

As a reminder, the OLWMC is a local development corporation, made up of 3 members with representative from the Town of Owasco, the City of Auburn, and Cayuga County. The Board of Directors, with representatives from various municipalities make up the Council and may offer votes to steer general decision making. Yet, only the members can change the corporate bylaws of the council.

I recommend to the Council Members: (Owasco - Ed Wagner, Cayuga County- Aileen McNabb-Coleman, City of Auburn - Debby McCormick) to add the Village of Moravia as a Director of the Council, an amendment to bylaws, requesting the current board of directors include the Village of Moravia and Mayor Gary Mulvaney as the Village's representative on the Council.

I'm excited to share the Village of Moravia resolved to join the OLWMC that supports the council's goal for increased participation.

Back to the agenda...

Director's Summary

Since I have been on-boarded, I have not ceased to be impressed by the diligent nature and full extent of partner collaboration in this community for watershed improvements for the sake of lake water quality.

Our collaborative approach is driving the advancement of watershed priorities moving forward.

Items:

1. The Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations re-write is an essential water quality protection initiative set forth by the OLWMC with lead authorship from partnering agencies as well as the public. With revisions to the 1984 rules and regulations document and through public and stakeholder participation, the initiative seeks equitable watershed regulations for the ultimate benefit of lake water quality improvements and lake preservation. The broad scope of near-final draft was discussed at a City Council Meeting at Memorial City Hall March 28th. Following the public rollout of the rules and regulations document, there were held two stakeholder meetings on April 8th and April 9th, for the lakeshore and agriculture stakeholder groups, respectively. There was important feedback for some changes to the document by both groups. Overwhelmingly, stakeholders were supportive of the intent, but had some concerns about the approach.

Some of these concerns included:

- The lack of an economic impact study to assess instances where lakeshore homeowners will be required to move and/or replace their septic systems, or farmers will be required to dedicate lands to watercourse vegetated buffers.
 - It was indicated such an economic feasibility study may be required by NYS as part of the approval process. If this is not the case, such an assessment by the state will be requested.

- Is there funding availability to help leverage planning and related projects that will be required to meet the needs of the rules and regulations document.
 - Partnering agencies plan to look, leverage, and write for funding opportunities to assist stakeholders with some of the financial costs they will incur.
- What is the effect of land tax structure for farmers following the required implementation of watercourse vegetative buffering, and questions about retaining tax exemptions if the land is removed from use.
 - An inquiry on land tax structures and assessments was made as well as a request for the continuation of exemptions for buffered lands.
- The need to be explicit about the eventual requirement for farms to have whole-farm nutrient management plans and a desire to have the plan provide primary guidance for farmers rather than the rules and regs document.
 - Waivers are in place within the rules and regulations document to address where adherence of the rules and regs needs to be flexible based on specific layout and functions of an individual farm as described in a whole farm plan. The rules and regulations are not meant to duplicate instances where (for example state) regulations are in place or strategic plans already address areas of concern for the watershed in the context of lake water quality.

One farmer described the fact clean lake-sourced water as a critical component of farming and he offered the notion farmers are aware of the stake they have in the health of Owasco Lake. I envision some of the farmers that composed the agriculture stakeholder group will play an important instructional role in what will become a farmer-led advisory committee designed to support sharing farm management approaches with the greater farming community. The farmers I have discussed this with so far, who have agreed to participate, have shared a sense of pride in their farming and nutrient management plans and an eagerness to collaborate with onboarding the greater farming community. The question and answer and public feedback period is still ongoing, so please get involved. There will be two upcoming public meetings on May 15th and May 16th at Cayuga Onondaga BOCES and Moravia High school, respectively. Please come and share your questions and concerns.

2. I am currently working on a petition for stream reclassification for the purpose of improved stream protections at the state level. Working towards reclassification of Owasco tributaries to AA (the highest standard) will support the implementation of more stringent regulations at the state level to protect tributaries and the lake resource. It is our hope the reclassification will work in tandem with the rules and regulations we are developing at the local level.
3. I mentioned at our last monthly meeting, Watershed Specialist Andrew Snell, council members, and I all agreed there would be value in changing the name of the Watershed Inspection Program to one that carries the authority, weight, and longevity necessary to support governance by this body for watershed inspections under the newly proposed watershed rules and regulations.

