

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
OSWEGO COUNTY LEGISLATURE HELD ON  
JANUARY 5, 2006**

Chairman Johnson called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. Roll call was taken, with all elected legislators present and one vacancy in Legislative District #9.

Invocation was given by Ted Jerrett, Clerk of the Legislature, followed by the salute to the flag.

Honorable Walter W. Hafner, Jr., J.S.C., was present to perform the oath of office on the newly elected legislators, as well as, the Chairman of the Legislature, the Vice Chairman of the Legislature, the Clerk of the Legislature and County Attorney.

**ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Chairman Johnson turned the meeting over to Clerk of the Legislature Ted Jerrett. The floor was offered for nominations for Chairman of the Legislature.

Leg. Proud nominated Leg. Russ Johnson, seconded by Leg. Kunzwiler and several others. There being no other names offered, the nominations were closed. By voice vote, Leg. Russ Johnson was elected Chairman for the year 2006 with all in favor except for Leg. Gearsbeck and one vacancy in the 9<sup>th</sup> District.

Leg. Johnson was sworn in as Chairman of the Oswego County Legislature, accompanied by his wife Sue, mother-in-law Suzanne, and daughter Sue.

Leg. Leemann moved to waive the rules to consider Resolution No. 1, seconded by Leg. Kunzwiler. A roll call vote was taken on the motion to waive the rules.

The motion to waive the rules passed, by a roll call vote  
YES: 24 NO: 0 ABSENT: 0 VACANT: 1

YES: THOMAS, POTTER, DOYLE, LEEMANN, BRYANT, GEARSBECK, PROUD, BROWN, SEAGER, NATOLI, OSPELT, GARDNER, BULLARD, OSETEK, SANTORE, PONZI, KUNZWILER, CHALIFOUX, MALONE, BECKWITH, VASHO, FRENCH, BREWER, JOHNSON.

NO: NONE

ABSENT: NONE

VACANT: District 9

Leg. Leemann offered Resolution No. 1, entitled, RESOLUTION FILLING A VACANCY IN THE OFFICE OF COUNTY LEGISLATOR FOR THE NINTH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT. Leg. Leemann strongly endorsed the resolution nominating Mr. Fred Beardsley to fill this vacancy. The resolution passed on a roll call vote with the following results:

YES: THOMAS, POTTER, DOYLE, LEEMANN, BRYANT, PROUD, BROWN, SEAGER, NATOLI, OSPELT, GARDNER, BULLARD, OSETEK, SANTORE, PONZI, KUNZWILER, CHALIFOUX, BECKWITH, VASHO, FRENCH, BREWER, JOHNSON.

NO: GEARSBECK, MALONE

ABSENT: NONE

VACANT: District 9

**SWEARING IN CEREMONY**

Fred Beardsley was sworn in as Legislator of District 9.

Milferd Potter was sworn in as Legislator of District 2, accompanied by his wife Patricia and his daughters Valerie and Loretta Potter and his neighbor Mike Rose.

Shawn Doyle was sworn in as Legislator of District 3, accompanied by his mother, Patsy Doyle.

Paul Natoli was sworn in as Legislator of District 11, accompanied by his wife Kim, mother-in-law Kathleen Colek, and parents Robert and Joanne Natoli.

Daniel Chalfioux was sworn in as Legislator of District 19, accompanied by wife Kristine, daughter Kristin and sons Christopher and Nicholas.

All returning Legislators were then sworn in.

**ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

Nominations were opened for the position of Legislature Vice-Chairman for 2006.

Leg. Bullard nominated Leg. Greg Osetek, seconded by Leg. Thomas.

Leg. Kunzwiler nominated Leg. Doug Malone, seconded by Leg. Ponzi.

There being no further nominations, a roll call vote was taken with the following result:

FOR LEG. OSETEK: THOMAS, POTTER, DOYLE, LEEMANN, BRYANT, PROUD, BROWN, BEARDSLEY, SEAGER, OSPELT, GARDNER, BULLARD, OSETEK, SANTORE, CHALIFOUX, BECKWITH, FRENCH, BREWER, JOHNSON.

FOR LEG. MALONE: GEARSBECK, NATOLI, PONZI, KUNZWILER, MALONE, VASHO.

