 44% lower in 2014 than it was in 1990.

Reported Index Property Crimes

Source: FBI Crime Statistics

Reported Violent Crime Syracuse PD

Legend: Syracuse City PD — Linear (Syracuse City PD) .... Source: FBI Crime Statistics
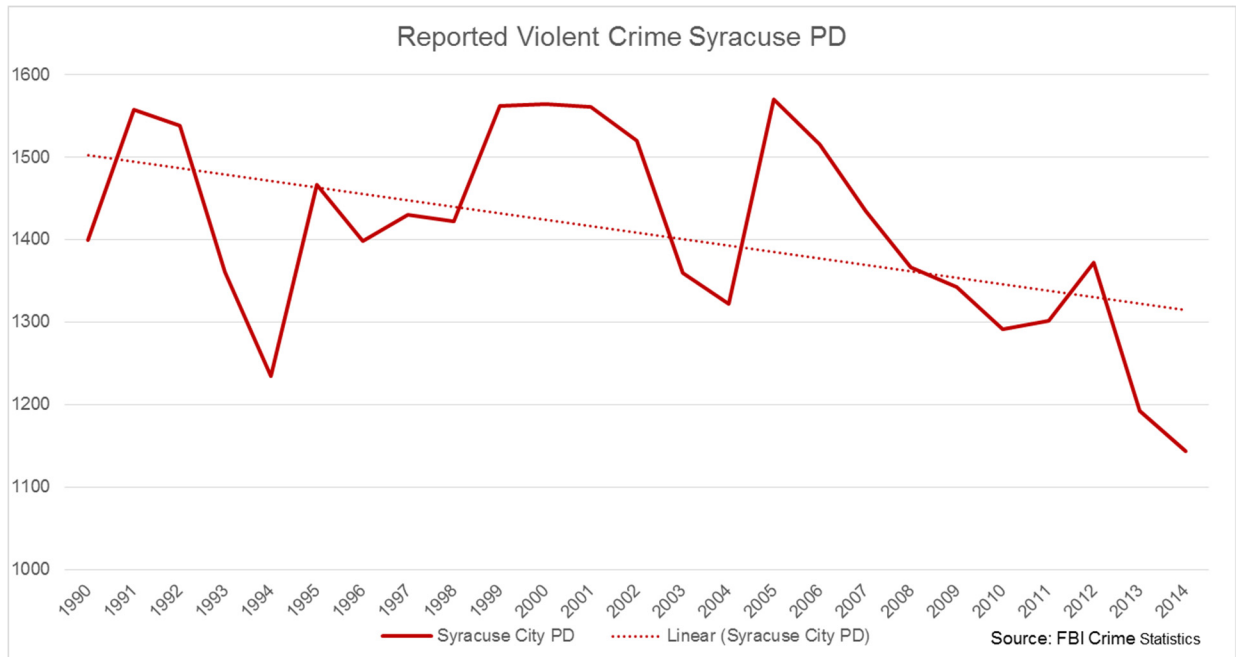
🔲 The number of reported violent crimes in Syracuse has dropped in the last several years from the long term average of about 1,400 incidents per year. Anecdotally, there is an increase in number of violent crimes committed by gang members and incidents related to the drug trade. The reported crimes in 2014 were 28% below the high year in 2005.

🔲 In the remainder of Onondaga County, the rate of reported violent crime has remained essentially level for the last 25 years. There are about 375 violent crimes per year on average in the rest of the County, compared to 1,400 in Syracuse.

Violent Crime (OCSO, NYSP and others outside Syracuse)

Source: FBI Crime Statistics

- Onondaga County Sheriff
- Onondaga County State Police
- All Other Departments
- Linear (Onondaga County Sheriff)
- Linear (Onondaga County State Police)
- Linear (All Other Departments)

■ The cost of providing law enforcement in the Syracuse-Onondaga community continues to climb at a steady rate higher than inflation.

■ Several of the interviewed officials indicated that a rise in crime committed by younger individuals, and particularly by gang members, is a concern. The entire community needs to work to reduce poverty, improve education and provide a pathway away from criminal behavior.

Map of Law Enforcement Agencies in Syracuse-Onondaga
(Gray = County Sheriff; Color = Municipal Dept)
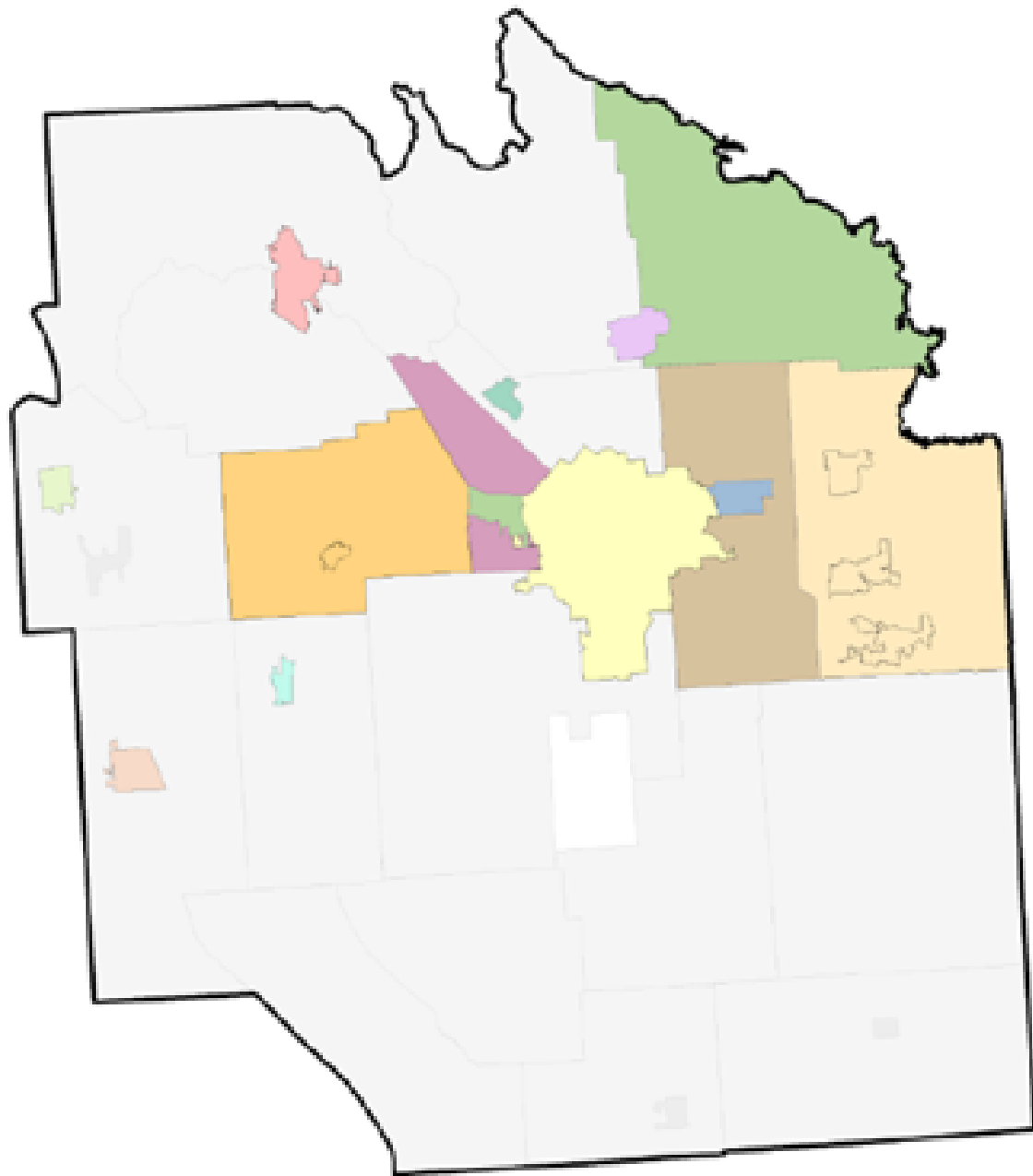
PRELIMINARY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Public Safety Committee has developed the following preliminary recommendations regarding law enforcement services. These have not yet been formally accepted by the full Commission.

Note

The Syracuse-Onondaga community has already seen two police departments dissolve or join others. There is a great deal of cooperation already, starting with the 911 center, joint task forces for serious crimes and the sharing of specialty teams.

Preferred Option

A consolidation of the Sheriff's Police Department and the City of Syracuse Police Department into a single metropolitan police department would allow for a larger pool of resources, especially personnel, to be deployed more effectively. Eliminating managerial positions through consolidation would free up money to put more officers on the street and acquire technologies (such as more street cameras and information systems) to aid in solving crimes. A key tenet will be that the number of police personnel patrolling needs to keep pace with the calls for service in the community. Also, specialized units could be consolidated and strengthened. The remaining local police forces would be encouraged to join the metropolitan police department.

It is important to acknowledge that moving toward this option would have substantial challenges, including different labor unions, competing political interests and separate work practices.

Interim Actions

A consolidated department will take substantial political will and several years of planning to implement. Some interim actions were identified as being helpful to improve the law enforcement environment. To combat the perception of increased violent crime in the urban core, additional resources should deployed including an emphasis on community policing and targeted patrolling of high crime areas. This can be accomplished by additional hiring of sworn officers, increasing sworn staff through reassignment of tasks to non-sworn personnel, and temporary task forces. Another tool that may assist in this area is expanding the use of technology to both deter and solve crime. A further recommendation is to expand and enhance the sharing of resources between law enforcement agencies including coordinated grant applications.

Shape the law enforcement workforce to better reflect the community it serves by evaluating the existing screening process for potential biases and taking further proactive steps in recruiting qualified minority candidates.

CORRECTIONS

The County is exclusively responsible for providing and administering corrections and incarcerations in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. However, there are inefficiencies created by the County's operation of two separate corrections departments – one by the Sheriff for prisoners that have not yet been sentenced, and one by the Department of Corrections for prisoners that have been sentenced. Onondaga is the only New York county that has not unified its prison operations.

