

**CITY OF ONEIDA
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR**

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Final Guest Column

I would like to thank all the voters who voted in the 2009 City of Oneida Mayoral Election, especially the more than 1,000 who voted for me. I again congratulate Mayor-elect Matzke upon his victory. My only real disappointment is that less than half of eligible voters voted in an election with clear differences between the candidates and serious issues facing our City.

I am very proud of what was accomplished in 2008 and 2009. The Common Council followed the City Charter and made the policy decisions for the operation of City government. As Mayor and Chief Executive Officer of the City, I followed those policy decisions even when I didn't agree with them. For example, I proposed in the budget for 2009 to pay for crossing guards at Vet's Field. The Common Council made a policy decision to take that out as part of cutting almost \$400,000 of spending. I honored that policy decision and did not attempt to go behind the back of the Council to provide funding for crossing guards from some other part of the City budget, recognizing and accepting that the Council makes policy and no Mayor is empowered to ignore or overrule the Council's policy decisions.

In 2008 and 2009 the City of Oneida Common Council complied with the letter and the spirit of the Open Meetings Law. We met in the Common Council chambers and discussed City business in meetings open to all. We discussed, debated, and even disagreed in front of those to whom we were accountable.

In 2008 and 2009 public participation was welcomed in Common Council meetings. The public had the opportunity to comment on and ask questions about every agenda item. There were numerous times where we had a dialogue between the Council and the audience on a specific agenda item, with the result being that the Council had the benefit of knowing what was on the minds of the people in the audience and the audience was able to see the thought processes of Councilors. In addition, at the end of every Common Council meeting, every person in the Chambers was invited to bring any item of old business back or to place an item of new business before the Council.

Early in 2008 the Common Council met with the City Engineer and the Code Enforcement Officer, the Fire Chief and the Housing Code Inspector and Fire Marshal, and the Police Chief and the Community Services Officer. The Common Council gave a clear expression of its policy determination that it wanted our codes to be vigorously enforced. We added a second part-time housing code inspector in an effort to catch-up on housing code inspections. Codes enforcement protects the health and safety of our residents, which is most important. In addition, codes enforcement enhances the quality of life of everyone who lives in or comes to our community to shop, work, play or attend school, as well as

helping to maintain property values for all.

A great deal of my time and that of the Common Council was spent on discussing and attempting to focus attention on the long-term financial situation of the City. It cannot be disputed that the City of Oneida is spending more than it is generating in current revenue, funding the difference by dipping into the General Fund Balance, the City's "savings account." There is nothing wrong with using the General Fund Balance for this purpose, however, we need to have a plan for what to do when there's not enough money left in the General Fund Balance to balance the General Fund Budget. Will we raise taxes, cut services, or some combination of these two things? While I hope that City revenues can grow by adding retail establishments that collect sales tax and new assessed value upon which real property taxes will be paid, it is unlikely that will solve our problem.

I campaigned for re-election on the basis of the accomplishments of 2008 and 2009 and talking honestly about what I thought were the big and challenging issues facing the City. I resisted the temptation to promise individuals and groups favors at tax payer expense or of questionable legality. I did what I concluded was in the best interest of the City of Oneida, even when I knew it was politically risky. I did not compromise principle for political advantage. I have no regrets and am proud of how I conducted the 2009 campaign.

Governments at all levels, including the City of Oneida, face difficult challenges as a result of the current recession and the need to balance revenues and spending. I urge all residents of the City of Oneida to study the issues, to attend and participate in Common Council meetings, and to communicate with our new Mayor and Common Councilors by phone, email, mail, and in person. They need to know what we want and, perhaps more importantly, what we are willing to pay for. We can continue to do better by putting aside selfishness and pulling together with Mayor Matzke and the new Council to solve problems and improve our future.

Thank you for the honor and privilege of serving as Mayor of the City of Oneida in 2008 and 2009.

Yours truly,

Peter F. Hedglon