

Lewiston, Porter to begin joint reassessment program; plans offered to address drainage/flooding

BY TERRY DUFFY
Editor-in-Chief

Lewiston Town Board members got down to business Monday, with significant projects for 2024 unveiled at their Town Hall work session.

Reassessments to Begin

The town announced a new joint endeavor with Porter that would see a full-scale reassessment beginning in both communities this spring.

Supervisor Steve Broderick said, "It has been over 23 years since both communities have conducted a townwide reassessment project. The project will save both communities money by utilizing the same vendor, and the ability to share data and processes."

Broderick said the projects would begin in the winter of 2024 and be completed by July 1, 2026.

A similar announcement was made this week in the Town of Porter. According to a GAR Associates appraisal firm project statement for both towns, released from Supervisor John "Duffy" Johnson, "During the years 2001-07, the municipalities maintained full-value assessments through a New York state-sponsored program titled 'Annual Assessment.' That program ceased to provide aid for maintaining full value assessments, and both communities - like several others - opted out of the program. Since 2007, property values have experienced significant changes. In addition, both communities have also seen progressive growth in both residential and commercial type properties.

"The projects will be conducted jointly, saving both communities money by utilizing the same vendor and the ability to share various data and processes. ... A process will include a comprehensive property inventory data review, verification, and collection of current data. A new digital sketch and photographs will be created.

"This process will begin in the spring. ... No one will be entering your property both exterior and interior. All data will be verified using the latest technology including aerial imagery. Authorized staff that may be conducting digital photography and or public right-of-way review will have proper identification.

"Upon completion of the data verification process, property owners will have the opportunity to review the collected and verified data online. If any errors or omissions are identified, property owners will have the opportunity to submit changes for further review. Commercial property owners will receive an income and expense questionnaire as well.

"In the fall of 2025, new property assessments will be created based on current market conditions. New assessments will be mailed to all property owners (in both towns) no later than March 1, 2026. Property owners will have an opportunity to challenge the new property assessment and all values will be finalized by July 1, 2026.

"Through the project, public information and transparency will be created and maintained to ensure property owners are kept informed and updated. Website information including customized web videos will be posted throughout the project regarding the various phases of the project.

"Remember, reassessment projects do not raise more tax dollars, rather the process is a redistribution of budgets and levies to ensure property owners are only paying their fair share of the property tax burden."

In the Lewiston Town Board resolution approved Monday, "the Town of Lewiston Town Board hereby expresses its support of its town assessor in updating the town's 2026 assessment roll, and

maintenance of such assessment roll at full market value, and annually maintains assessment equity at 100% full value assessment after 2026, and authorized the sufficient allocation of sufficient resources for town services and staff to complete such project in the annual maintenance of assessment equity. ...

"The Town Board further requests that the New York State Office of Real Property Tax Services and the Niagara County Office of Real Property Services provides assistance that is typically afforded during such projects to the Town of Lewiston."

The motion went on to be unanimously approved by Town Board members.

Town Addressing Drainage

In other news, the town will be taking steps to address recurring "perfect storm" events that are now impacting the region with greater frequency.

"During the summer of 2021, the winter of 2024 and several past years, the Town of Lewiston experienced several rain events that caused flooding and sewer backups in several areas throughout the town," Broderick said. "The Town Board is committed to systemwide infrastructure improvements to address these decades' long problems and improve the quality of life for Lewiston residents.

"As a result, the town is looking into a backflow preventer grant program whereby the town reimburses homeowners up to a certain dollar amount to be determined to install backflow preventers."

Jeff Ritter, chief operator of the Water Pollution Control Center (WPCC), said, "On Jan. 26, WNY was in another 'perfect storm.' Town of Lewiston received about an inch-and-a-half of rain, with snowpack already on the ground. The Water Pollution Control Center received dozens of phone calls

pertaining to flooded properties and basements.

"This episode was not confined to the Town of Lewiston, but every town in Western New York. Although these episodes seem to be more frequent, the town is doing the best to mitigate these problems with the sewer system, drainage concerns.

"Many issues come up on private property that cause basements to back up with water after the collection system is fully charged, and in some cases directly leading to flooding basements, such as broken or disconnected vent stacks, improper sump pump discharges, floor drains, downspouts, gutter discharging and improper basement discharging. All of these pipes eventually join together, so efforts made by one homeowner can affect an entire neighborhood.

"The Town of Lewiston wants to be proactive in protecting homeowners' personal property, and we would like to offer home evaluations and code compliance inspections to educate homeowners on what measures can be taken to protect their homes from sewer backups in the future.

"I would like any homeowner to get a hold of me to set up an appointment or call me with any questions pertaining to the sewer system."

Ritter can be contacted 716-754-8291 or via email at jritter@townoflewiston.us.

Broderick said he, Town Attorney Al Bax, and Ritter "are looking into several other programs offered to municipalities across the country and Canada, trying to solve the exact same problems some of our residents are experiencing here.

"Lewiston is not alone experiencing severe flooding based on current weather patterns that have brought milder winters to our area. The town is prepared to move forward in an attempt to find solutions to several areas of concern. This board will be supporting Highway Superintendent Mitch Zahno to increase cleaning of town ditches, and other necessary steps to alleviate townwide drainage issues."

Public Hearings Announced

In other news from the session: •Town Councilman John Jacoby revealed plans to introduce Local Law No. 1 of 2024 covering short-term rental properties.

"It's a local law regulating the use of transient or short-term rentals within the Town of Lewiston," he said.

The board approved a public hearing on the matter, set for 6 p.m. Monday, March 11. Jacoby said a full text of the proposed law would be available for review on the town website: www.townoflewiston.us.

•Councilman Rob Morreale announced another public hearing for that night, to extend the moratorium of the town's 2023 solar law.

"We're mirroring the '23 law another six months into 2024," he said.

Soon after, the board approved the second hearing.

Further information on this proposal is available at www.townoflewiston.us.



Personal trainer student shows she is career-focused

BY LISA BIELMEIER

Orleans/Niagara BOCES Public Relations Director

Rachel Williams from Lewiston-Porter High School has taken the certified personal trainer program at the Niagara Career and Technical Education Center for the past two years. This past January, she completed her personal training certification exam with the National Academy of Sports Medicine.

"I am so proud of her," said her teacher, Jared Karas. "She is the earliest senior in the program to get certified before graduation. Rachel has maintained a high academic average every quarter. She is very career driven."

Rachel recently completed an internship at Wolf Den Strength & Fitness in Williamsville and plans to start personal training at a gym. Her future plans include opening her own gym.

Rachel is pictured with Karas.

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Proper sitting involves: keeping both feet flat on the floor (or using a foot rest), aligning your back with the back of the chair, not slouching or leaning forward, keeping your shoulders straight and adjusting the chair so your knees are even or slightly higher than your hips and your arms are at 75-90 degree angle at the elbows.

To help overcome bad posture, make stretching part of your daily routine, especially at your desk. An exercise ball can be used instead of a chair to strengthen the muscles of good sitting posture. With so many adults and children sitting at home at a computer or doing desk work, it is vital to see a chiropractor regularly to realign the spine for improved nerve supply, reducing muscle spasm and improving body function, posture, respiration and reducing stress.

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