

CITY OPERATIONS

Tuesday, June 23, 2026 – 6:10 p.m.

Council Chambers – Olean Municipal Building

Present: Members: Chairman Bennion, Vice Chairman Anastasia, Alderman Keary, Alderman Crawford, and Alderman McCall. Others: Alderman Robinson; Mayor Amy Sherburne; Michael Morgan, City Attorney; Allison Barnish, City Auditor; Keri Kerper, Community Development Program Coordinator; James Sprague, Director of Public Works, and Tiffany Taylor, Managerial Confidential Administrative Secretary.

1. Roll Call

Alderman Robinson called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m. and asked that the record show that all committee members were present.

2. Approval of Minutes of the Previous Committee Meeting (Tuesday, June 9, 2026)

A motion to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2026 committee meeting was made by Alderman Bennion, seconded by Alderman Keary. Voice vote, ayes all. Motion carried.

3. Unfinished Business

a. Front Street Railroad Underpass and Queen Street Pedestrian Crossing

Director Sprague explained he has obtained guidance from the Department of Transportation relative to the early warning system and placards. He explained their guidance recommends that we start with a dynamic warning system first, and then if that does not work, add additional warning methods later. He explained he has identified the company Tapco, who is a well-established traffic control device corporation who has a complete package for a dynamic warning system. He explained he recommends that through Ms. Kerper and the railroad, we proceed with our arrangements with the railroad to get this installed. Alderman Bennion asked what the system is, and Director Sprague explained it is a laser beam before the bridge. He explained an over-height vehicle would break the beam and trip warning lights between the laser beam and the bridge. He explained it also involves a series of warning signs illuminated with flashing warning lights. He explained we can also add lights on the bridge, and he would recommend asking that the bridge be repainted safety yellow so hopefully it shows better. He explained the key issue is to ensure we position the systems so the over-height vehicle has a place to turn around so traffic jams aren't occurring on Front Street. He explained he thinks he knows where to position this farther to the north on Front Street to allow a vehicle to turn down side streets before approaching the bridge. Alderman Bennion asked if this would be placed on the south side of the street as well and Director Sprague explained it can be installed on both sides.

Alderman Bennion asked about the pedestrian tunnel lighting, and Director Sprague explained the railroad is going to light the tunnel. Alderman Bennion explained they will be installing netting to prevent rocks and pedestrians from falling, and asked if they will be able to tie into our poles for the lighting. Director Sprague explained they should be able to tie into the new pole we put in. Alderman Bennion explained he wants to be clear that, although the Council received a memo that it is the responsibility of the City, the railroad has agreed to pay for these things. Mr. Morgan explained we would certainly welcome this, but noted that based on our agreement, this is voluntary, not required. Alderman Bennion explained they will be paying for this with leftover funds they have and we will not be paying anything. Ms. Kerper explained they have funding leftover from a DOT TAP grant, and explained it was never the railroad's intention for the City to pay anything.

Alderman Bennion asked that the City follow up with the railroad and report back to the Council when this work might commence, and asked to follow up on this during committee meetings in one month.

b. Ash Tree Reimbursement Issue

Alderman Robinson explained we have been stating in prior meetings that we fully funded the ash tree fund, but it was only funded for a little more than \$68,000. He explained the Council was all given notification about the amount of trees that were removed and that are left, and explained that all ash trees regardless of where they were in the City were removed using this funding. He explained the ones in the right-of-way were paid for half by the City with the other half being paid by the property owner in accordance with the City's tree policy. He explained City employees were instructed to hold off on billing property owners for their half until the Council decided how to move forward. He explained we now need to move forward and instruct DPW to go ahead and bill to have the funding reimbursed for the property owner's half.

Alderman McCall explained she had a couple residents talk to her about their frustrations that there are other dangerous trees out there besides ash trees. She explained she would like to discuss trees that need to come down in Oak Hill Park and the RFP for a tree contractor. Alderman Bennion asked if the reimbursement from property owners will go back into the ash tree funding, and Alderman Robinson explained it should, as it originally came out of that capital fund. He explained we are following the City's policy that property owners pay half and the City pays half. Alderman Bennion explained he doesn't necessarily agree with this, as the capital fund was created to take out and remove all ash trees, and he feels these trees are outside of the policy.

