

Town of Niagara supervisor looking into housing options for new residents

BY TIMOTHY CHIPP

In a move eerily perfect for the season, a long-tabled Town of Niagara-based housing development proposal is being brought back from the grave this month.

Supervisor Sylvia Virtuoso confirmed in a late agenda item to the October work session agenda Wednesday that Bri Estates, a roughly 115-lot housing development project off Colonial Drive, is again gaining traction after more than two years of re-design.

"We are in desperate need of housing here," Virtuoso told the town's board Wednesday. "We have a lot of people who want to move into town, and I don't think there's even five houses for sale right now. So, having 115 new houses would be a good thing."

No representative for Bri Estates attended the meeting to comment on an update of the project.

After its proposal, Bri Estates' plan for the development was given a positive declaration in a State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) and forced back to engineering by the former Town Board, of which Virtuoso was not a part.

Among the issues causing the design's positive declaration the last time before the Town Board were water mitigation and wetlands development, according to Building Inspector Charles Haseley.

Wetlands are different from floodplains, Haseley said. With floodplains, potential homeowners must carry flood insurance in order to qualify for a federally backed mortgage. This isn't the case with wetlands development.

As the proposal returns to the board with any adjustments made, the new efforts will come with a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that will address the initial impact issues and how they're handled in the revised plans, Haseley said. It will be posted to the town's website, www.townofniagara.com, for public review once finalized.

After that, the Town Board is expected to reaffirm its status as lead agency in the matter, which puts decision-making power in its hands again. The process, Virtuoso added, will likely pick up from that previous positive declaration and go from there.

No timetable for the new process was established Wednesday. While housing stock is certainly an issue in the town, it's only a microcosm of the national situation. According to real estate website Zillow.com, in June, the U.S. housing shortage grew from 4.5 million to 4.8 million from 2021 to 2022, the most recent data available.

Additionally, that same year, the number of U.S. families increased by 1.8 million, while the housing stock only grew by 1.4 million.

It results in a number of people unable to afford the cost of a mortgage and skyrocketing prices in general, as a limited product becomes a sought-after commodity.

So, Virtuoso said, she's responsible to the town as a whole. And while there may be some negativity surrounding the proposal before it's reviewed, she said she's honor-bound to give the project a fair shot.

"As a leader ... of the town as a whole, I am trying to do what's best for everyone," she said. "Denying (these) new homes isn't what's best for the town, just because one person doesn't want lights shining on their house. That can be remedied. And we're going to work with everyone to do the right thing."

While the future of the development is up in the air, the same is not the case for the town's proposed 2025 spending and revenue plans.

A public hearing is set to take place at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at Town Hall, 7105 Lockport Road, to present the budget and tax levy proposals for the public to consider.

Following the public hearing, the Town Board is expected to decide on the budget proposal, which must be approved by November.

The board completed its review of Virtuoso's roughly \$11.4 million proposal and made only minor changes to the amount of legal fees the town plans to spend. Virtuoso cited projects like Bri Estates' upcoming proposal as a reason for the increase.

The proposed budget comes with no townwide tax to support it, an increasing rarity in local government, especially in New York state. Only special district taxes will be collected, totaling slightly less than \$3 million total.

IN THE NEWS

Fashion Outlets to host 8th annual 'Boo Bash' family event

Press Release

It's time for spooky Halloween fun, as Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls USA hosts its eighth annual "Boo Bash" event for families with young children. The event is free and open to the public. It will be held from 4-6 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 17, inside the mall (1900 Military Road, Niagara Falls). Guests are asked to enter the event through entrance 6, between Saks OFF 5th and Forever 21.

"Boo Bash" is held in collaboration with charity partner the United Way of Greater Niagara/Women United. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Costumed little ones will be treated to a DJ dance party with DJ Mxn and trick-or-treating throughout the indoor section of the mall. More than 20 stores and community organizations will be distributing candy, while supplies last.

Other activities include balloon artists, popcorn stations, and the "Not-So-Wicked Walkway," a new selfie-encouraging highlight, designed by local artist Ali Price. These activities have minimal up-charges, all benefitting the United Way/Women United.

"The 'Not-So-Wicked Walkway' is a series of child-friendly Halloween-themed vignettes inside a vacant store," said Susie Swiatkowski, marketing manager. "Fashion Outlets and the United Way are excited to work with the very talented Ali Price to present this new activity, featured only

during 'Boo Bash.'"

For more information, visit <https://www.fashionoutletsniaagara.com/Events/BooBash2024> or follow Fashion Outlets Niagara on Facebook and Instagram.

Sanborn Historical Society ham dinner

Submitted

The Sanborn Area Historical Society will host a ham dinner from 4-7 p.m. (or until gone) on Saturday, Oct. 19, at the Sanborn Farm Museum, located at 2660 Saunders Settlement Road (Route 31) in Sanborn. The menu will include famous German wedding cabbage, along with ham, carrots,

squash, scalloped potatoes, apple sauce and cornbread. Dessert will be cupcakes.

The cost is \$15 for adults, \$7 for children ages 5-12, and free for those ages 4 and under.

Takeout is available. No reservations are required.

Sanborn Area Historical Society regular meeting

The Sanborn Area Historical Society will hold its regular meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 22, at the Sanborn Farm Museum.

As part of the speaker series program, Preston Niland will present "The Niland Bros. Of Tonawanda," a first-hand account of sacrifices made during World War II.

There is no charge for this

event (though donations are accepted), and refreshments will be served.

Alzheimer's Association free program on keeping brain healthy

Press Release

The Western New York Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association will offer a free event in Niagara Falls about how healthy habits can improve both the body and the mind.

"Healthy Living for Your Brain and Body" will take place from

noon to 1 p.m. Friday, Oct. 18, at the Niagara Falls Public Library, at 1425 Main St. The program will cover four areas of lifestyle habits that are associated with healthy aging: cognitive activity, diet and nutrition, exercise and social engagement. Participants will learn, based on current research, the steps they can take now to improve or maintain overall health in each area, and use hands-on tools to help incorporate these recommendations into a plan for healthy aging.

Registration is recommended and can be done at bit.ly/HLBB1018, or call 800-272-3900.

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