

THE GENEVA CITY COUNCIL

JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING

February 17, 2026 – 7:00 PM  
City Hall – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room  
47 Castle Street  
Geneva, NY 14456

Presiding – Jim Cecere, Mayor

.1. ROLL CALL:

Present: Clr. Brennan, Clr. Kaim, Clr. Petropoulos, Clr. Gillotte, Clr. Lavin, Clr. Gummoie,  
Clr. Grimaldi  
Absent: Clr. Whitfield

2. PRESENTATION- DPW Briefing

Joe Venuti, Director of Public Works, introduced himself to the Mayor and Council, noting that he is a lifelong resident with a background in heavy highway construction who returned to the city in 2020 and was honored to be selected as Director. He expressed pride in the Public Works team and their commitment to serving the community. Public Works is the city's largest department in both budget and staffing, managing about \$8 million across the General, Water, and Sewer Funds—roughly 30% of the city's \$22 million operating budget. The department is organized into divisions aligned with those funds but operates collaboratively, with 50.5 full-time equivalent employees across management and three union groups. The General Fund supports engineering, highway maintenance, code enforcement, and buildings and grounds; the Water Fund oversees water treatment and distribution; and the Sewer Fund covers sewer maintenance and wastewater treatment.

The Engineering Division, a small three-person team at City Hall, manages project design, grant administration, capital planning, and customer service while handling thousands of inquiries each year. Highway and Sewer Maintenance staff maintain 82 miles of streets and the sanitary sewer system serving about 4,300 customers, along with thousands of storm and sanitary structures and a fleet of more than 100 vehicles and equipment units. Code Enforcement staff enforce local ordinances and state building codes to protect public safety, while the Buildings and Parks Division maintains

city facilities, parks, and cemeteries through custodial work, maintenance, and groundskeeping. The Water Treatment Plant staff operate facilities including an 1887 filtration plant, a five-million-gallon reservoir, and a pumping station to produce safe drinking water, while the Water Maintenance Division oversees more than 60 miles of water mains serving about 4,500 customers and maintaining hundreds of hydrants and valves.

Much of the city's infrastructure is aging, with some water mains more than 100 years old. On average, the city experiences 30–35 water main breaks per year, with each repair costing about \$10,000 per day. Break frequency can fluctuate depending on weather and infrastructure conditions, and 2026 began above average due to prolonged cold weather and ground frost. The city replaces water mains during major reconstruction projects, such as the recent \$4.1 million Lafayette Avenue project, though replacing the entire 82-mile system would require major long-term investment. The city is testing coated ductile iron pipe to improve durability in the region's corrosive soil. Meanwhile, the wastewater treatment plant—originally built in 1972 and upgraded over time—treats about one billion gallons of wastewater annually, while the water treatment plant produces roughly 640 million gallons of drinking water each year. Public Works staff remain on call around the clock to maintain these essential systems, though much of their work goes unnoticed when infrastructure functions properly.

Looking ahead, priorities for 2026 include advancing capital projects, maintaining reliable water and wastewater operations, addressing aging infrastructure, and continuing data-driven planning despite challenges such as inflation, equipment failures, and severe weather. Projects underway or planned include water main improvements on Castle and Clinton Streets, structural evaluation of the water treatment plant's slow sand filter, construction of a lakefront gazebo, replacement of the Middle Street Bridge with support from a \$1 million BridgeNY grant, and ongoing sewer cleaning and lining programs. The city is also evaluating long-term solutions for its streetlight system after widespread driver failures in LED fixtures installed through a grant program.

Streetlight repairs have become costly because although parts can be relatively inexpensive, labor requires multiple workers and specialized equipment. Around 15% of the lights failed in 2023, offsetting the roughly \$100,000 the city had saved by bringing maintenance in-house in 2017. With warranties expiring and failures increasing, officials are considering options such as replacing fixtures entirely, outsourcing maintenance again, adding staff, or exploring shared service agreements with nearby municipalities. The broader discussion highlighted that Public Works often operates in a reactive mode due to aging infrastructure and limited staffing, though the department benefits from strong regional cooperation for equipment and emergency support.