Alderman Anastasia asked why the City decided to cut down all ash trees, and Director Sprague explained it is due to the Emerald Ash Borer. Alderman Bennion explained it was originally started under Director Thompson, and the idea was to remove all ash trees in every publically-owned

space. Alderman Anastasia explained with that knowledge he agrees that residents should not have to pay half. Alderman Robinson explained he does not think property owners should have to pay for trees at all, but the tree program says they are paying half and nothing says that the City is paying for 100% of the cost to remove ash trees. Alderman Crawford explained he recalls setting money aside to take care of ash trees on the inventory list, and Alderman Bennion explained the right-of-way trees were included in that list.

Alderman Robinson explained we either need to bill for the 13 trees that we are holding the bills for, or we need to reimburse those who have already paid half. Alderman McCall explained she thinks trees in the subway should be the City's responsibility. She explained if we indeed had complaints on those trees and they were damaged then she can see the property owner paying half. She explained if we took down perfectly healthy trees then she is not in agreement. She explained the tree board needs to meet and review this. She explained if those trees had damage and had complaints and needed to come down, then they could follow the tree program.

Ms. Kerper explained her office worked very hard to get funding to do a tree inventory and management plan. She explained there is a lot of funding out there to assist with this. She explained we need to keep the inventory updated and apply to the DEC for funding as they constantly have funding available for maintenance. She explained if we have everything in place then we will not need to keep funding like this, and we could get money and only pay a percentage with the local share to get this taken care of.

Alderman Robinson explained when you change the rules in the middle of something, there is going to be a quagmire. Alderman Crawford explained he understands in principle where one could say the City should be paying 100%, but we are how far through this and have been having property owners paying half for this long, so we should keep moving along in this manner. He explained if we actually have people asking about ash trees and why they had to pay half to have it removed.

A motion to direct the Department of Public Works to bill property owners for half the cost of removal of ash trees in the right-of-way was made by Alderman Crawford, seconded by Alderman McCall. Voice vote, ayes all except Aldermen Bennion and Anastasia, who voted no. Motion carried.

4. New Referrals for Consideration

a. Fifth Avenue Fire Hydrant Restoration

Director Sprague explained we have a fire hydrant on Fifth Avenue that was replaced, and we need to do some lawn restoration. He explained we had a contentious interaction with a homeowner and were told to get off of his property, and we have not done the restoration yet.

Alderman Bennion explained Casella hit a hydrant in October, and we replaced it with the wrong size hydrant so we had to go in, in March to put the correct hydrant in. He explained the lawn was left unrestored. He explained in May the property owner reached out to him and he called the DPW office to see when someone would be able to meet with him to discuss the complaint from the property owner. He explained an employee came over and there was a conversation with the homeowner who had a City-owned excavator sitting on his sidewalk, causing damage. He explained he was told by DPW that it was his responsibility to fix the sidewalk, and explained he was told multiple different things on different occasions. He explained because of the confusion he did tell the employee to get off his property but at no point did he threaten any City employee. He explained the property owner is just asking when it is going to be fixed. He explained he does not know why it has taken so long to restore the property, and he understands why residents get upset. He asked if there is a timeline for this to be done, and Director Sprague explained at the current moment there is not. He explained he can work with the Water Department tomorrow to get an update on when this can be done. Alderman Robinson asked if we are just fixing the grass, and Alderman Bennion explained this work was done on personal property and when the excavator was on the sidewalk, it sunk the sidewalk blocks. He explained one thing that made this property owner upset was that he was told the City was not on his sidewalk, but he clearly has a photo of a City-owned excavator on his sidewalk. He explained he will look forward to an update, because there was quite some time when the property owner had not heard anything.

5. Committee Reports

None

6. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Alderman Bennion, seconded by Alderman McCall. Voice vote, ayes all. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:45 p.m.