What we have today

- For 2013, the average daily census of the Onondaga County Justice Center, operated by the Sheriff, was 614. Ninety-two percent of the prisoners were unsentenced. The Sheriff's Office has about 280 sworn personnel assigned to different roles in the Custody Section. The Justice Center operates at nearly full capacity, especially during the summer months. Any overflow prisoners are sent preferentially to Jamesville and the alternative is to board them with another county for a fee.

- Also in 2013, the average daily census of the Jamesville Correctional Facility, operated by the Department of Corrections, was 476. Seventy percent were sentenced. The Department of Corrections has 184 funded positions, including a small percentage of non-sworn support staff.

Challenges and Opportunities

- The County operates separate facilities and administers them across separate departments.

- There is cooperation with certain shared administrative tasks, including using the same records management system, human resources, purchasing, food service and correctional health.

- There are two separate union agreements, with the Department of Corrections staff earning less than the Sheriff's deputies. While the officers and deputies that directly work in custody of prisoners have similar training, union rules prevent them from being assigned at the other facility.

PRELIMINARY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Public Safety Committee has developed the following preliminary recommendations regarding corrections services. These have not yet been formally accepted by the full Commission.

Note

The changes that would result from this preferred option can be made by the actions of the County without involvement of other municipalities in Onondaga County. The preferred option has been considered a number of times previously, but has not been adopted.

Preferred Option

The preferred option would be a single organizational structure responsible for operating both County facilities and holding all prisoners. This would involve moving to a single labor agreement and unified operating structure. In the near term, there would not be substantial cost savings as the size of the work force supervising prisoners is unlikely to change, but there may be efficiencies gained with increased flexibility in assigning the workforce to both locations (which would enable some overtime savings) and a single capital plan.

Municipal Operations

The Municipal Operations Committee focused on those service areas that were neither infrastructure nor public safety related, including:

- Tax Assessment;
- Financial Administration;
- Courts;
- Code Enforcement;
- Clerk;
- Social Services and Health; and
- Libraries.

TAX ASSESSMENT

Property taxes are a critically important revenue source for local governments. As a result, an effective and equitable tax assessment system is the basis for funding municipal government and the services it provides.

What we have today

- There are 17 separate tax assessment units in the Syracuse-Onondaga community, including the City and 16 town-based providers.

- There are broad scale differences in the jurisdiction of these agencies. The largest is the City, which maintains assessments on more than 42,000 parcels; the smallest unit administers 1,539 parcels.

- Although villages have the authority to run their own assessment operations in New York State, none do in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. Each village's assessment function is effectively consolidated within its surrounding town, and village property taxes are levied using the town-derived assessment for each property.

- There are three Coordinated Assessment Programs (CAPs) in the Syracuse-Onondaga community, whereby multiple towns have effectively merged their assessment functions under authority granted by the State Real Property Tax Law.

Challenges and opportunities

- There is functional and administrative duplication across separate assessment units, particularly in "back office" capacity required by each office.

- There is variability in the level of assessment across the Syracuse-Onondaga community, with equalization rates ranging from as low as 2% to as high as 100%.

▶ There are large scale differences across the assessment units: Eight units handle more than 10,000 properties each, while five units handle fewer than 3,000 properties each.

▶ The technical expertise required to administer accurate, equitable assessments is in limited supply, creating succession challenges beyond the current group of assessors in the Syracuse-Onondaga community.

▶ Tax certiorari lawsuit defense is costly and can create substantial burdens for smaller municipalities.

▶ There is a statistical correlation between scale of assessing units in the Syracuse-Onondaga community and their unit costs, with those serving a higher number of parcels tending to have lower unit costs, as shown in the following graph.

Map of Tax Assessing Units
in Syracuse-Onondaga
(each color represents a separate unit)
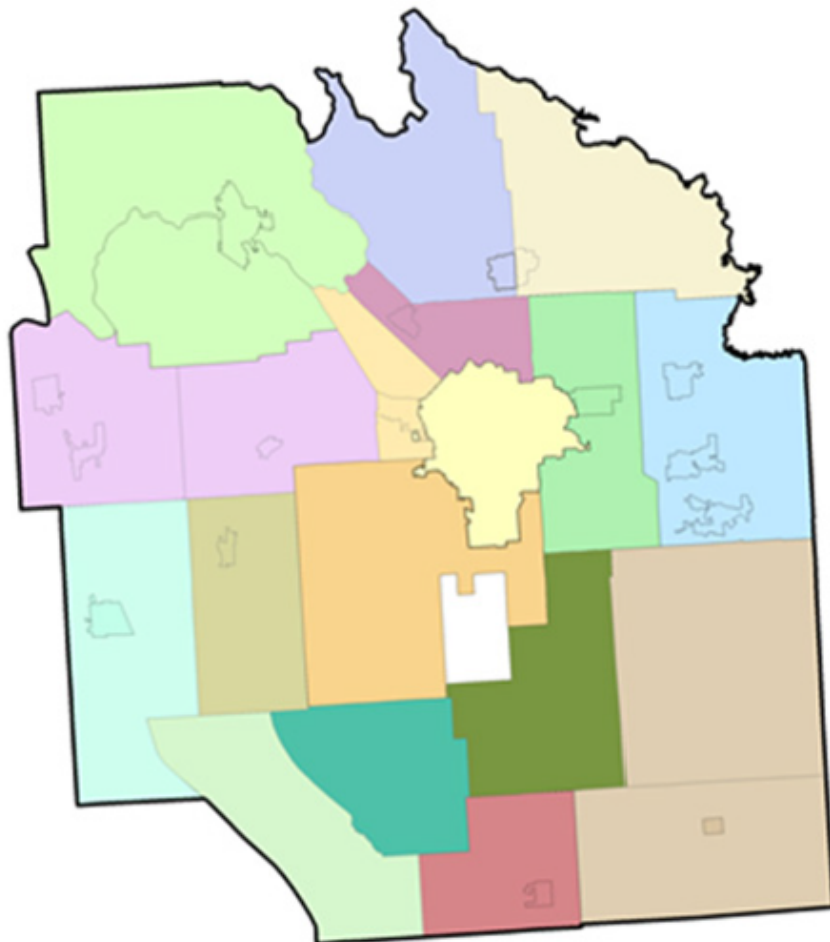
Assessment Costs Per Parcel vs. Total Parcels
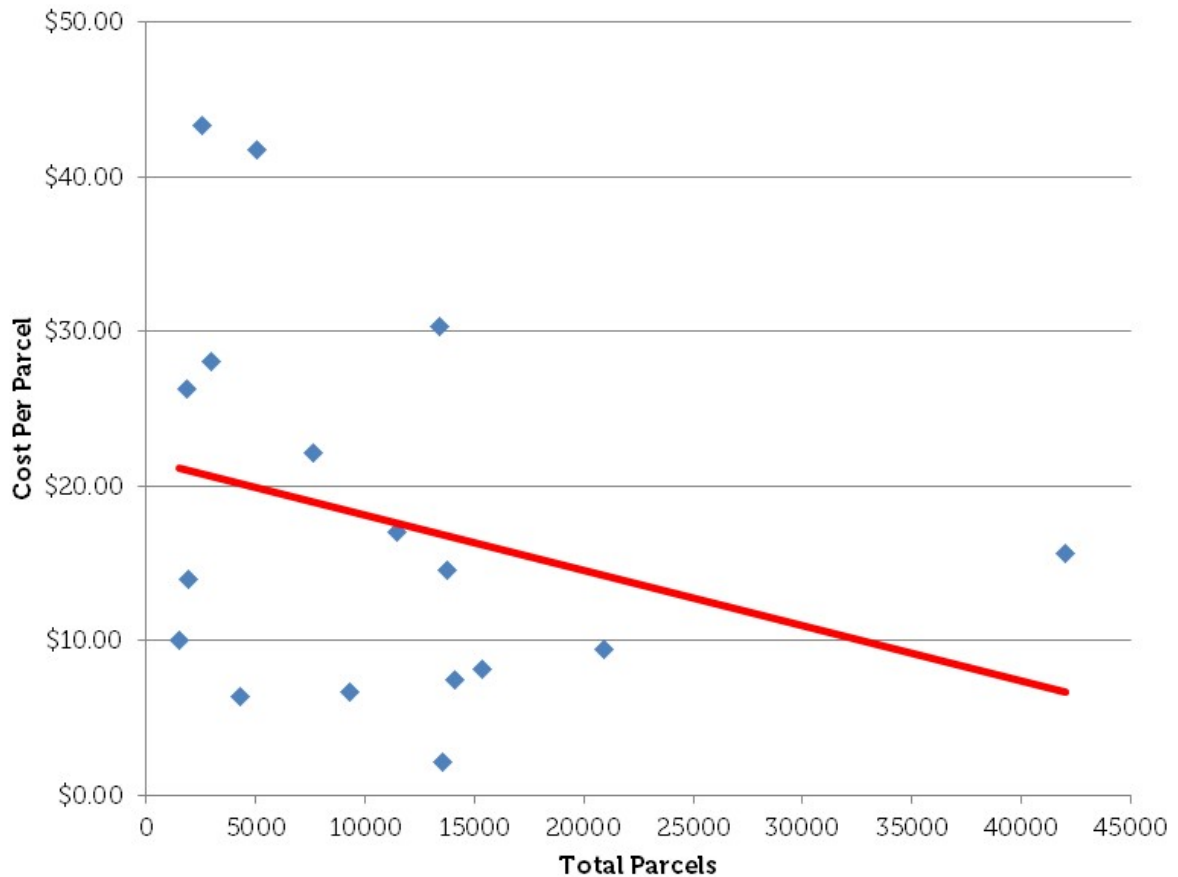
FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION

A strong financial administration function is critically important to prudent fiscal management in local government, especially in light of the budgetary challenges municipalities increasingly face.