Leg. Osetek was then sworn in as Vice Chairman of the Oswego County Legislature for 2006.

**CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE**

Nominations were opened for Clerk of the Legislature.

Leg. Brown nominated Theodore Jerrett for the Clerk of the Legislature, seconded by Legs. Gardner and Santore. A roll call vote was taken with the following results.

YES: THOMAS, POTTER, DOYLE, LEEMANN, GEARSBECK, PROUD, BROWN, BEARDSLEY, SEAGER, NATOLI, OSPELT, GARDNER, BULLARD OSETEK, SANTORE PONZI KUNZWILER, MALONE, BECKWITH, VASHO, FRENCH, BREWER, JOHNSON.

NO: BRYANT, CHALIFOUX.

ABSENT: NONE

Mr. Jerrett was then sworn in as Clerk of the Legislature, accompanied by his wife Donna and daughter Kristen.

Leg. Osetek moved to waive the rules to introduce Resolution No. 2., seconded by Leg. Ponzi. The motion to waive the rules passed unanimously by voice vote.

Leg. Bryant offered Resolution No. 2, entitled RESOLUTION APPOINTING COUNTY ATTORNEY FOR THE COUNTY OF OSWEGO. This resolution appoints Richard C. Mitchell as County Attorney for a term of two years, commencing January 1, 2006.

Resolution passed, with a voice vote  
YES: 25 NO: 0 ABSENT: 0

Richard C. Mitchell III was then sworn in as County Attorney accompanied by his father Richard C. Mitchell II.

Leg. Ospelt offered Resolution No. 3, entitled, RESOLUTION APPOINTING MEMBERS TO THE DISTRICT FOREST PRACTICE BOARD. This resolution appoints Leg. Brown, Mr. Norman Bullard and Ms. Connie Smith to the District Forest Practice Board.

Resolution passed, with a voice vote  
YES: 25 NO: 0 ABSENT: 0

Leg. Osetek offered Resolution No. 4, entitled, RESOLUTION ADOPTING AN OSWEGO COUNTY INVESTMENT POLICY AND DESIGNATING BANKS AS DEPOSITORIES OF COUNTY FUNDS. Leg. Osetek moved to amend the resolution, on page 2, to change Fleet Bank to Bank of America, seconded by Leg. Bullard. The motion to amend passed unanimously.

Resolution passed, as amended, with a voice vote  
YES: 25 NO: 0 ABSENT: 0

Leg. Bryant offered Resolution No. 5, entitled, RESOLUTION DESIGNATING THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPERS FOR PUBLICATION OF ALL ELECTION NOTICES, OFFICIAL CANVASS, LOCAL LAWS, NOTICES AND OTHER MATTERS REQUIRED BY LAW TO BE PUBLISHED. This resolution lists Oswego County Weeklies of Mexico, New York and The Palladium Times of Oswego, New York as the official newspapers for the county.

Resolution passed, with a voice vote  
YES: 25 NO: 0 ABSENT: 0

Leg. Santore offered Resolution No. 6, entitled, RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION AND DELIVERY OF DEEDS FOR PROPERTY SOLD BY THE OSWEGO COUNTY LEGISLATURE, TITLES TO WHICH WERE ACQUIRED BY THE TAX FORECLOSURE OF 2000.

Resolution passed, with a voice vote  
YES: 25 NO: 0 ABSENT: 0

Chairman Johnson asked if there were any objections to the minutes of December 8, 2005, December 15, 2005, and December 22, 2005. Hearing no objections, the minutes were approved.

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS/PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON RESOLUTIONS OF THE DAY**

Leg. Brown introduced Marcia Myers, and her daughters Emily, Elizabeth and Juliana. The girls are being home schooled and came to the meeting today to observe government in action. They are all from Hastings, in Leg. Brown's District. There were no other speakers.

**REPORTS OF COUNTY OFFICIALS**

Chairman Johnson offered the State of the County Address (attached).

**MAJORITY AND MINORITY LEADERS**

The Democrat Caucus announced the appointment of Leg. Kunzwiler as Minority Leader and Leg. Malone as the Minority Whip.

