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Workers with Gardenville Landscaping of West Seneca assemble the components of the inclusive playground being built in Fairmount Park, Wheatfield.

'If you build it, they will come': Inclusive playground under construction in Town of Wheatfield

**ARTICLE AND PHOTOS
BY KAREN CARR KEEFE**
Senior Contributing Reporter

As goes the often-misquoted famous line from the movie, "Field of Dreams," the Town of Wheatfield is counting on the belief that "If you build it, they will come."

Construction is now underway for Wheatfield's inclusive playground in Fairmount Park, and

it's a dream coming true for kids with special needs and their families. Inclusive playgrounds accommodate and welcome young people of all abilities – to play, learn and grow together.

Wheatfield Councilmember Curt Doktor said the site preparation work – including leveling and drainage – was done internally.

"We had members of our Highway Department complete that

work to save money," he said.

Doktor noted the playground is expected to be completed by the end of October, and the grand opening is scheduled for 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, Nov. 4. He said refreshments will be served – including Tim Hortons coffee for the adults and hot chocolate for the kids. Doktor said it promises to be a lot of fun for young and old.

SEE PLAYGROUND, on Page 5

Town of Niagara budget approved, increasing townwide spending \$300,000

BY TIMOTHY CHIPP
Contributing Writer

There are few things constant in Western New York autumns. Leaves changing colors, Buffalo Bills-themed decorations adorning residences and businesses, and local towns finalizing their budgets for the upcoming calendar years.

For the Town of Niagara, the budgeting process finalized Wednesday as the Town Board put its stamp of approval on the upcoming 2024 spending and revenue plans, as well as the town's tax levy and rates for the upcoming year, Supervisor Lee Wallace said.

And though alarm bells have been ringing the last few years, the town is once again planning a year funded without the use of a general, townwide tax.

Especially postpandemic, town officials have spoken about the town's need for revenue while approving projects like the Amazon warehouse facility on Lockport Road and finishing up a pair of new solar farms in local landfills.

The approved general fund budget will cost a little more than \$4.7 million, which is about \$300,000 more than the approved current year plan from last fall.

This \$300,000 increase year-over-year accounts for nearly

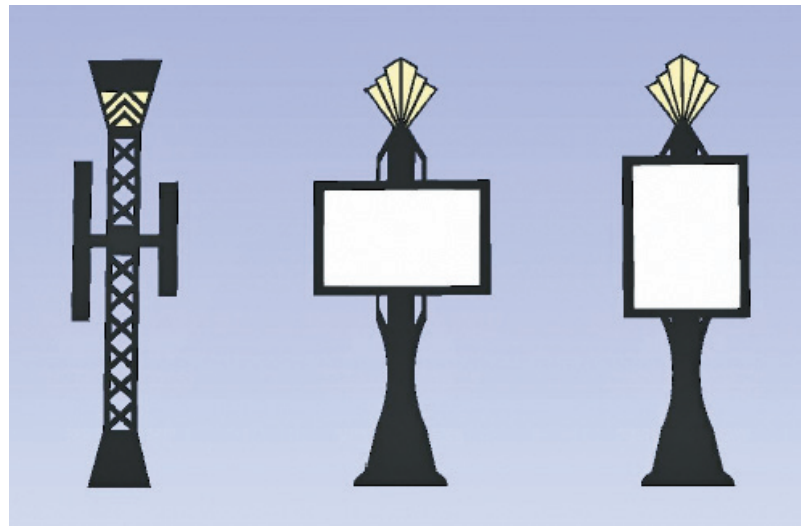
all of the jump in total spending the town estimates for next year, itself a roughly \$300,000 jump to an estimated \$10.6 million. Though there was some movement across many of the five special taxing districts set up to help manage operations.

The town has special funds for the Highway Department, its water improvement area, sewer operations, fire protection and lighting. And all but the lighting district, with a \$125,000 budget, will see a change in spending and revenues.

But not all of it is bad news for taxpayers.

SEE TOWN, continued on Page 5

More answers, more details on proposed 'Lewiston Public Art Project'



Pictured is Dan Buttery's rendering of a metal art frame that is part of the proposed "Lewiston Public Art Project."

BY JOSHUA MALONI
GM/Managing Editor

River Region residents posed additional questions regarding the planned "Lewiston Public Art Project" following a report in last week's Niagara County Tribune/Sentinel. They asked:

•Where would the proposed metal frames be located?

As part of the Lewiston Council on the Arts' proposal, metal fabricator Dan Buttery would be tasked with creating up to 10 double-sided, 8-foot-tall, sculptured frames with a solar-powered art-deco top light. The purpose would be to display and promote local art and artists.

A pitch to the Town of Lewiston and Niagara River Greenway Commission suggested the signs could be placed along Center Street.

However, when speaking with the Village of Lewiston Board of Trustees last week, Buttery said, "These spots that we've proposed, they're not set in stone. They can be moved."

LCA Executive Director Maria Fortuna Dean said, "The placement is not determined. ... The positions are not set."

At the board meeting, Mayor Anne Welch suggested artworks and metal frames could be placed along the Academy Park peripheral, in coordination with a proposed bike path extension.

Trustee Tina Coppins suggested Artpark and Seneca "Bug" Park – next to the Lewiston Public Library – as viable alternative locations.

•What is the bike trail/ Greenway component to this plan?

The LCA seeks \$90,000 in Greenway funding for the \$153,533 "Lewiston Public Art Project." It could receive such funds through the Host Communities Standing Committee, with an endorsement from HCSC member the Town of Lewiston.

The Niagara River Greenway Commission is in the midst of spearheading a \$200 million Empire State Trail, a 750-mile path that "welcomes bicyclists and hikers to explore New York state's extraordinary experiences, people and places." The passageway will connect Manhattan to Montreal – and, locally, Buffalo to Porter.

Presently, there is a stop into the Village of Lewiston, at Seneca and South Ninth streets. The bike path extends down North Ninth Street, turning to Mohawk Street and out to River Road.

In 2020 and 2021, Greenway Executive Director Greg Stevens met with trustees and held public meetings regarding a proposal to extend the bike path down Center Street. After much debate, and in consultation with the New York State Department of Transportation, Welch said that bike route isn't possible.

Instead, she explained in February 2021, "We decided to come out of Academy Park and go down Cayuga Street. ... It'll go through the historic district. We plan on SEE LEWISTON, continued on Page 2

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