What we have today

■ Financial administration is disaggregated across the local governments of the Syracuse-Onondaga community. Every general purpose local government has a treasurer, budget officer and / or finance department to administer its financial management responsibilities.

■ The size, cost and capacity of the function varies, with the largest-budget governments tending to have the greatest investment in financial administration. In smaller governments, the budget officer responsibility is borne by the town supervisor or village mayor's office, with input from department heads who oversee

specific functional areas; in larger governments, the function is typically a separate department.

- In the County, the Finance Department serves the financial management role. Additionally, the County has a separately-elected Comptroller charged with independently overseeing finance and audit functions across County government.

- The "check and balance" role of financial administration makes some level of local oversight important.

- Technological capacity – important for financial management generally and the data that supports it – varies across local governments.

Challenges and opportunities

- There is no standard financial software system in use across the local governments of the Syracuse-Onondaga community.

- Procurement processes are handled separately by each local government, except for occasional procurement off State or County bids (and with the exception of the County, City and City School District's joint procurement framework).

- There is limited information technology capacity in some local governments, especially smaller municipalities where the investment may be cost prohibitive.

COURTS

The organization of New York State's court system results in different levels of local government having markedly different responsibilities. At the town and village level, locally-funded justice courts handle a range of criminal proceedings including felonies, misdemeanors / violations and traffic infractions.

What we have today

- There are 19 town courts and 9 village courts, all of which are locally-funded. Separate City and County courts are state-funded.

- Total judicial costs in the Syracuse-Onondaga community totaled nearly $18.3 million in 2013. County costs, which also included state-mandated functions such as district attorney and public defender, accounted for 80%; town and village costs accounted for 17% of the total.

- Every town government in the Syracuse-Onondaga community operates its own court, while 9 of the fifteen villages do so. For those 6 villages that do not maintain their own court, proceedings are handled by the surrounding town's court.

- Town and village justice courts do generate some revenue to offset a portion of their local cost burden. The net municipal share (after State and County fees are assessed) of court revenues generated in 2013 ranged from a high of $1.0 million to a low of less than $10,000.

Challenges and opportunities

- There is limited intermunicipal sharing of administrative capacity, justices or facilities at the present time.

- NYS Uniform Justice Court Act, Section 106-a, authorizes two or more contiguous towns to share a court.

- Adequate facilities are a real and growing concern for many justice courts.

- Town and village courts do generate some revenue through fines and fees, but most run a "deficit" with local taxpayers funding the difference. The average deficit across all town and village justice courts in 2013 was approximately $54,000; the cumulative deficit was more than $1.4 million.

- There is a statistical correlation between scale of justice courts in the Syracuse-Onondaga community and their deficit level, with the smallest courts (measured by caseload and revenue) having the highest deficit as a percentage of revenue.

Map of Town and Village Justice Courts in Syracuse-Onondaga

(each color represents a separate unit)
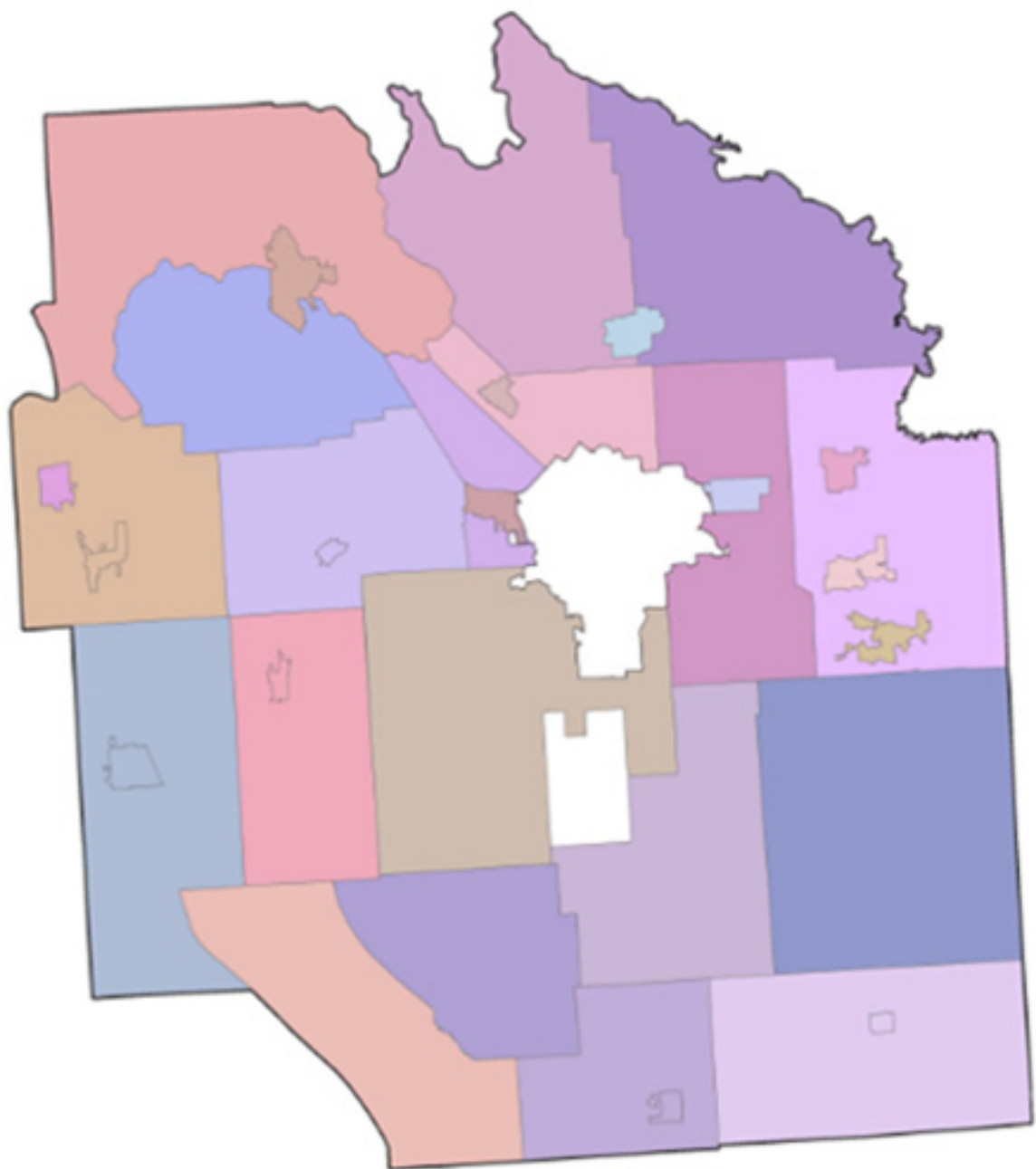
Net Cost of Onondaga County Justice Courts
(2013, net of Revenue)
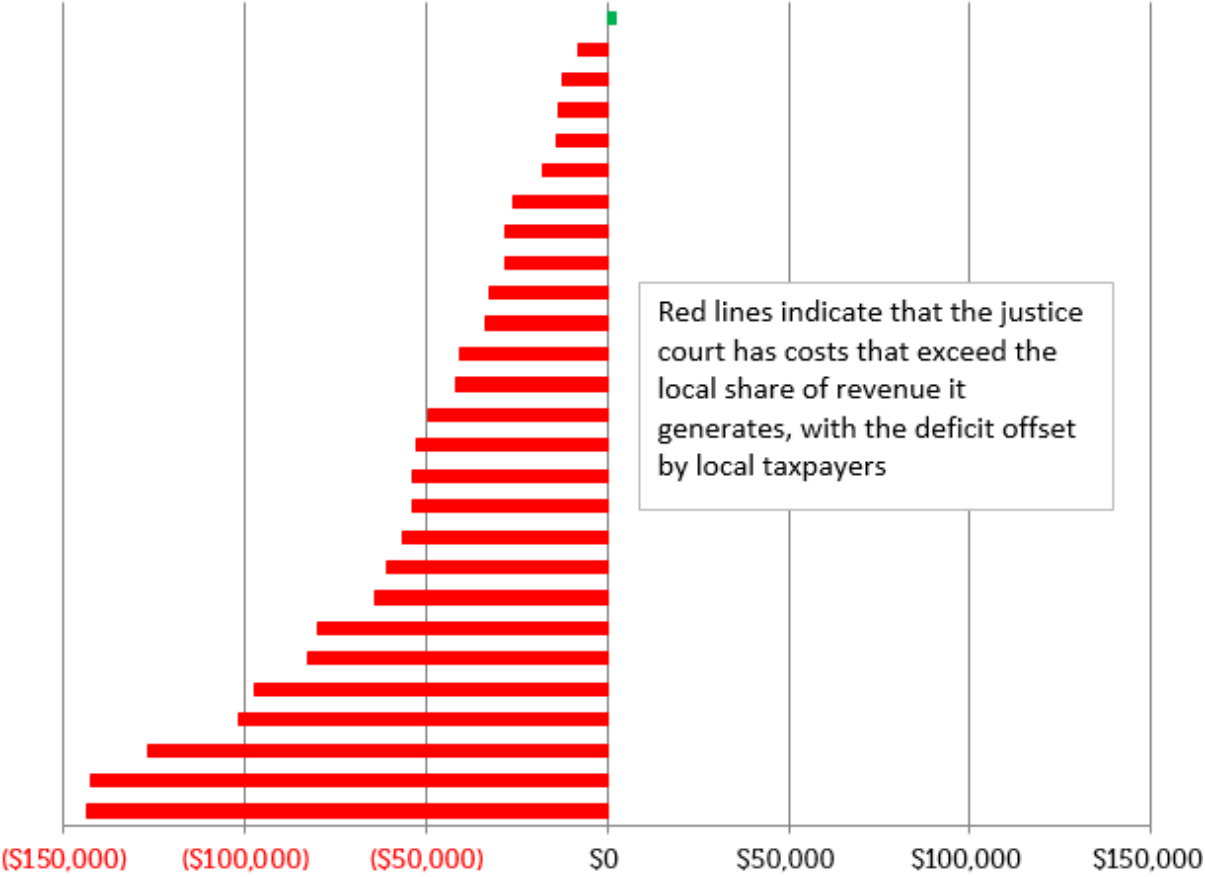
Red lines indicate that the justice court has costs that exceed the local share of revenue it generates, with the deficit offset by local taxpayers

($150,000)   ($100,000)   ($50,000) $0 $50,000 $100,000 $150,000

Justice Court Deficits as % of Total Revenue vs. Total Revenue

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Code enforcement, which is critically important to ensuring the health and well-being of persons and property, involves the investigation and enforcement of State laws and local ordinances pertaining to building standards, property / land use, and important quality of life measures.