The Republican Caucus announced the appointment of Leg. Leemann as Majority Leader and Leg. Bullard as Majority Whip.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

None

**ADJOURNMENT:**

Under motion by Leg. Kunzwiler, seconded by Leg. Bullard, and carried unanimously, the meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

**PUBLIC SPEAKERS:**

None



# Oswego County Legislature

Russ Johnson, Chairman  
Gregory Osetek, Vice Chairman  
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Theodore Jerrett, Clerk

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## State of the County Address

January 5, 2006

*By Russ Johnson, Chairman, Oswego County Legislature*

My fellow Members of the Legislature, Members of the Press, County Staff and Guests;

Today is the official start of another year of business for the County Legislature. Before I speak to the agenda facing this body during the coming year, I would like to take a moment to do two things. First, and most importantly, I want to thank all the members of this Legislature for their support today and in the years past. I am truly honored to serve again as Chairman - not just of the Oswego County Legislature, but of this particular Legislature. Because this is a Legislature of achievement - a group of women and men of diverse backgrounds who have found a way to work together to accomplish great things for the people of Oswego County. In an age when Legislative bodies across this nation have become increasingly divisive, the members of this Legislature have shown that they can negotiate their differences in an atmosphere of mutual respect. This, I strongly believe, is because each and every member of this body has made service to constituents our first and only priority.

Secondly, I would like to take a few moments to reflect on the work that this Legislature has accomplished - achievements that will provide a firm foundation for the future. We deal with so many issues each month that it is easy to lose sight of the progress that underlies the resolutions. Let me highlight but a few:

Oswego County has made major investments to upgrade its technological infrastructure. The 911 Center is being modernized; a comprehensive plan to update hardware and software in each department is in process; a wireless network is being installed to lower costs and increase bandwidth between and among County facilities; and advanced technology is being deployed in the areas of public safety and emergency preparedness.

Fair and reasonable labor agreements have been reached with four of the five unions that represent the County's employees. This is important for ensuring the recruitment and retention of an experienced and professional workforce, as well as to assist the County in its long-term financial planning.

The County's Power for Progress program is providing 22 companies and municipalities with much-needed relief from high energy costs.

Intermunicipal cooperation has continued to flourish. Examples are numerous - County buildings are now home to three state agencies, a town government, and two non-profits. Several shared-service agreements are in place with the Public Works Department, the Planning Department, the Sheriff's Department, and others. The re-opening of the Niagara Mohawk fire school provides an opportunity for a further expansion of these efforts.

The County's balance sheet has seen substantial improvement. Debt has been eliminated; reserve funds for tax stabilization and retirement costs have been established; general fund balance has been increased to recommended levels; and interest earnings are higher.

Property taxes have been stabilized. There was no increase in property taxes in 2005 and a modest decrease in 2006. I anticipate this is a trend that will continue into the future. I can say that for two reasons. First, this is a smaller government than it was even three years ago. Our budget is actually \$6 million less than it was in 2003. I think I can speak for the entire Legislature when I say that we are all conservatives when it comes to making decisions about spending tax dollars.

The second reason I am confident in predicting stable property taxes is because we have adopted a multi-year financial plan. Our approach has not been to construct a budget around one-shot revenues and unsubstantiated estimates, only to leave the next Legislature with a shortfall if our wishes don't come true. The budget, which is one component of the County's financial plan, is based on conservative principles and anticipates the challenges to come. It's not a question of making life easy or difficult for the next Legislature; it's simply a matter of doing the responsible thing for the people we are here to serve.

And that, my friends, is what I believe the coming year will be all about. The major issues we tackle in 2006 are ones that will be of importance for years to come, that will outlive this particular Legislature. We will not finish the work in the coming year, but we do have the opportunity, indeed - the responsibility - to get the work started and on the right track.

It will start with the County's solid waste system. Now, I know that solid waste is not the sexiest issue in the world. But when it piles up on your doorstep, it sure does get your attention. Like it or not, it is one of the prime responsibilities of Oswego County government, and this is the year when we must make provisions for the future of the program.