The Director concluded by thanking Public Works staff for their dedication during recent severe weather and infrastructure emergencies, with council members expressing appreciation for employees who worked around the clock. City officials emphasized that while budgets and capital plans are based on expected infrastructure lifespans, flexibility is necessary to respond to unexpected events such as water main breaks,

equipment failures, and harsh winters. They also noted that many grant-funded projects take years to begin, and inflation can significantly increase costs by the time construction starts. Overall, the discussion underscored the importance of long-term planning, proactive investment, and strategic prioritization to maintain aging infrastructure and reliable public services.

### 3. PRESENTATION - Major Infrastructure and Capital Projects Overview

Comptroller Adam Blowers presented: The City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is a multi-year planning tool used to guide major infrastructure investments such as streets, water and sewer systems, and city facilities. Developed collaboratively by city departments during the annual budget process, the plan typically looks five years ahead while also tracking longer-term infrastructure needs. Its purpose is to prioritize projects based on service needs and community goals, align those projects with available funding and grant opportunities, and provide transparency and predictable planning. The program also helps spread the cost of large projects over time through responsible borrowing, while remaining flexible so it can be updated each year as conditions and priorities change.

To finance capital projects, the City relies on several funding tools. Bond Anticipation Notes (BANs) provide short-term borrowing while projects are underway and are later converted into long-term bonds once final project costs are known. General Obligation Bonds are used for completed capital projects, while Water and Sewer Revenue Bonds are supported by utility revenues. The City also pursues grants and state funding, such as CHIPS, whenever possible to reduce the amount that must be borrowed. Officials emphasized that projects are not permanently bonded until they are completed so that the City only borrows the amount actually required.

The City currently maintains a strong AA- bond rating with a stable outlook, which allows it to secure favorable interest rates. Only about 13 percent of the City's constitutional debt limit is currently used, indicating there is borrowing capacity, although officials stressed that having capacity does not necessarily mean the City can afford to use it. Debt-to-revenue ratios remain within recommended ranges across the general, water, and sewer funds. Council members and staff also discussed the importance of developing additional debt metrics, such as cost per taxpayer and long-term debt trends, to better evaluate sustainability over time.

The capital plan for 2026 was originally expected to require approximately \$15 million in borrowing, but after reevaluating project timing and readiness the anticipated borrowing has been reduced to about \$5 million. Key priorities for the year include street reconstruction and resurfacing, water system improvements such as meter upgrades, sewer infrastructure maintenance, and upgrades at the water treatment plant. Replacement of a fire apparatus is also planned but will now be supported by grant

funding rather than borrowing. Some projects were postponed due to readiness issues, timing of grants, or regulatory uncertainty.

Looking ahead from 2027 through 2030, the City plans to continue focusing on coordinated reconstruction of streets and underground utilities, ongoing sewer maintenance, water system upgrades, improvements to parks and the lakefront, and the use of state CHIPS funding for resurfacing projects. Officials noted that the project list may shift depending on emergencies, infrastructure failures, grant opportunities, or other changing conditions.

Overall, the discussion emphasized the need to balance significant infrastructure needs with sustainable borrowing practices. City leadership highlighted that debt levels must remain aligned with fiscal capacity, particularly in the context of a limited or shrinking taxpayer base. Maintaining strong financial management is important for protecting the City's bond rating and keeping borrowing costs low, while flexibility remains essential due to inflation, aging infrastructure, and unexpected failures. The conversation also underscored the importance of regional cooperation and shared services as ways to manage costs while continuing to invest in essential infrastructure and maintain reliable city services.

#### 4. ADJOURNMENT

**ACTION TAKEN by Clr. Petropoulos; seconded by Clr. Gillotte  
MOVED THAT the meeting be adjourned at 7:56pm  
MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (8-1 absent)**

*Alicia Jean*  
Deputy City Clerk