What we have today

- Nearly every municipality in the Syracuse-Onondaga community handles its own code enforcement, though there is some collaboration between towns and their villages (e.g. Town of Elbridge and the Villages of Elbridge and Jordan).

- Code enforcement responsibilities span both the State Uniform Code (which is the same for all local governments equally) and specific provisions of the municipal code (which is different across municipalities and often reflects certain quality of life matters the local community wants to focus its enforcement efforts on). On balance, the state-established Uniform Code covers about 90% of enforcement responsibilities, with local ordinances representing the other 10%.

- Neighboring communities with similar development density and land uses tend to have common code approaches and face similar enforcement challenges.

Challenges and opportunities

- Code enforcement expertise and staff capacity is limited, particularly in smaller municipalities where the function is less than full-time.

- The technical expertise required to implement effective code enforcement is in limited supply, creating succession challenges beyond the current group of code enforcement personnel in the Syracuse-Onondaga community.

- There are disparities in technology utilization for record keeping across municipalities.

Clerk

Often the "face" of municipal government, every general purpose local government has a clerk position. Duties typically include interfacing with the public on permit and license applications, and maintaining the books, files and records of local government.

What we have today

- There are 36 separate municipal clerks in the Syracuse-Onondaga community – one in each general purpose local government. In many cases, those positions are supported by deputy clerk and / or clerical personnel.

- In the County, the clerk is an elected position in accordance with State County Law. In the City, it is an appointed position in accordance with the City Charter. In towns, clerk positions are almost always elected, pursuant to State Town Law (although some towns in New York State have sought to convert the position to an appointed one in recent years). In villages, clerks are appointed by the mayor and board, in accordance with State Village Law.

Challenges and opportunities

- Although progress has been made, local governments in the Syracuse-Onondaga community are not yet making optimal use of online / electronic opportunities for the filing and permit processing responsibilities that clerk offices generally handle.

- There is a range of information technology capacity in place across clerk offices, with some having significantly more robust capabilities than others.

SOCIAL SERVICES AND HEALTH

Social services and public / mental health are among the largest governmental cost centers in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. Although much of the programming is determined by the State, the County is primarily responsible for administering and delivering these functions.

What we have today

- Social services represents the single largest functional cost center among governments in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. With $267.6 million in 2013 spending, the function equates to approximately $571 per capita.

- Public health functions represent the fifth-largest local government cost center, at $66.5 million in 2013 or $142 per capita. Mental health functions accounted for an additional $22.9 million in 2013, or $49 per capita.

- Social services are vested entirely at the County level, as are all major public / mental health programs.

- Caseload numbers for these services within the Syracuse-Onondaga community are significant. In 2014, the Department of Social Services – Economic Security served over 143,000 unduplicated county residents through programs such as Temporary Assistance, SNAP (Food Stamps), Subsidized Child Care, Heating Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Child Support and Medicaid.

- Caseload numbers are growing in certain programmatic areas. For example, since 2007 there has been a 17% increase in total Temporary Assistance applications, including increases of 58% for families (Family Assistance) and 97% for singles (Safety Net Assistance). Over that period there has also been an 80% increase in the number of individuals and families applying for SNAP (Food Stamp) assistance; a 30% increase in the number of working families receiving subsidized child care assistance; and a 35% increase in the number of individuals receiving Medicaid.

Challenges and opportunities

- Caseloads have stabilized, but at very high levels causing continued stress on staff and resources.

- Technology advances, like the County's self-service kiosks, continue to propel the system forward.

- New York State's takeover of Medicaid administration is progressing more slowly than originally planned.

LIBRARIES

Library services in the Syracuse-Onondaga community are essentially consolidated under the Onondaga County Public Library (OCPL). The product of a 1976 merger of the Syracuse Public Library and the nonprofit Onondaga Library System, OCPL is one of 23 public library systems chartered by the New York State Board of Regents. It is responsible for providing library development and resource sharing support across the system's member libraries, as well as an integrated records system that links member libraries.

What we have today

- OCPL operates a Central library downtown, 8 branch libraries within the City, 2 satellite libraries and 12 independent suburban member libraries.

- The libraries within OCPL are a variety of different types, which impacts their governance structure and funding framework. The types include public school district libraries, public special legislative district libraries, association libraries and public / municipal libraries.

SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES

In reviewing these functional areas, the Municipal Operations Committee explored a range of service delivery options. In general, there is a range of ways in which these local government services can be provided. The diversity of approaches is evident in the Syracuse-Onondaga community today.

At one end of the continuum are services that are based at the most local level, delivered by individual local governments or service providers generally operating independently of one another. Examples include financial administration and clerk, both of which are provided by 36 separate entities. While there is occasional inter-municipal collaboration in these services, the basic structure is disaggregated across the County.

At the other end of the continuum are services that are based at the regional or countywide level, delivered by a single government with service jurisdiction spanning otherwise independent municipalities. These include social services, public health and mental health, each of which is provided exclusively by Onondaga County on a countywide basis in accordance with state law.

In between are hybrid models in which services are delivered over geographies that are larger than individual communities, but smaller than the entire County. Examples in the Syracuse-Onondaga community include tax assessment (17 separate agencies, with all villages already merged into their towns and three consolidated multi-town agencies) and libraries (where a single regional "umbrella" system serves 31 libraries, including 21 independent suburban libraries).

Model 1: Local

Under this model, a service is delivered more or less independently by a multitude of service providers. Typically those service providers are municipalities, although in some cases (e.g. fire protection) they are not general purpose local governments. The model is enabled by state law granting local governments (i.e. individual communities) the autonomy to decide which services they will provide and at what level.

The local model is not devoid of inter-municipal cooperation, however; indeed, much of the cooperation (formal and informal) that exists in the delivery of services across the Syracuse-Onondaga community occurs in services that use a local delivery structure. But even with examples of collaboration, the local model is based on a disaggregated approach where local communities budget, fund, deliver and administer particular services at the municipal level. In most cases where service autonomy is granted at the local level, there is no requirement that governments collaborate in the delivery of the service.

Perceived Advantages

- Local control, choice and decision-making authority
- Local democracy and resident access to elected officials and department heads

- Ability to provide "personal" or more tailored types of services to residents
- Ability to provide different levels and types of services based on community desires
- More responsive to community / neighborhood concerns

Perceived Disadvantages

- Duplicative service delivery infrastructures, esp. at managerial level
- Lost economies of scale in procurement and capital planning
- Disaggregation of regional tax base concentrates local fiscal burden and makes certain investments cost prohibitive

Model 2: Hybrid

Under this model, a service is delivered at a geographic level greater than individual municipalities but less than the entire county / region. There are at least two basic models:

- **Inter-municipal,** where individual governments otherwise authorized to deliver a service independently have opted instead to deliver, administer and fund the service collaboratively. Tax assessment is an example – although 17 separate governments provide this service in the Syracuse-Onondaga community today, there is existing collaboration in that town governments provide the service for all villages. By contrast, there are portions of New York in which village governments still handle their own tax assessment. Further, the Syracuse-Onondaga community has three examples of consolidated multi-town assessment operations.

- **Sub-regional,** where essential services are delivered through a combination of municipal service providers and county government. Police is an example – the county operates a law enforcement agency (i.e. Onondaga County Sheriff) that has countywide jurisdiction and serves as primary agency in 14 towns and 3 villages. At the same time, there are 14 municipal-level law enforcement agencies serving specific portions of the county, including the City of Syracuse Police Department. The municipal departments are funded by taxes from only those municipalities they serve; by contrast, the Sheriff is funded on a countywide basis through taxes from all Onondaga County taxpayers.

Though hybrid models do not cover the entire region, they can serve as important building blocks for exploring more countywide service delivery by building on existing collaboration / service delivery infrastructure spanning multiple communities.

Perceived Advantages

- Mitigate some service duplication in neighboring jurisdictions, reducing the administrative and capital overhead that would otherwise be required
- Enlarged / joint tax base over which to spread expenditures
- Leveraging of existing commonalities and connections of neighboring jurisdictions

- Standardize delivery of complex services requiring specific expertise (e.g. tax assessment)

Perceived Disadvantages

- Loss of local control over service level
- Loss of some service level choice and differentiation among communities
- Reduced accountability as administrators and service providers are geographically further from constituents

Model 3: Countywide

Under this model, a service is delivered at the county level. Key distinguishing features include a unified service delivery infrastructure and administrative framework, and the spreading of costs across the entire county (as opposed to a disaggregated administrative framework and concentrated cost burdens on smaller geographic areas).

Several services are already provided on a countywide basis to the entire Syracuse-Onondaga community. Among them are social services and public / mental health, which are exclusively delivered and administered by county government pursuant to state law.

Just because a service is delivered by the county does not necessarily make it a regional service. For example, the county delivers law enforcement services, but that function is technically a "hybrid model" since it is simultaneously delivered by individual municipalities. In such cases the county's existing service delivery / administrative infrastructure may provide a stepping stone to regional service delivery.

