

GIFC: Plan would 'get town out of fire business'

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terms, with staggered terms initially."

The fire district would have two main administrative officers, also unpaid: a secretary, who would act as a town clerk does for a municipality, and a treasurer, who would be akin to a comptroller.

Butler said that cost of fire apparatus has skyrocketed in the past two years after COVID.

He stressed the financial advantages of a fire district over that of a town-led Fire Protection District. He gave as an example a first-line pumper that would have cost \$450,000 to \$500,000 now would cost \$900,000 to \$1 million.

When the town has to finance equipment purchases for the fire company, it has a special commercial rate that's recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as tax-exempt.

"However, that doesn't go anywhere near the savings involved if the fire district would be able to finance using municipal bonding for that purpose," Butler said. "Municipal bonding and other financing by a fire district requires mandatory voter approval. So, if there's concerns that a new fire district would go out and borrow wildly, that simply can't be the case without any voter oversight and ultimately approval."

Butler said that, in a recent large apparatus purchase, the town was able to borrow at a rate of 4% interest. At the time of that purchase,

he said, municipal bonding was below 1%.

He added, "The fire department leadership has worked hard over the past 18 months to two years developing a proposed budget to illustrate the enormous expense and the future costs of assuring fire protection in this community."

He said the fire company leadership came to the Town Board recommending that "forming a fire district is the best thing for the fire department, the town and its residents and taxpayers that fund this fire district," Butler said.

Greg Butcher, a 33-year life member of the Grand Island Fire Co., has served as fire chief and chairman of the board.

"The fire company, and in turn the fire district, would continue to serve as one of the economic engines that rises this community through its quality of life to a place that brings people to Grand Island and would more strongly fortify the backbone of the fire (safety), life safety and emergency services for the citizens, visitors and guests that come here," he said.

Butcher outlined the apparatus needed for fire safety, including engines, rescues, ladders, trucks and boats.

Former council member and current volunteer firefighter Mike Madigan identified some drawbacks he observed in the plan to create a fire district. He said he was speaking as a taxpayer.

"I am not against the concept of

a fire district," Madigan said. "I do have a question about the public hearing. How can we hold a public hearing when significantly inaccurate information has been shared with the public regarding the increase that the taxpayers will pay? The information posted suggested a 29% increase in what taxpayers will pay, when, in fact, the increase is 70%. Every \$1 you are paying today for fire protection will be increased to \$1.70 under the proposed plan."

Madigan said he has two other concerns: "Buildings and property were paid for primarily by taxpayers. It is my opinion that the proposed gifting of them to the volunteer fire department, who will then charge the taxpayers well over \$200,000 per year to lease them, is a concern. I would like to hear several different legal opinions on whether that is appropriate. I would also like to know if any other fire district in Western New York has done anything similar."

"Second concern is in 911 dispatch - major increase in cost in the proposed budget as far as 911 dispatch. Other options were not considered. I would like to see a full assessment done regarding shared services between other dispatches and/or Erie County that may actually result in cost savings, not the currently proposed significant increase impacting our taxpayers."

Madigan said he is proud of his fellow volunteer firefighters. He

would like additional work to be done on the proposal and a new public hearing scheduled.

Resident Cathy Rayhill said she favors bringing the idea of forming a fire district to a public referendum "instead of having the four members of the Town Board make a decision for us."

John Chin said he had concerns about the degree of transparency in the planning process for the proposed fire district.

"I'm not a firefighter. I don't understand all these matters. But I would like to know and understand what will it cost the taxpayer - and why?" he said.

Chin said when he tried to get a copy of the PowerPoints that were presented to the Town Board workshop, he couldn't. "I was told there was no obligation to provide such."

He said the proposal doesn't give any reference point to what taxpayers are currently paying.

Fifteen speakers commented during the public hearing on the proposed fire district.

More news

In other business, the Town Board:

- Approved two projects to be submitted for possible federal Community Development Block Grant funding: Golden Age Center drainage improvements, and an extension of the linear bike path that runs from Bedell Road to Buckhorn State Park to Sidway Elementary School.

- Reaffirmed a May 20 negative declaration under the State Environmental Quality Review Act stating there would be no significant environmental impact from the subdivision at Ransom and Stony Point roads proposed by developer 1441 Ransom Road LLC. The board also gave preliminary plat approval for nine lots in the proposed subdivision, subject to ditches to be piped along Ransom Road frontage lots and appropriate recreation fees to be paid.



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State Parks debuts trail etiquette initiative to enhance public safety on Empire State Trail

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Press Release

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation announced a new trail etiquette initiative launching to ensure public safety on the agency's over 2,000 miles of trails statewide, including the 750-mile Empire State Trail and the many locally managed trails it encompasses. The initiative offers New York residents and visitors contemporary, common-sense tips to safely navigate busy trails, being aware of the wide variety of trail users and occasional intersections.

"Regardless of whether you walk, run, ride a bike, operate a wheelchair, walk a leashed pet, push a stroller, or cross-country ski, New York State Parks wants to ensure all trailgoers are aware of their surroundings and share our beloved trails with courtesy and safety in mind," New York State Parks Commissioner Pro Tempore Randy Simons said. "We all want to get outside and enjoy all that New York has to offer, and small actions can mean the difference between a memorable fall day on the trail or a trip to urgent care."

State Parks' new trail etiquette initiative consists of four main principles:

- Wear a helmet: All cyclists should wear a properly sized bike helmet, with the strap buckled. Under New York state law, those under age 14 are required to wear an appropriate helmet.

- Be courteous and aware: Because the trail is enjoyed by a variety of users, ages and abilities, visitors should be aware of the activity around them.

- All users, especially groups and those with children, should stay to

the right and maintain a clear path for passing.

- Cyclists must slow down for other trail users, use a bell or call out to alert others, and pass safely on the left.

- When stopping or taking a break, move to the side and avoid blocking the trail.

- Leashed dogs can make sudden movements and startle other trail users. Dog walkers must keep their pet under control at all times.

- See and be seen: Cyclists are encouraged to ride defensively. Stopping at all intersections to check for oncoming traffic before safely crossing is advised.

- Follow electric bike rules: Electric-assist bicycles, or e-bikes, are legal to use across the state. However, government entities and trail owners can place restrictions on the types and places they may be used. In most locations, e-scooters, one-wheels, and higher-speed e-bikes are prohibited. On road, class I and class II e-bikes are permitted where the posted speed is 30 mph or less. It is the responsibility of the rider to know where and what types of e-bikes are allowed and to operate them in a safe manner.

The Empire Trail welcomes bicyclists and walkers of all ages and abilities to experience the Empire State's urban centers, village main streets, rural communities, and diverse history, from New York City through the Hudson River Valley, west to Buffalo along the Erie Canal, and north to the Champlain Valley and Adirondacks.

New York State Canal Corp. Director Brian U. Stratton said, "The Erie and Champlain Canalway Trails are multiuse trails that offer walkers, joggers and cyclists an

incredible way to exercise and recreate across the upstate New York. For the safety of all trail users, I encourage everyone to follow the guiding principles set forth in this new initiative as it will ensure a more enjoyable experience for all."

Parks & Trails New York Executive Director Paul Steely White said, "We need your help keeping greenway trails safe and accessible for all New Yorkers - cyclists and pedestrians alike. Safe trails require more than just clear pathways and signage - they are built on the cooperation and understanding of each and every individual on the trail. Stay safe and keep others safe by following trailway rules and always yielding to those around you."

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