The proposed name change is from the (currently):
Watershed Inspection Program
to the:
Watershed Inspection and Protection Division.

I now make a recommendation to the board of directors for this change in naming convention.

4. Citizens group OWLA obtained an approved QAPP for their sampling plan for the 2019 sampling season. They are equipped with required sampling equipment and volunteer samplers were trained on sampling procedures on Thursday, April 11th. Beyond their plans to continue monitoring lake tributaries this year, they are making headway on an implementation initiative, providing funding as match on a CCSWCD grant to be used for roadside ditch improvements. OWLA looks to continue their support of and fundraising for an active hydroseeding and ditch remediation campaign with partner support for guidance and implementation. There was discussion about a donor driven campaign that could offer signage for private industries willing to get involved. The County Planning Department is partnering on this project by building priority sites into an upcoming ditch monitoring project. The monitoring component can offer important pre- and post- construction water quality information that could provide insights on project effectiveness to support future work initiatives.
5. Owasco Lake now has a fish advisory. The following language was pulled from the WQMA webpage that can be found at Cayugacountywater.org:

Owasco Lake Fish Advisory

The New York State Department of Health issues an *annual advisory* about consuming certain fish caught in specific New York State water bodies, because some fish contain chemicals at levels that could adversely affect health. For the first time, this advisory includes some fish species from Owasco Lake.

Data from walleye and smallmouth bass collected in Owasco Lake by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation showed mercury levels that were higher than those previously found in smaller fish. The fish collected in Owasco Lake tended to include larger, older fish than in other Finger Lakes

Mercury is a naturally occurring element, which can be released into the environment by sources like coal combustion. Elevated levels of mercury in fish have been documented in many New York State waters for many years, including lakes in the Adirondack and Catskill Regions of New York. Fish typically accumulate mercury from the food they eat. Smaller and younger fish within a species and fish lower in the food chain tend to build up fewer contaminants in their bodies, hence have a lower potential amount of mercury.

Based on the information from the Finger Lakes Institute at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, walleyes collected and sampled from Owasco Lake in an earlier study were older than walleyes found in other lakes. Fish that live longer and eat other fish, like bass and walleye, tend to have more mercury than do smaller or younger fish. The Finger Lakes Institute plans on repeating

their study in the next 18 months, depending upon funding, to see how the fish mercury levels are changing over time.

It is essential to know that the public drinking water from the City of Auburn and the Town of Owasco, both who draw water from Owasco Lake, is still safe. This drinking water is tested annually for mercury and to date, no mercury has been detected.

6. Having reached out to NYSDEC Region 7 Director, Matt Marco, on what would be required to streamline restoration projects within the watershed, he informed me that the DEC was finalizing their development of a general permit that should help ease some of the regulatory hurdles for the CCSWCD as the leading implementation group within the Owasco Lake Watershed. I believe support for and continued partnership with the SWCD is critical to meet the overarching objectives for watershed protection and restoration set forth by the OLWMC. The SWCD has been praised as one of the best in the state and the trust the district has developed with the agricultural community is unparalleled.
7. A strategic funding meeting was held on April 8th at the Region 7 office in Syracuse, where members from the City of Auburn, Cayuga County, the OLWMC, the Town of Owasco, CC Health Department, and the NYSDEC discussed funding opportunities that might best support our watershed priorities. Input from the state helped us to focus our efforts and best align new programming with funding opportunities. Our original list of priority projects will likely need to adjust slightly as we attempt to match OLWMC priorities with current State funding initiatives. Our partnering groups are coordinating our efforts to work for grant funding for priority projects. Most of the grant-based competitive funding initiatives discussed do not well-support staff time, administrative costs, or planning. We will need to be creative in our approach to secure funding moving forward to address staffing needs. Direct discussion with state elected officials as well as private funding sources should be considered to meet increased staffing needs (for the WIP).