Perceived Advantages

- Unified service delivery minimizes duplication
- Regional structures permit greater ability to address regional service needs and issues that transcend governmental boundaries
- Spreading costs over larger and more robust regional tax base
- Elimination of "deadheading" (i.e. delivery of common services that terminates at municipal borders yielding inefficiencies)

Perceived Disadvantages

- Moves service administration and decision-making further from constituent level
- Greater geographic distance between constituents and service administration
- Loss of local control and access to community-level department heads
- Loss of power to effect immediately local / neighborhood service issues
- Loss of "personal" forms of service
- "One size fits all" approach can minimize service differentiation

Summary of Alternative Models by Service Category			
Service	**Model 1: Local**	**Model 2: Hybrid**	**Model 3: Regional**
Tax Assessment	Does not appear feasible given that villages are already out of the tax assessment function. Shifting to this model would require village governments to create their own assessment infrastructure, including investments in professional expertise and specialized software.	Exists today but an expansion is feasible by creating new Coordinated Assessment Programs serving multiple jurisdictions and / or expanding the existing CAPs to include additional neighboring communities.	Would be feasible. At present there are three counties in New York State that deliver tax assessment services on a countywide basis – Nassau, Tompkins and Schuyler, although Schuyler's structure involves each town appointing the county assessor as its own.
Financial Administration (including purchasing)	Exists today.	Is feasible and could be implemented and enlarged over time through intermunicipal collaboration and shared services. Common tasks could be shared – e.g. payroll, purchasing, HR and benefits).	Is technically feasible, although there are challenges in maintaining local-level accountability, checks and balances over financial transactions through a regional framework that spans many individual governments. Further, the use of different financial software systems makes full administrative integration difficult.
Courts	Does not appear feasible given that every town already handles courts independently and, in the case of the 6 villages who do not have their own court, establishing one would require staffing, capital and facility investments both at startup and on a recurring basis.	Exists today but could be expanded further. The State's Uniform Justice Court Act, Section 106-a, authorizes two or more towns that form a contiguous geographic area within the same county to establish a single justice court with justices elected from each town.	Does not appear feasible under current state law, though a quasi-regional model could be envisioned in which municipal-level courts share common facilities and staff in strategically located sections of the County (e.g. quadrants). Such an arrangement would be further enabled by an expansion of the current hybrid model.

Summary of Alternative Models by Service Category
(continued)

Service	Model 1: Local	Model 2: Hybrid	Model 3: Regional
Code Enforcement	Exists today.	Is feasible and could be implemented and enlarged over time through town-village and town-town collaboration in providing code services in shared fashion.	Is technically feasible, though it could compromise individual local governments' desire to focus the enforcement function on specific issues of local concern. Under state law, the minimum required enforcement pertains to the Uniform Building Code. Municipalities can legally "opt out" of enforcing that, in which case state law requires the county government to handle enforcement functions.
Clerk	Exists today.	Is feasible, though the elected position and the role clerks often play as the municipality's primary public interface would complicate integration.	Would be less feasible as long as independent municipalities exist, since the clerk function is responsible for maintaining the books and documentation of each municipal government.
Social Services and Health	Not feasible, given role counties are required to play as primary administrator.	Not feasible, given role counties are required to play as primary administrator.	Exists today. Primary opportunities involve decisions at the state level regarding programmatic / benefit offerings and cost share.
Libraries	Would not be advisable to roll back the regionally collaborative model already in place.	Exists today.	May be feasible, though politically difficult in that local independent libraries may lose governance authority and, in some cases, current funding vehicles based on their legal structure. Efficiency improvements may be minimal, given the hybrid regional system already in place under OCPL.

Preliminary Committee Recommendations

The Municipal Operations Committee has developed the following preliminary recommendations regarding tax assessment, financial administration, courts, code enforcement, clerk, social services / health and library services. These have not yet been formally accepted by the full Commission.

Tax Assessment

1. Create new Coordinated Assessment Programs (CAPs) serving multiple towns and / or expand existing CAPs to include neighboring towns, since a reduced number of units would yield higher standardization, enable sharing of limited expertise across municipalities, mitigate succession challenges and sharing of "back office" capacity. Potential new CAPs might include:

   a. Expand Pompey-Fabius CAP to include Tully-Otisco-Spafford-Lafayette (combined 12,944 parcels)

   b. Expand Camillus-Elbridge CAP to include Marcellus-Skaneateles (combined 20,690 parcels)

   c. Create Geddes-Onondaga CAP (combined 16,960 parcels)

2. Create a centralized approach to tax certiorari lawsuit defense, since these proceedings often require specialized and costly legal counsel and create substantial burdens for smaller municipalities.

Financial Administration

1. Migrate local governments to a common financial accounting system with the goal of consolidating finance administration. A common financial accounting system would enable shared services and create efficiencies while improving effectiveness.

   a. The County is willing to host the PeopleSoft Enterprise Resource Planning application at no cost to municipalities. Municipalities would continue to administer their own finances and would incur implementation costs under this option.

   b. The County is willing to assume the financial administration function for municipalities under an intermunicipal agreement (IMA).

2. Centralize information technology to ensure at least a base level of service to all local governments in the Syracuse-Onondaga community.

<ol type="a" start="1">
Jointly purchase hardware / software, and provide information technology support via shared service.

Courts

1. Aggressively pursue shared services to reduce the number of separate justice courts in the County and serve larger populations.

2. Migrate remaining village courts into the court of their surrounding town to leverage common administrative and "back office" needs and resources.

3. Continue exploration of a regional court system.

Code Enforcement

1. Leverage opportunities to share "back office" functions across neighboring code offices.

2. Pursue shared / contracted code enforcement services between and among neighboring municipalities where development density, type and code issues are relatively similar.

3. Increase interaction between code enforcement officers in contiguous municipalities to ensure rational and consistent application of codes at municipal borders and "gateways."

4. Integrate code enforcement information into the Real Property Tax System.

5. Create an educational program for code enforcement officers to ensure adequate succession pool going forward. Training should be coordinated and centralized.

Clerk

1. Shared efforts to enhance information technology sophistication and deliver more services (e.g. licenses and permits) via the Web.

2. Shared digitalized system of public records with access to all municipalities.

Social Services and Health

1. The New York State Department of Health has taken over approximately 25% of the administrative function of Medicaid eligibility from Onondaga County. The state's intention is to take over all of Medicaid administration by March 2018. The state's current progress in this assumption of responsibilities appears to be well behind its established timeline. This move has allowed the County to reduce staffing in Medicaid. The local savings, however, is not commensurate with the total cost of the positions because of the state share of Medicaid costs.

The state has not announced any additional plans to assume responsibility for other public benefit programs. Once the Medicaid technology platform is completed, SNAP (Food Stamps) could logically be considered for takeover by the state since there is no face-to-face interview requirement.

Libraries

1. Create a statewide library card, waive library fines for children, and pursue opportunities for regional purchasing and material sharing within a broadened framework that includes libraries at higher education institutions.

Economic Development

WE CAN DO BETTER

The Economic Development Committee focused on the region's economic competitiveness, its nexus with local government services / policy, and the extent to which issues like land use and fiscal growth capacity (both of the Syracuse-Onondaga community as a whole and as individual communities) impact its ability to grow and thrive. Framing the Committee's work is the reality that, by any objective measure, economic performance in the Syracuse-Onondaga community continues to lag the state and nation.

- The employed labor force in Onondaga County is smaller today than it was in 1990, and that contraction has not been confined to the City – the City is down 23.5% in that period, while the suburbs are down 3.2%. The entire Syracuse-Onondaga community is down 9.5%, compared to 7.4% growth in the State and 23.2% growth nationally.

- Population growth in the Syracuse-Onondaga community has been anemic, and declines have not been confined to the City. Between 2000 and 2010, nineteen of the 35 municipalities in the County lost population. Since 1970, the entire Syracuse-Onondaga community has lost 0.9% of its population, compared to 8.2% growth in the State and 55.4% growth nationally.

- Despite population decline in the Syracuse-Onondaga community since 1970, urbanized land area over that time period has increased 92% such that fewer people are spread across a larger area and creating new infrastructure investment and maintenance demands that are borne by a smaller number of residents.

The challenged economic performance of the Syracuse-Onondaga community is validated by a host of rankings, including most recently Brookings Institution's Metro Monitor, which ranked the metropolitan area 294 out of the world's 300 largest in its economic performance over 2013-2014. According to Brookings, since the trough of the recession, the metropolitan area's combined performance on job growth, unemployment, output (i.e. gross product) and housing prices ranked 98 out of the nation's 100 largest metros. Further, since the trough of the recession,

- The total number of full- and part-time jobs in the Syracuse metropolitan area has increased 2.4%, roughly one-quarter the national growth rate; and

- The gross product output of the Syracuse metropolitan area has increased 6.1%, less than half the national growth rate.

Brookings' own work on the 2013 CenterState Agenda for Economic Opportunity found that "the CenterState region lags the nation in most critical indicators of economic performance" from 2000-2012, including change in economic output (11.8% vs. 19.7%),

change in employment (-0.8% vs. 1.3%), output per worker ($91.15 vs. $96.24), and household income ($39,660 vs. $49,200).

THE FISCAL REALITY FACING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

It is abundantly clear that all municipalities – not just those in the Syracuse-Onondaga community – face a fiscal imperative: As the cost of delivering public services rises, the need for each local government to have sustained, recurring revenue growth also rises.

But there are mitigating factors.

First, not all communities have the same "fiscal growth capacity," meaning some can offset cost increases more easily than others. One byproduct of this capacity differential across a region is the potential to create "pockets" of relative wealth and need from a local government standpoint, where some municipalities are capable of continuing to invest in services and offset cost growth, while others cannot.

