



# County of Cayuga

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County Administrator  
**J. Justin Woods, JD, MPA**

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Cayuga County Welcomes New Department Leaders**

At a busy last meeting of the year, the Cayuga County Legislature appointed three department heads and expanded the leadership team at the new Department of Public Works. Acting County Attorney Christopher M. Palermo, Esq. was appointed County Attorney for the balance of his predecessor's term through December 31, 2019. Following a long career as a firefighter and public safety and emergency management educator, Captain W. Douglas Whittaker (Ret.) was appointed Director of Emergency Management. Former Army Lieutenant Colonel David Leo Gardner (Ret.), MPA, MBA was appointed to a four-year term as Director of Public Works. The Legislature also authorized creating and filling a new Deputy Director of Public Works position, and approved designating Tomkins County Deputy Highway Director Carl Martel, PE as Deputy Director of Public Works with the statutory powers of a Deputy Highway Superintendent.

*"All of these individuals bring a wealth of knowledge, leadership, and experience to their respective positions."* said **J. Justin Woods**, County Administrator. *"We look forward to their partnership and contributions that will help our team improve the services we provide to the community."*

Attorney Palermo has 20 years of local government experience. He served on the Sterling Town Board, Cayuga County Legislature, and as Sterling Town Justice. He has worked as an Assistant County Attorney and Social Services Attorney, and while in private practice served as municipal attorney for several communities. *"It is with great pleasure that I continue serving Cayuga County,"* said **Palermo**. *"This is my dream job, and it is an honor to work with the County Legislature, Administrator, and Department Heads."*

Captain Whittaker will oversee operations of the County's Emergency Management Office and develop a reorganization plan for Emergency Management and E911. He joins the County for this half-time position with over 40 years of experience in fire and emergency services. Captain Whittaker was a career firefighter, retiring as the Captain of Special Operations at the Syracuse Fire Department. During this career, he also served in the New York State Volunteer Fire Service and as an instructor for fire protection and emergency management, including as the Chair of Public Safety at the Onondaga Community College Public Safety Training Center. *"I am honored to lead the Office of Emergency Services,"* said **Whittaker**. *"We have well over a thousand Police, Fire, and EMS First Responders in this County. These responders are exceptional people performing extraordinary tasks, and I want to make sure that our office does everything in our power to assist in their training, planning, and operations for any problems they may encounter."*

Colonel Gardner will be the new Director of Public Works, which serves as the County Highway Superintendent and oversees Highway, Buildings and Grounds, Parks and Trails, and Weights and Measures. Colonel Gardner had an impressive military career that spanned over 25 years, including positions such as Federal Air Marshal, Interim Director for Resource Management at the U.S. Army Reserve Command in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and Chief Financial Officer/Comptroller at the U.S. Army Cadet Command in Fort Knox, Kentucky. He also served as the Associate Director for Defense Programs at Syracuse University. His extensive leadership and capital planning experience is complemented by dual master degrees in Business and Public Administration, and various certifications in government fraud examining, financial management, and auditing. **Colonel Gardner** said, *"I am excited for the opportunity to serve the people of Cayuga County as their Director of Public Works. I look forward to leading the DPW team of professionals in the advancement of the County."*

In a companion resolution, the Legislature also authorized Colonel Gardner to create and fill a Deputy Director of Public Works and approved his designation of Mr. Martel as Deputy County Highway Superintendent. Mr. Martel is a structural engineer with extensive experience in road and bridge construction, as well as facilities design and management. In Tompkins County, he has overseen capital projects, including designing and supervising the construction of roads and bridges. The Deputy Director position is replacing a vacant General County Highway Supervisor position and another new position that had been budgeted for 2019, for a net savings of approximately \$13,500.

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