The first order of business this year for the Infrastructure and Facilities Committee is to work through the recently completed analysis of the County's solid waste system. The report the Committee will review confirms two observations that I made last year - first, that the County has a well-developed and well-run solid waste program; and second, that the County needs to make substantial investments to maintain the program. The report provides us with a series of options for maintaining the integrity of our system. It provides a framework for the Legislature to make decisions; while there are choices, the decisions are entirely ours to make. There will be pros and cons involved with each option, and I am certain that we will not all agree on which direction to take. What we have to agree on, however, is that doing nothing is not an option. And

when the majority of this body decides on a course of action, we all need to do our best to make that choice the right one.

Another area of focus for this coming year will be emergency preparedness. As host to three nuclear electric-generating facilities, Oswego County has made planning for natural or man-made disasters a priority. But we are faced with new threats that may require unique responses.

I recently invited numerous leaders and representatives from essential public service disciplines to participate in an exercise dealing with the latest, and potentially gravest, threat to public health - the avian flu. It was most instructive, and the lesson taken home was that all of us, even in Oswego County, need to be prepared. A flu strain nearly identical to the strain that is raising alarms across the world visited Oswego during the First World War. Let me read to you from our own Journal of Proceedings. This comes from a letter, dated December 9, 1918, from John Fitzgibbons, Mayor of Oswego, to the Board of Supervisors:

*Gentlemen: During the months of September, October and November 1918, the City and County of Oswego was afflicted by a most severe epidemic influenza.*

*Oswego was perhaps the most hard hit spot in all America and before the disease was finally under control, over 10,000 cases in various degrees of seriousness saddened our city and surroundings.*

*In the City of Oswego alone, 216 civilian deaths in October could be traced to this disease and to this death roll must be added 84 soldiers who died of influenza at Fort Ontario.*

*On October 1st the City of Oswego established at its Health Center free medical care, medicine, nurses, food and all other necessary supplies for the sick or afflicted.*

*Until November 12th this great work went on and at one time besides many nurses, 27 outside doctors were administering free care and medicine to Oswego and its stricken neighbors.*

Back then Mayor Fitzgibbons requested financial assistance from the County. I am happy to report that the Legislature did indeed honor the Mayor's request, as well as a subsequent plea from the Mayor of Fulton. Living proof that these governmental bodies can indeed work together.

One of the lessons from this year's horrible hurricane season is that localities need to be prepared to take the lead in responding during emergencies. We will be working hard to be able to do just that.

I would like to conclude this afternoon by addressing one additional issue of concern, not just for today, but for the foreseeable future. And that is the local economy, and the County's role in promoting its development.

There is a fair amount of pessimism about the future of this County's economy. We've heard it from our constituents; we've heard it from members of the public that have come to address this body; and we have heard it within our own ranks. It is understandable - job losses are highly visible and well-publicized. While job gains are often unnoticed. Then too, it gets a little cold in

Oswego, and shoveling gets old in a hurry, so it's easy to get negative. It is also very human to focus on what we don't have, rather than taking the time to reflect on what we do have going for us.

Nonetheless, there is reason to be optimistic about this County's economy. The three largest sectors - energy, higher education, and health - are strong and are making considerable investments in their Oswego County facilities. Oswego is home to several manufacturers whose value-added products are in great demand. New small businesses are starting up every day. The County has a wealth of assets to offer employers - multi-modal transportation; abundant water, land and energy; affordable housing; a workforce that knows the meaning of work; good schools; safe streets; and, not least of all, colorful local politics. And some of the things we don't have, we can live without - smog, horrendous congestion, ridiculously high housing costs, and, of course, hurricanes.

We have a good foundation, so we do not need to be pessimistic. At the same time, though, we need to be realistic, and it is a part of our reality that the rate of unemployment and underemployment is still too high.

So what should County government be doing? I recognize that many members of this Legislature have questions and concerns about the return on the County's investments in economic development. In fact, there is debate across the country regarding the value of economic development incentives. A representative from the Federal Reserve Bank was in Syracuse recently to argue that the economy benefited more from investments in early childhood education than from traditional business incentive programs.

While economists may disagree whether incentives like PILOT agreements and grants provide greater benefits than costs, there is no argument that some localities are more likely to foster development than others. What do those localities share in common? A positive business climate. And what makes for a positive business climate? An educated work force; a safe community; stable and fair taxation; a reasonable regulatory environment; a well-developed physical infrastructure; and, not least by any means, strong leadership from governmental and civic organizations.