Second, this shared imperative facing all local governments in the region creates the potential for an intra-regional competitive framework, a byproduct of which is "zero sum fiscal growth." That is, local governments have incentives to compete against one another for the same investment since the direct fiscal benefit is confined to whichever community "wins" it. This challenge is further exacerbated when economic investments migrate from one part of the region to another, as opposed to wholly new investments in the region.
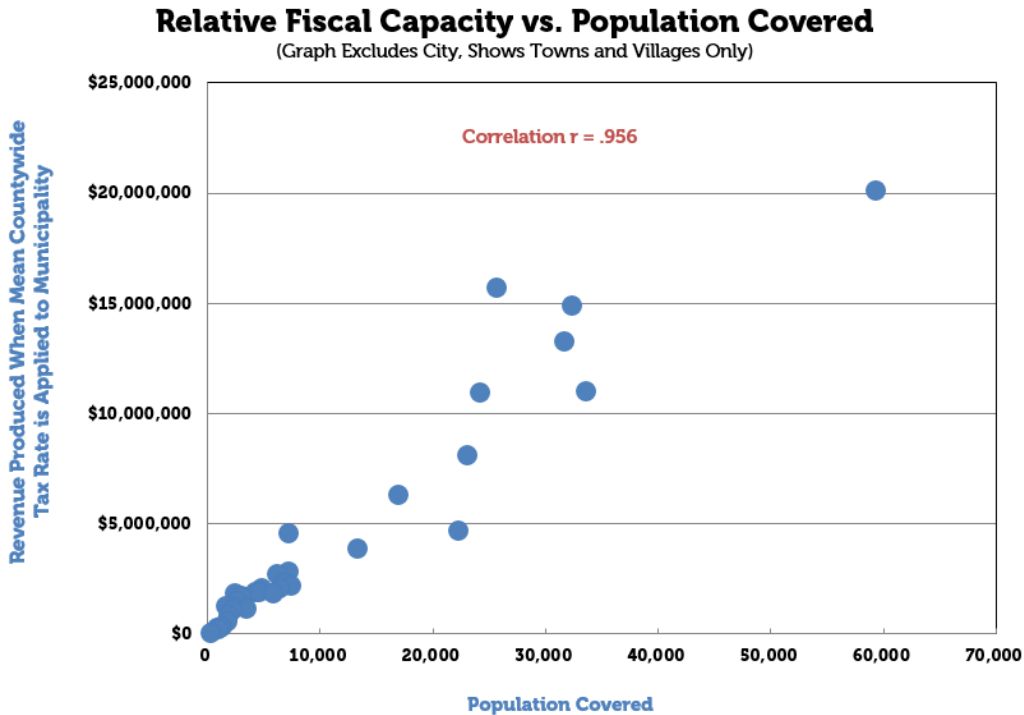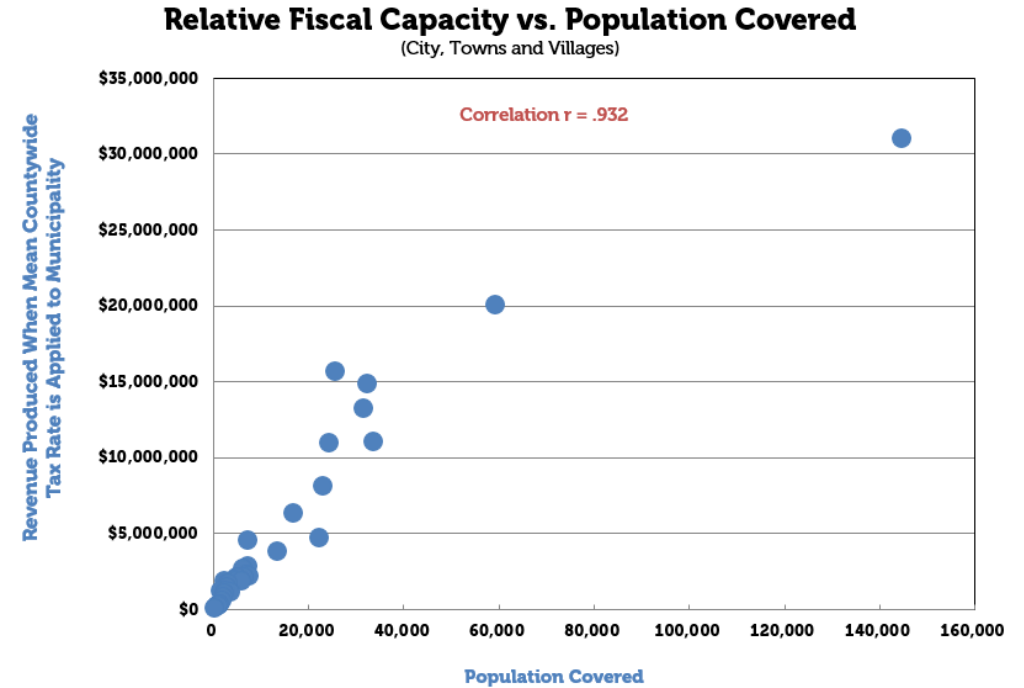
A community's fiscal growth capacity – its ability to grow its taxable base – is impacted by a host of factors. One may be the degree to which it is already built out; communities with less developable property have lower fiscal growth capacity. Another may be its distance from the region's core; communities that are further from the region's commercial corridors and transportation hubs may have lower fiscal growth capacity. Still another may be the degree to which a community wishes to remain undeveloped; areas that wish to retain "community character," greenspace or other natural public spaces and make policy decisions to do so create real financial impacts, one of which is opting to have lower fiscal growth capacity.

The Economic Development Committee examined fiscal growth capacities of the individual municipalities in the Syracuse-Onondaga community by applying a measure used in the Twin Cities Region[8] of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Known as "relative fiscal capacity," the measure plots municipalities within the region based on a calculation of the hypothetical revenue that would be produced if the mean countywide tax rate were applied to each municipality. The measure reflects the range of tax base capacities across the individual local tax bases in a region.

Within the Syracuse-Onondaga community, municipal tax base sizes (excluding the County itself) range from as small as $2 million to as large as $2.1 billion, a difference of

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[8] http://www.metrocouncil.org/Communities/Planning/Local-Planning-Assistance/Fiscal-Disparities.aspx

more than *seventy-nine thousand percent.* The same tax rate applied in these two different contexts, therefore, produces hugely different property tax revenue levels. The following graphics plot out relative fiscal capacity vs. population covered for municipalities in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. The first graphic includes the City plus all towns and villages; the second graphic shows only the towns and villages.

Relative Fiscal Capacity vs. Population Covered
(City, Towns and Villages)

Correlation r = .932

Relative Fiscal Capacity vs. Population Covered
(Graph Excludes City, Shows Towns and Villages Only)

Correlation r = .956

Not surprisingly, tax bases covering larger numbers of residents tend to be larger, and thus capable of producing more sheer dollars when the mean countywide property tax rate is applied in this hypothetical analysis. As important, however, is the capacity challenge facing those municipalities with a smaller relative property tax base. Where the base is smaller, overall capacity is lower, rates may need to be higher to generate the same amount of money than would otherwise be the case with a larger tax base, and the burden is concentrated on a smaller number of residents and property taxpayers.

UNEVEN REGIONAL GROWTH

Another factor impacting fiscal growth capacity is the rate of growth within a municipality. In order to assess growth patterns in the Syracuse-Onondaga community, the Economic Development Committee analyzed place-based residential building permit data from the U.S. Census Bureau for the period 2005-2014. This offers a proxy variable for where development has occurred at the fastest rate.

Over the entire period, countywide residential construction totaled approximately $1.3 billion. The Town of Clay ranked first with 17% of the total, followed in order by the Towns of Camillus (11%), Lysander (9%), Onondaga (8%), Cicero (7%), and the City of Syracuse (7%).

But as important as where this construction *occurred* is finding where it *did not occur.* Many local governments experienced little to none of that development, compromising their ability to offset cost increases and sustain essential services. Consider:

- 20 of the 35 municipalities in the Syracuse-Onondaga community had residential construction growth shares that represented less than 1% of the countywide total;

- 9 of the 35 municipalities had growth shares that were less than their share of the countywide population. The greatest disparity of this type was in the City of Syracuse, which, notwithstanding that it ranked 7th among all municipalities in the County with 7% of the construction value, has 31% of the countywide population; and

- Villages in the Syracuse-Onondaga community were generally not beneficiaries of new residential construction – 10 of the 15 villages claimed less than 1% of the countywide share, and 3 others claimed 1% each. This had the effect of keeping the average village property tax base capacity low and compromising villages' ability to offset cost increases and maintain critical services.

MINNESOTA'S SHARED GROWTH PROGRAM

The same fiscal imperatives and byproducts of intra-regional competition led the State of Minnesota to adopt the "Fiscal Disparities Program" in 1971 for the Minneapolis and St. Paul region. The core element of the program is a tax base sharing framework designed

to, first, create regional incentives to growth and second, to bridge differences in fiscal capacity.[9]

Under the program, 60% of all new growth in property tax base remains in the "host community," defined as the municipality in which the investment actually occurs. The other 40% of new growth in property tax base flows to a regionally shared pot that is distributed pursuant to formula. The "shared" pot grows over time as new investments are made anywhere in the region. Since 1971, the shared portion of that region's tax base has grown to represent more than one-third of the total commercial / industrial tax base, and 10% of the overall tax base (including residential).

The goals of Minnesota's program are cross-cutting:

- Shifting economic development within the region away from a "zero sum fiscal growth" framework, and into one that is more collectively beneficial;

- Providing a way for local governments to share in resources generated by the region's growth without removing any existing resources they already have; and

- Bridging fiscal capacity gaps among communities in the region.

Under Minnesota's system, the shared portion of the tax base is distributed by formula to municipalities based on their respective fiscal capacity, defined as equalized market value per capita. This means that:

- A municipality whose fiscal capacity is <u>equal to</u> the regional average gets a payout equal to its share of total population;

- A municipality whose fiscal capacity is <u>greater than</u> the regional average gets a payout that is smaller; and

- A municipality whose fiscal capacity is <u>less than</u> the regional average gets a payout that is larger.