The Current Priorities list for reference:

- *Acquire and/or conserve lands within the watershed to protect and maintain existing buffers before increased subdivision and land conservation impacts these functioning systems.*
- *Maximize coordination and equitable allocation of resources through the Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council (OLWMC) in order to leverage available staffing to complete the projects listed.*
- *Implement Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Tier 3A Resource Management Plans to reduce sediment and nutrient runoff on crop and alternative farms and AEM Tier 3A Nutrient Management Plans (NMPS) for non-CAFO beef/dairy operations.*
- *Perform a pilot study to evaluate the phosphorus removal efficiency of stormwater management techniques (e.g., iron-enhanced sand filter, i.e., Minnesota Filter) in locations such as the discharge of agricultural swales and tile lines.*

- *Alternative water quality improvement project that will remove nutrient concentrations (weed harvesters)*

I would like to make a motion to include funding to cover increased staffing for the WIP that is necessary to increase our bandwidth for ongoing watershed inspections and facilitate the greater demands on that program for administrative needs related to the Watershed Rules and Regulations.

8. The Town of Owasco submitted an application for \$1,000 in NYS Urban Forestry Council's 2019 Arbor Day Community Grant project support. Assemblyman from the 126th district, Gary Finch, offered his support for the initiative. The town pursues its very first Tree City USA designation this year, and celebrates its very first Arbor Day with students from Owasco Elementary School on Thursday, May 16th, 2019. The town plans to offer a proclamation on at the Arbor Day celebration behalf of the value of trees. To secure our first Tree City USA designation, the Town Council has committed to underwrite an inventory of public trees, draft and adopt a new tree ordinance, and form a dynamic tree board.
9. The OLWMC, in partnership with the (WIP), Parks and Trails, CCSWD, and the County Planning Department, are planning on holding a fall Riparian Buffer planting event along the outlet within Emerson Park. Our original intention was to plan for a spring planting, but the landscape architects that are designing the Deauville Island renovations for Parks and Trails will be providing plans to the state (OPRHP) for approval by mid-May. This will be used as the template for both sides of the river for continuity. Hosting the planting event in fall will give the team time to receive/review plans, design a complimentary plan, and match the design parameters and submit to the Parks Commission for approval.

This project will be considered Phase 1 of what we hope will be an ongoing initiative for similar ongoing work within public lands. The application for buffer in a bag was submitted, yet there was so much support and enthusiasm for the state trees program, the nursery sold out of stock, and I am sorry we could not secure funding through that program. Hopefully, the DEC expands their stock supply to better meet demand for next spring. There have been additional offers for funding for this project through CCSWCD and OWLA, and planning for this fall planting event is still underway.

At a basic level, the science is clear that receiving water bodies from forested watersheds tend to demonstrate reduced effects of non-point source nutrient runoff. I would like to recommend for the OLWMC to support and encourage stream buffering and reforestation on public and municipal lands working with planning departments to identify appropriate planting locations.

More on the Emerson Park project to come.

10. The Nature Conservancy is working closely with the City of Auburn on a project intended to identify key land areas within the flats for land acquisition and preservation. To do this, they are using a study that supports the prioritization of priority at risk parcels. Jo-Anne from TNC will present on this later in this meeting. This expansion of preservation and subsequent restoration work, that is, efforts to improve resiliency in the Owasco Lake Flats, is a focus while we continue to encourage community buy-in for similar restorative work on privately held lands.
11. Through a partnership between the OLWMC the (WIP) and the Nature Conservancy, a preliminary homeowner survey was created to be delivered to homeowners with septic systems who live in flood-prone Indian Cove. This document will be used to segue into a feasibility study that will include plans for pre- and post- construction monitoring and parallel a septic system improvements grant facilitated through Cayuga County Health Department. A pilot for innovative Phosphorus treatment technology use in septic systems is funded through the Environmental Division of the Cayuga County Health Department. Please reach out to Eileen O'Connor if you would you would be willing to use your property for this important test project. 315-253-1405

Moving with the agenda...

Today's Presenter- I would like to present Dr. Kim Schulz, professor at SUNY-ESF- she presented at the OWLA-led March to Lake Day Symposium. Dr. Schulz who will present today on findings from an Owasco Lake Quagga Mussel Survey. Thanks you, Kim.

Communications- There was a request from Keith Batman for any of our members to attend a April 25, 2019 meeting at 6pm at the Aurora Inn. The meeting includes listening to a debate from the FFA at Southern Cayuga High School. The debate will be on water quality. The students need people involved in the County to be present for them to get maximum points for their competition.