Clearly County government can play a critical role in the creation of a positive business climate. We have spoken many times in these chambers about stability - maintaining a predictable tax structure, investing in the County's infrastructure, and ensuring continuity of service delivery. Keeping our community safe is also a priority for County government. The County is heavily involved in the development of the area's workforce. But we can do more.

Friends and colleagues, we cannot think that County government has accomplished its responsibilities for economic development because we receive awards for marketing materials or have a successful project or two. The measure of achievement needs to be the overall economic health of the county and its citizens. We live in an extremely competitive environment. Oswego County competes with other counties, other states, other countries. It's not enough to have what investors need to be successful; it has to be better than the competition. Our schools and university need to be not just good, but better; our housing needs not just to be affordable, it needs to be attractive: our infrastructure needs to be better than just good enough to get by for

now; our governments need to be thinking beyond today's controversy and thinking to the future. It's not a question of making things bigger or more expensive, but of making a commitment to doing things well.

This is a challenge to the entire community, not just County government. But ladies and gentlemen, we need to start here. If the Oswego County Legislature won't lead by example, then who will?

Allow me to offer some examples.

Start with the Oswego County Airport. We know that this is an important tool for economic development. We know that there is a long waiting list of pilots looking to make the Airport their home base. We know that investments in the Airport's facilities will generate the revenue to make the Airport self-sufficient. And we know that if we do not respond to the needs of the Airport's users, they will take their business elsewhere. So what are we waiting for? Let's let 2006 be the last year that we merely talk about this improvement. Accordingly, I will be asking the Infrastructure and Facilities Committee to initiate a capital project to construct sufficient hangar space to eliminate the waiting list.

Let's also consider what the County is doing for tourism development. We know that when the County was forced to take a number of measures to make the budget balance, it was necessary to redirect bed tax revenues away from municipalities to help pay for promotion of the tourism industry in Oswego. While this was necessary at the time, I think most or all legislators hoped this would only be temporary. The down side of not returning bed tax to the municipalities is two-fold - it takes away support from the very attractions the County wishes to support, and removes incentives from municipalities to contribute to activities that would help bed tax grow. The bed tax is not important in and of itself, but as a measure of the strength of the tourism industry.

And therein lies the challenge for County government. If bed tax revenue is a gauge for the health of the industry, then the fact that collections have been relatively flat over the years means there is much room for improvement. I don't think this is a matter of merely spending more money on advertising; it's broader than that. It's a question of developing the kinds of attractions that makes visitors want to come to Oswego County, and to stay for more than a day. It is also a matter of packaging those attractions in new and exciting ways.

That is why I am proposing a shift in direction for the County with respect to tourism. It starts with returning bed tax money to the municipalities, and empowering local leaders to fashion strategies to promote tourism-related businesses within their communities. It continues with devoting additional county resources to development of the industry, not just marketing. For example, we know that the canal system holds great potential for development, but that someone, somehow, has to take charge of bringing people together to make a plan and marshal the resources needed to get it off the ground. That's why I will be asking the Legislature to consider a marriage of the Promotion and Tourism and Planning Departments to enhance development of the tourism industry. Make no mistake - this involves greater investment in the industry, not less.

The Community Development function of the Planning Department is one that also demands a

greater investment. The essential ingredients for a good business climate are also key components of a sound community development strategy. We need to utilize the resources of County government to identify developmental needs, bring communities together, and take an active role in overcoming the barriers that any change faces. Let's make this a priority as we search for new leadership of the Department.

I have spoken about the need for this County to support the elements of a good business climate. It's not hard for all of us to agree on those principles. But what if we flip the coin and talk about the pieces of a bad climate for economic development? Would they include governments without leadership, governments with an unstable tax policy, governments that fight among each other to the detriment of the larger community? I suspect they would be front and center in defining a community that discourages investment. That, my colleagues, is our challenge and our opportunity. We have demonstrated that this government can lead; that it can achieve; and that it can plan for the future. We must continue and build upon this foundation. Because if not this Legislature, then who?

But enough of this talk. In the words of the great philosopher, Larry, let's Git-R-Done!

**Questions about the Oswego County Legislature?**

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