An analysis of market values per capita within the Syracuse-Onondaga community finds that the net recipients of such a tax sharing arrangement – that is, those with the lowest market values per capita – would be the City of Syracuse and the majority of village governments within the County.

It is important to note that under the Minnesota framework, market values per capita are regularly recalculated and over time some net recipients become net contributors. Such was the case with the City of Minneapolis itself, which has become a net contributor over time.

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[9] http://www.metrocouncil.org/Communities/Planning/Local-Planning-Assistance/Fiscal-Disparities.aspx

LAND USE PLANNING

The land use and planning function is spread across all of the County's municipalities. Generally speaking, there are three boards per municipality involved in planning and zoning-related decisions. Jurisdiction varies by municipality, but most typically **municipal boards** handle zoning changes, ordinance changes, local laws, comprehensive plan adoptions, moratoriums and, occasionally, subdivisions; **planning boards** are responsible for site plans, subdivisions, special permits, recommendations to the municipal boards on certain actions, and appeals of administrative decisions; and **zoning boards of appeals** adjudicate use and area variances and, occasionally, special permits. Municipal boards are elected; planning and zoning boards are generally appointed by the municipal board.

The disaggregation of these functions across all local governments requires professional / paid staff capacity in each. At the town and village level, planning staff work and budgeting often occurs alongside code enforcement activities, and staff capacity is sometimes shared across the two functions. The level of staff work is highly dependent on the caseload, which varies greatly by community – some boards see less than 10 cases per year, while others review hundreds. Some planning and zoning board members are paid, while in other communities they are not. Boards also generally retain attorneys and engineers to advise on matters than come before them.

In total, we estimate that more than 550 board members are involved in land use and planning activities across Onondaga County – nearly 200 municipal board members, 195 planning board members, and 169 zoning board members. Each municipality possesses its own zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations, and other local laws / ordinances related to planning. Each is also required to promulgate and enforce its own ordinances and policies (though state General Municipal Law dictates that public notice must be given to neighboring municipalities of certain planning and zoning actions).

This disaggregation of planning and zoning powers countywide creates challenges. Notwithstanding that part of SOCPA's (Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency) mission is to coordinate countywide planning activities and cooperate on local planning matters, the reality is that the Syracuse-Onondaga community lacks an enforceable regional land use plan. And most importantly, the absence of an enforceable regional land use plan has exacerbated the incentives to engage in zero sum fiscal growth throughout the County. In addition to encouraging intra-regional competition, it has also resulted in urbanization and new infrastructure development despite the County's overall stagnant population.

For example, from 2001-2008, while population remained essentially flat the Syracuse-Onondaga community added:

- 144 miles of new water mains;
- 57,201 feet of new sewer lines; and
- 61 miles of new road.

Within the 1990s, the Syracuse-Onondaga community's urbanized area grew by approximately 50 square miles.

Increase in Urbanized Area vs. Population Growth, 1950-2000
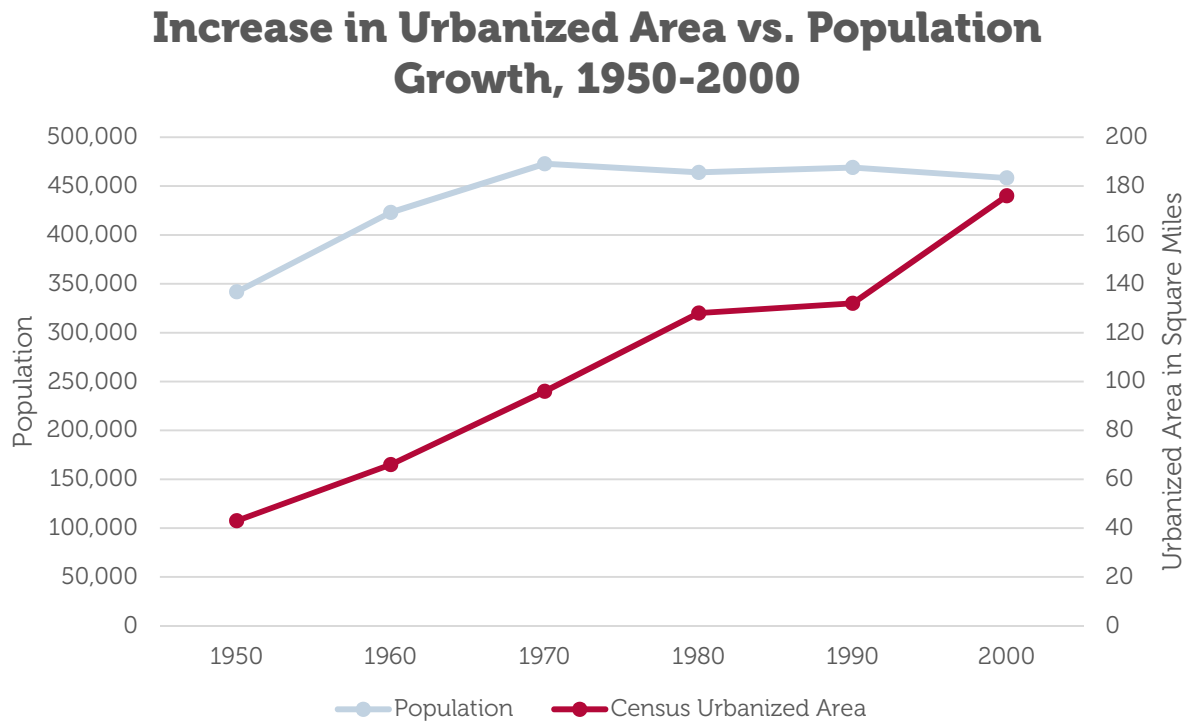
PRELIMINARY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Economic Development Committee has developed the following preliminary recommendations. These have not yet been formally accepted by the full Commission.

Fiscal Connections

1. Create a countywide shared tax base framework modeled on Minnesota's Fiscal Disparities Program designed to:

   a. Reinforce the regional benefits of economic development;

   b. Mitigate the fiscal imperatives to development facing every municipality; and

   c. Incentivize future development into developed parts of the region in a way that preserves fiscal benefit for all municipalities.

> 2. Establish a regional land use plan that provides for consistent and enforceable planning on a countywide basis. Provide for countywide coordination among municipalities' individual land use plans. Retain zoning and planning functions within individual municipalities but leverage the regional plan to ensure consistency and most effectively encourage growth in a way that optimizes existing infrastructure and urbanized area, and reduces the creation of new infrastructure that will require ongoing maintenance and long-term investment.
>
> 3. Combine the City and County Industrial Development Agencies and economic development offices.

Governance

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE: EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

The Governance Committee focused on the overall structure of local government in the Syracuse-Onondaga community – its boundaries, how responsibilities are allocated across levels of government, and similarities / differences across local governments – in order to assess the degree to which *structure* impacts *efficiency and effectiveness.* In particular, the Committee considered how the current structure helps or hinders the ability of the Syracuse-Onondaga community to make *policy* and *manage investments* that are in the overall *community's* best interest.

Several key themes emerged in the Governance Committee's discussions:

- The broader impacts on the Syracuse-Onondaga community of population loss and stagnation;

- The local fragmentation of service delivery, administrative responsibility, and policy making authority on certain issues that are truly countywide in nature;

- The fiscal and service sustainability of the City of Syracuse, which serves as the region's economic engine and population hub; and

- The similarly of function and scale that exists between the City and County governments.

As with the Economic Development Committee, the Governance Committee's work was framed by a reality that, by any objective measure, economic performance in the Syracuse-Onondaga community has lagged for at least a generation. A smaller employed

labor force, higher levels of poverty and stagnant population growth have increased the management challenge for local government officials and concentrated the cost burden on those residents and businesses who remain.

So, too has the emergence of confounding policy challenges that, in very real ways, are cross-cutting and transcend municipal boundaries. Issues like poverty, economic development and unemployment do not stop at the City's edge, but rather affect other parts of the County in fundamental ways.

Yet, our structures are not always designed to address such dynamic challenges (nor capitalize on our regional assets) in truly regional ways. The County and City's current boundaries date to 1825; the towns' and villages' to as far back as the late 1700s. Although over the years lines have been adjusted, and municipal powers and responsibilities reconfigured, the reality is that the basic structure of local government we have in place today is nearly two centuries old. The needs, challenges and opportunities facing the Syracuse-Onondaga community have changed radically since.

The Consensus process, and the work of the Commission on Local Government Modernization, offers a focused opportunity to examine those structures and have a robust and engaging community dialogue about what makes the most sense for the Syracuse-Onondaga community going forward.

WHY DO PLACES EXPLORE THE IDEA OF "THINKING BIGGER"?

To inform its deliberations, the Governance Committee interviewed representatives of a number of communities in the U.S. that have pursued high profile regional government innovations in the past half-century, including Indianapolis, Minneapolis and Louisville, and found that there are a number of consistent rationales that drive the push to "think bigger" and beyond municipal-level structures.

- **Cost Savings:** Efforts are often motivated in part by a desire to realize efficiency savings through the elimination (or mitigation) of duplicative structures, services and positions.

- **Economic Imperatives:** Efforts are often motivated by a desire to promote regional competition and shift the community paradigm from one of intra-regional local competition to one where the entire region can more effectively compete with other regions in the country and around the world.

- **Policy Realities:** Efforts are often motivated by a realization that policy issues – especially those that bear most strongly on a region's economic health and well-being – no longer stop at centuries-old municipal boundaries.

- **Fiscal Connections:** Efforts are often motivated by data that evidence the economic ties between urban cores and their surrounding suburban and rural communities. Research suggests that, on balance, healthier cities beget healthier

suburbs, and that there is a positive statistical relationship between changes in suburban and urban per capita personal income.

