

37th Annual Planning Symposium

March 19, 2026 – Marriott Syracuse Downtown

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

A. Special Use Permits

Christopher Eastman, Local Government Training Specialist 2, Division of Local Government Services, New York State Department of State

Lindsey Drew, Local Government Training Specialist 2, Division of Local Government Services, New York State Department of State

Some land uses require additional review and should be granted permission only if the application meets certain conditions. These special uses include gas stations, dog kennels, and uses with drive-through windows. The special use permit is also used for development in environmentally sensitive zones with overlays such as for wetlands, steep slopes, and along scenic ridgelines. Scenarios in which the special use permit tool is most helpful will be discussed, along with rules local boards must follow for reviewing and approving applications for special use permits.

B. Building Momentum: Great Housing Opportunities for Onondaga County

Charles Buki, Managing Partner, Director of Strategy Development, czb, LLC

Matt Ingalls, Partner, Director of Urban Planning and Design, czb, LLC

Eric Ameigh, Managing Partner, Director of Operations and Special Projects, czb, LLC

In 2024, Onondaga County released its Housing Onondaga - Phase 1 Needs Assessment, to better understand local housing dynamics and prepare for unprecedented demographic and housing market changes, challenges and opportunities. The County has partnered with czb, LLC to develop a second phase of work to align housing development strategies in the County, Towns and Villages to address housing market gaps identified during Phase 1 and align with the thematic goals from the Plan Onondaga County comprehensive plan. This session will introduce you to the County's strategy to achieve Housing Onondaga goals, including identification of appropriate and targeted incentives and interventions to leverage new investments in housing and neighborhoods, as well as steps communities can take to support new housing types and address market needs.

C. Case Study: A Pathway to a Greenway

Chad A. Clark, Mayor, Village of Marcellus

Tyler Cooper, Educator, Marcellus Central School District

The Village of Marcellus has demonstrated the power of collaboration through the transformation of Green Gateway Park, once an abandoned industrial site, into a vibrant community asset. Through a partnership between the Village and Town of Marcellus and students from Marcellus High School, the community has designed the park and secured funding for key improvements, including an outdoor classroom, a pedestrian bridge over Nine Mile Creek, and a scenic walking path with historical interpretation. Green Gateway Park exemplifies successful community-led revitalization and serves as a model for open space and waterway corridors that unite natural, cultural, and scenic features.

D. Area Variances: A Deep Dive

[Monica Ryan](#), Local Government Training Specialist 2, Division of Local Government Services, New York State Department of State

[Lindsey Drew](#), Local Government Training Specialist 2, Division of Local Government Services, New York State Department of State

Area variances are the most frequent appeal before most zoning boards of appeals. This course is a thorough exploration of each factor of the area variance test with examples and discussion of details often missed and concepts often misunderstood. Tips and best practices for review, decision-making, and documentation, with several court case examples that address key legal considerations and challenges will also be highlighted.

E. Regulating Short-Term Rentals: A Local Perspective

[Megan Wilson](#), Deputy Director of Planning and Development, City of Ithaca

[Maura Baldiga](#), Senior Planner, City of Ithaca

Is your community feeling the impacts of short-term rentals? As a university community located in the Finger Lakes, the City of Ithaca faced increasing impacts, both positive and negative, from the growth of short-term rentals. This session offers insights and lessons learned as the City adopted its first regulations of short-term rentals in 2024 after years of debate over policy goals and approach. The development of the policy and its subsequent implementation have faced both successes and challenges. The lessons learned from this ongoing effort can help guide other communities as they undertake their own short-term rental policies and enforcement.

F. Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)

[Jennifer Manierre](#), CEM, LEED AP ND, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)

This session will provide an overview of why energy storage is essential to building a modern, reliable grid that lowers customer costs and meets growing local demand. It will also cover how energy storage is regulated in New York State from a safety perspective and offer practical insights into some of the planning issues local governments should consider to ensure safe, effective deployment in their communities.

G. Site Plan Review

[Monica Ryan](#), Local Government Training Specialist 2, Division of Local Government Services, New York State Department of State

[Lindsey Drew](#), Local Government Training Specialist 2, Division of Local Government Services, New York State Department of State

This course is an overview of the statutory authority local governments have to review site plans. It will address the scope and content of a site plan and the role of the site plan in municipal review of development projects. A discussion of design and the reasons some approaches might be preferable to others is included in the course.

H. How to Design a Neighborhood

[Adam Bonosky](#), AIA, AICP, CNU-a, Senior Architect/Planner, Fisher Associates

How well do your project reviews contribute to designing strong neighborhoods? How can a proposed project help your municipality achieve housing and neighborhood goals? This session will introduce the qualities of good neighborhood design and provide guidelines for evaluating plan submissions to build great neighborhoods. The session will culminate with a group review of a hypothetical submission to simulate working experience, enabling the application of this approach on a day-to-day basis.

I. Changes in New York State Wetland Regulations

[Dereth Glance](#), Director, Region 7, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Dereth Glance, Director for Region 7, will discuss implementation of New York State's updated wetlands law and highlight additional regulatory changes that relate to the environmental review and permitting process.

J. County Referral (GML §239-l,m &n)

Christopher Eastman, Local Government Training Specialist 2, Division of Local Government Services, New York State Department of State

Monica Ryan, Division of Local Government Services, New York State Department of State

Megan Costa, Deputy Director for Planning, Onondaga County Department of Planning

Many applications before local boards require referral to the county planning agency before action can be taken on them. This course reviews the requirements of General Municipal Law 239-l, -m, and -n and the law's impact on local decision making. It includes discussion of the benefits of county referral, the effect of recommendations from the county planning agency, and the consequences of failing to make a required referral to the county planning agency.

K. Choose Wisely: How Land Use Drives Local Government Revenue and Operations

Matt Horn, Director of Strategic Growth and Development, MRB Group

Land use and development regulations factor prominently in local communities in so many ways – placemaking, quality of life, community health. As local governments evaluate changes to land use regulations for their impacts on each of these, they should also consider the impacts of these changes on municipal costs and revenues. We will share case studies and ideas about how some communities have maximized land use to mitigate the costs of growth and enhance revenues . . . along with case studies of some who have not!

L. Overview of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) Process

Diane Carlton, AICP, Emeritus, Regional Director for Public Affairs and Education, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and Adjunct Professor in Environmental Sustainability, SUNY Oneonta

This session is for those who want to know how to implement the SEQRA process. We'll talk about the SEQRA process, terminology, long and short environmental assessment forms and their various parts, and who is responsible for completing which part and when. We'll then apply the SEQRA process to a hypothetical project to help you understand how SEQRA works in real life circumstances. If you have questions about the SEQRA process and where and how the various steps fit into municipal reviews, then this session is for you.

M. Closing Plenary Session: Case Law Update for Planning and Zoning

Joseph Frateschi, Esq., Partner, Harris Beach Murtha

Amelia McLean Robertson, Esq., Associate, Harris Beach Murtha

This session will summarize recent legal cases pertaining to land use and explore the implications of these cases on land use regulation at the local level.