

A Call to Action

You'll find a timeline of significant, and impactful moments in the life of Oneonta displayed on the walls of the History Center. It's not all positive, but it's generously dotted with good, trajectory altering actions taken by citizens and government.

We're in such a moment now, and what we do today will be noted.

Unlike earlier decades when Oneonta's upstate location and geographic distance from other communities gave it a measure of control over threats to its health, safety, and economy, these are different times.

There have always been shared issues like weather patterns, regional infrastructure, and challenges to the economy and population. But our unique problems were generally local and could be addressed internally and as a community. Consequently, Oneonta planned and executed decisions that are still being felt today. Whether or not those actions were the best that could have been taken... they were ours to take.

But we are living in a different time, and the inability or unwillingness of some who surround us to address and assume responsibility for their residents' needs, coupled with Oneonta's deserved reputation as a city that cares, has put us in new, uncharted, and dangerous waters.

Lack of affordable housing is endemic in the state, as is the continuing diminishment of mental health services, the proliferation of cheap, powerful, and highly addictive drugs, and the procedural and staffing challenges of public safety.

It's a lot, and apparently too much for some. So, it's easy to rationalize the notion that Oneonta has become a "dumping ground" for the problems of others.

To be kind, well intentioned legislators and service providers have unwittingly contributed to our current predicament. However, it's easy to understand why individuals and agencies have welcomed the avenue that's been presented and have taken advantage of what appears to be the best route for an "at-risk" population.

Like every other municipality in these United States, Oneonta would have had its own issues with an unsheltered population, neighbors in need of mental health support, and a flood of easily accessed narcotics.

We do have neighbors in need – and as a caring and moral community - we are rightfully committed to their support.

However, for decades we've been the resource to which increasing numbers of others have been directed, within this county and beyond.

We do not have the housing, we do not have the services, and we do not have the capacity for this to continue.

What we do have is easy access to narcotics, ample opportunity for petit larceny, untenable stress on case management, a growing population of the untethered and a deep reservoir of peer support for bad decision making.

The harm to those needing care, and to our city's ability to grow and prosper, requires immediate action. This is a moment in Oneonta's timeline when those actions will have historical consequence.

At Tuesday's meeting of the Common Council, I detailed my plan. It should be no surprise that I'm looking for all of us (Oneontans, and our neighbors) to work together to find a better way – for everyone.

Together we can and will do this.

We really don't have a choice.