A SYRACUSE-ONONDAGA STORY, NOT JUST A CITY STORY

Since 1970, Onondaga County's population growth has lagged that of New York State and the nation. In raw numbers and rate, the greatest population decline during that period has been in the City of Syracuse. As a result, the City's share of total County population has fallen substantially since 1970, declining from 42% to 31%. However, the City has not been the only community to lose residents. From 2000 to 2010, *less than half* of the municipalities in the Syracuse-Onondaga community experienced population growth. Nineteen municipalities – including the City, 7 (of 19) towns and 11 (of 15) villages – experienced declines.

With the loss of population, of course, comes fiscal stress. That stress has been greatest in the City of Syracuse where its countywide share of property tax base decreased from 22% in 1996 to 17% in 2013. Over that timeframe, the City's real taxable assessed value has contracted by approximately 17%, compounded by the concentration of much of the Syracuse-Onondaga community's tax-exempt property within the City.

As noted, there is strong evidence in the regional economics research that a city's economic health impacts that of its surrounding suburbs. That is, suburbs that surround an economically healthier central city tend to have higher economic performance and median incomes than those that surround economically struggling cities. The data on job growth and fiscal stability strongly suggest this relationship is at work in the Syracuse-Onondaga community. Consider: The size of the employed labor force in *both* the City *and* the suburbs of the Syracuse-Onondaga community has not only lagged the state and nation, but is actually *down* in the past 25 years. The City is down 23.5% over that period, and the suburbs are down 3.2%.

The fiscal, service and social challenges facing the City of Syracuse – and many of its urban peers in New York and across the nation – are well-documented. But in the face of data showing population loss and job contraction in many of the *suburbs,* it becomes increasingly difficult to write off the challenges facing the Syracuse-Onondaga community as simply a "city story." They are, in very real ways, a "Syracuse-Onondaga community story."

A POLICY MOTIVATION TO "THINK BIGGER"

The Governance Committee observed a number of key themes which became clear both through its work and the work of other Committees:

- First, our local government boundaries are, in many cases, too local to deal with issues that are truly regional in nature;

- Second, to address many of the bigger challenges facing our region, there is a need to think / act / make policy over a broader geographic area; and

- Third, our current fragmented approach yields smaller individual tax bases that make critical investments (esp. infrastructure) more difficult and cost prohibitive, and contribute to deferred maintenance.

There is a *policy* motivation to thinking bigger.

A FISCAL MOTIVATION TO "THINK BIGGER"

The Governance Committee also considered the long-term fiscal stability of the Syracuse-Onondaga community a fundamental challenge to be addressed. When the actual expenditure trends for the period 2004 to 2013 for all local governments in the Syracuse-Onondaga community are projected forward at their current rate versus a revenue cap of two percent, 20 of our 35 municipalities (excluding the County) find themselves in deficit situations over the next decade *absent any other action.*

There is a *fiscal* motivation to thinking bigger.

PRELIMINARY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Governance Committee has developed the following preliminary recommendations. These have not yet been formally accepted by the full Commission.

Creating Regional Governance Capacity

The systemic challenges facing our community call for systemic solutions. And the process of modernizing how we "do" local government will require systemic change on the part of all our governments: County, City, Towns and Villages. Under the preliminary committee recommendations contained in this report, including those in this Governance section, every unit of government will bear the challenge of change – in how we make policy, deliver critical services and plan for the future.

And with regard to Governance, these are **process recommendations.** They offer the Syracuse-Onondaga community an opportunity to take immediate steps to strengthen our urban core, while creating a pathway to evolve to a model whereby we govern, deliver services, make policy and compete as **one community,** rather than three dozen separate communities.

1. Establish a process toward creating a new city-county government and service delivery structure that leverages the functional and scale similarities of the region's two largest local governments – the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County. Together they represent approximately 85% of all local government spending in the community. As the region's two largest local governments, the City and County can and should be leaders in this process.

   - A functional mapping review of the City and County finds that there is at least $111 million in City budget appropriations that overlap with a

comparable function in County government. Of those, there is approximately $20 million in potential cost elimination through combination of governance, administrative and service delivery infrastructure over time.

- As the City and County take the lead on this initial recommendation, it is vitally important to bear in mind that the additional recommendations detailed in this report represent a paradigm shift in the delivery of services at the Town and Village levels as well. Every unit and level of local government will bear the challenge of change, and we cannot ignore the fiscal realities facing our suburban partners. A host of Town and Village officials clearly and directly expressed to Consensus that the balance of current services with projected resources has grown dangerously tenuous in light of economically- and tax cap-challenged revenues.

- For this reason, there must be a formal mechanism and defined process whereby towns and villages in the Syracuse-Onondaga community can join the new city-county framework over time – an "opt-in" process whereby they can join by a vote of the constituents in that municipality. Fiscal pressure on towns and villages will continue to grow, making it likely some will opt in over the near term. Each opt in will represent an additional investment in governing, delivering services, making policy and competing as **one community**.

  The model of leading with the City and County as the region's largest local governments has precedent in communities like Indianapolis – notwithstanding its "Unigov" city-county structure, more than a dozen towns and excluded cities elected to retain some or all of their governing and service delivery autonomy.

- It is imperative that we ensure these changes are inclusive and respect the voices of our diverse communities. This is especially important for traditionally underrepresented constituencies. Ensuring a place for all at the new regional table is key to our overall success. The experiences of Indianapolis, Jacksonville and Nashville – where the minority community's representative share of governing body seats increased in the years following consolidation – prove these changes can enhance the voice and leadership of traditionally underrepresented communities.

2. Vest this new government with responsibility for specific regional matters, including administering the regional land use plan, overseeing major infrastructure planning and economic development planning using a countywide model that is similar in form and function to the Twin Cities' Metropolitan Council in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota (http://www.metrocouncil.org/).

Empowering Local Leadership and Vision through Mandate Relief

We also need the commitment of state government to being a willing partner in our modernization. Not only in relieving our local governments of costly mandates, but actively empowering efforts to help ourselves and supporting our efforts to carve out a more positive direction for our community.

Government officials in the Syracuse-Onondaga community cannot effectively confront our economic, service and fiscal challenges within a statutory framework that mandates certain activities and prohibits the flexibility to do others. As we make recommendations to help our region from within, we also seek to develop a new relationship with partners at other levels of government. At a minimum, the Syracuse-Onondaga community needs relief from the following statutory inhibitors to effective and efficient governance:

- The Taylor Law and Triborough Amendment;
- The Wicks Law;
- The Medicaid funding framework which splits costs with counties;
- The absence of defined contribution pension options for public employees;
- The absence of a strong "ability to pay" criterion in binding arbitration;
- The ability of local governments to procure more cost-effective services through the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services model;
- Costly Civil Service provisions including 207a and 207c; and
- A justice court system that is procedurally cumbersome and from which the state is taking an increasing share of local fines and fees.

Conclusion

For too long, the Syracuse-Onondaga community has struggled. That struggle has compromised economic opportunity for our residents, created significant hardships for many of our neighbors, and strained our local governments. As troubling, it has shrunk the promise of opportunity for our children and grandchildren, increasing the likelihood that they will be forced to start their families and careers elsewhere – or for many, continue to live in poverty.

Although pockets of our community have held their own, the simple fact is that a region performing well only in pockets is not a region performing well overall. Economic and demographic data tell us that the challenges facing our region are systemic and transcend all levels of local government – County, City, Towns and Villages. Those challenges call for bold, systemic solutions that can offer a foundation for a stronger and more vibrant future.

There are many reasons the Syracuse-Onondaga community has struggled to compete for the past two generations. And it would be wrong to blame a local government system that has persevered despite incredibly challenging financial circumstances.

But it would be equally wrong to conclude that local government cannot play a lead role in pursuing the bold actions that are required to change our community's trajectory. Indeed, they've demonstrated an ability to innovate and improve both service delivery and cost-

efficiency over the years. We now call on them to do more.

Change is hard, but change we must. The preliminary recommendations in this report require change from each and every unit of local government. Some changes are bold and dramatic and likely to generate significant debate. Others are more subtle, but equally necessary. Some changes can and should be made quickly. Others will take years.

These changes are about greater competitiveness, economic growth, fiscal sustainability, preservation of high quality services and building capacity. And although they are not exclusively about saving money, we know there are clear savings opportunities in the recommendations contained in this report. With greater efficiency will come greater cost effectiveness.

Certain savings opportunities will be subject to the manner and pace of implementation, of course. But it is reasonable to believe that these preliminary recommendations are capable of producing savings in the range of $40 million overall, or the rough equivalent of more than $200 per household in the Syracuse-Onondaga community.

We know these changes cannot happen overnight. Nor will they be easily achieved. The experiences of peer communities nationwide that have paved the path of modernization tell us as much. Changes of this magnitude require effort, difficult decisions, and a

willingness to challenge a "that's the way we've always done things" mentality.

Much as our challenges transcend every level and unit of government, so too must the solutions. These changes will require our well-intentioned public servants to take the risk associated with bold leadership. History tells us we can come together as a community to produce positive change – change built on a cooperative spirit, change that recognizes our similarities are deeper than our differences, and change that ensures every resident and constituency a voice at our regional table.

The next step in this process is yours. This report is intended to launch a robust public engagement process. The conversation the Syracuse-Onondaga community will have in the coming months is as important as any we have had.

We need to hear from you. It matters not whether you support or oppose

our findings and preliminary recommendations. What matters is that you engage and help us understand why. Your voice is critically important over the coming months. Please take the opportunity to engage – through a public forum, letter to the editor, feedback to the Commission via our website (www.consensuscny.com), or other medium.

Our goal, following what we hope will be an engaging and powerful community conversation on these issues, is to incorporate your feedback and issue the Commission's final recommendations early in 2016.

We can do better. And we know that, working together, we will make this vision for the Syracuse-Onondaga community even better and more reflective of what we all desire for our region.

Our future deserves nothing less.

The Commission

For additional information on the Commission on Local Government Modernization, its members and its work, as well as to submit feedback, visit the Commission's website at:

www.consensuscny.com

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