

## Porter Town Board discussions include budget, POTL, Airbnb

### STAFF REPORTS

Porter Town Board members began discussions on the town's 2023 budget plans at its monthly meeting Tuesday at Town Hall. No actual numbers were released that evening, as financial discussions are said to be continuing between the town and its employees, namely the Highway Department, according to Supervisor John "Duffy" Johnston and bookkeeper Kim Boyer.

The Town Board did announce it would hold a public hearing regarding

the 2023 preliminary budget at 7 p.m. Monday, Nov. 7, coinciding with the board's regular meeting. 2023 budget numbers are expected to be reviewed by that date. The town's adopted 2022 plan reflects \$5.770 million in spending appropriations and \$1.753 million raised by taxes.

In other news from the session:

\*The Town Board announced plans for a local law toward formation of a Porter on the Lake committee to help better manage operations the site on Dietz Road. Councilman Larry White, who serves as a board liaison for POTL, said the volunteer group – expected to be comprised of up to nine residents – would assist the board in various areas, including planning, improvements and maintenance issues; fundraising; and future activities at the lakeside park.

"The committee would be unpaid; people would serve on it, but they would be reimbursed (for their related activities)," Town Attorney Mike Dowd said as he reviewed the committee's structure. "They would have a budget line so, if the town's interested in creating this committee, we have to do it by local law."

Johnston said the town is seeking to follow its previously developed master plan for the park.

"They would be looking for other funding besides what we (already) do, with Summerfest," he said of the town's annual fundraiser to benefit POTL operations. "They could look for grants. It's nice the community wants to get involved; I don't see a problem with this. They would look for ideas; see where the park needs some help and then they can bring that to the Town Board."

The board said it would discuss the matter further at a planned public hearing on Nov. 7.

•In public comments at the end of the session, Town Board members heard concerns from two residents regarding what they called "unregulated rentals" involving Airbnbs on the 2500 block of Lake Road. The residents, who wished to remain anonymous, said they viewed the operations as "being incompatible with residences," and cited the behavior of visiting tenants and privacy issues. They

suggested the Town Board consider revisiting this activity.

•Town of Porter Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer Pete Jeffery said the town oversees Airbnb activities by means of a "Short Term Rental Homes Guide." The town does not have an actual local law governing such operations.

Available on the town's website, [www.townofporter.net](http://www.townofporter.net), this document includes the following under the title, "Short Term Rental Homes."

"Occupancy of a single-family residential premises for a term of no more than 30 days, on two or more occasions during any six-month period. Occupancy shall not exceed two persons for each bedroom, plus two additional occupants. On-site parking as otherwise required by the Town of Porter Zoning Law shall be provided. All laws and ordinances related to the maintenance of single-family homes shall be complied with including, but not limited to, providing wastewater treatment facilities, fire protection systems, compliance with building maintenance rules and compliance with noise ordinances. Any violation shall be enforced by the Code Enforcement Officer, or other person authorized by law to enforce these laws and ordinances. In the event of three or more violations during any six-month period, any fines provided for in this zoning law shall be doubled. Property owners renting their single-family homes on short-term rental basis are responsible to collect any bed or occupancy taxes which may be imposed by state or local municipalities. Short-term rentals are permitted in any district where a single-family residence is permitted."

The guide goes on to detail a number of recommendations made by the code enforcement officer covering the operation of short-term rentals. These include parking requirements, including RVs; occupancy limits; smoke and CO2 detection systems; fire extinguisher requirements; regulations covering use of swimming pools and spas, guest registry requirements; requirement of a local contact person and notice of adjacent property owners; privacy requirements; garbage/refuse disposal rules; and guidance covering noise and recreational fires/opening burning.

"The town could consider more definitional areas, to better manage it," Jeffery told board members. (At present), the town does not have a permitted use (law on these). Others do."

Jeffery said he estimates the number of Airbnbs currently operating in the town to be between 30 and 45 units.

Town Board members indicated they would consider reviewing the matter in the future.

## Higgins: Nearly \$250,000 for UB supports project preserving history of Cataract House in Niagara Falls

Congressman Brian Higgins announced a federal grant totaling \$249,369 awarded to the University at Buffalo. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and awarded through the Collaborative Research grant program, the grant funding will lay the foundation for a print manuscript and a corresponding website on the Cataract House, historically located in Niagara Falls.

"As a major stop on the Underground Railroad, the Cataract House is not only an important part of our local history, but also our national history," Higgins said. "Funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities continues efforts throughout the Western New York community to preserve the historic events that took place at the Cataract House for many generations to come."

Higgins' team said, "The Collaborative Research program aims to advance humanistic knowledge by fostering rich scholarship accomplished through collaboration by teams of two or more scholars. The National Endowment of the Humanities encourages projects that incorporate multiple points of view and pursue new avenues of inquiry in the humanities. Projects awarded through the program must have tangible and sustainable outcomes such as a coauthored or multiauthored book, a themed issue of a peer-reviewed journal, a series of peer-reviewed articles, a born-digital publication, or an open-access website or other digital research."

In order to continue on-going efforts to preserve the Cataract House's storied history, the University at Buffalo will use grant funding to support research and preparation toward a project titled "From the Cataract House to Canada: African American Activism and the Underground Railroad in the Niagara River Borderland." Undertaking this research, UB will create a print manuscript and an accompanying website about the Cataract House Hotel.

"We are thankful that the National Endowment for the Humanities recognizes the importance of our project, 'From the Cataract House to Canada: African American Activism and the Underground Railroad in the Niagara River Borderland,' and the strength of the research team we have put together," said Doug Perrelli, clinical assistant professor of anthropology in the UB College of Arts and Sciences, and director of the UB Archaeological Survey. "This collaborative research award brings together scholars from across New York and Canada to create a book and website that will present and preserve the amazing history of activism that brought freedom seekers to freedom on the international borderland of Niagara Falls. The project will delve deeply into the historic context of the Underground Railroad and the specific people that helped so many to escape slavery. The perspectives of descendants of freedom seekers and the local community will help us recognize and celebrate enormous gains made for humanity that occurred here in western New



File photo by Mark Williams Jr.

York and Southern Ontario."

Higgins' team shared, "Established in 1825, the Cataract House was a world-renowned luxury hotel that became one of the most important stops on the Underground Railroad. It was also the site of many escapes from slavery. The staff of African American waiters, led by head waiter John Morrison and others, brought countless Freedom Seekers to safety across the border in Canada.

"The hotel reached its peak in the late 1800 through 1920, welcoming notable guests like Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant. It was purchased by a developer in 1945 who sought to restore the aging property, but a fire erupted later that year destroying the building. After the fire, debris from the hotel, including plaster, wood, stone and brick, were used to fill the basements of the burned structure. An archeological dig led by the University at Buffalo at the site of the hotel between from 2017-18 and 2022 revealed artifacts and structural remains of the hotel.

Sara Capen, executive director of the Niagara Falls National Heritage

Area said, "For over a decade, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area has worked alongside the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Commission to fund and expand the research surrounding the role of the Cataract House in the Underground Railroad. This history, specifically the role of the African American waiters, is the foundation of the visitor experience at the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center. Our organizations are thrilled that the research will continue under this grant, and the long under-told stories of the Cataract House will proceed to inspire visitors to the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center."

In September, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation rededicated Heritage Park, the pocket park outside of Prospect Point in Niagara Falls State Park, as Cataract House Park. It marks the historic site where the hotel once sat.

To learn more about the Cataract House, visit [https://www.niagarafallsundergroundrailroad.org/underground\\_railroad\\_site/site-of-the-cataract-house/](https://www.niagarafallsundergroundrailroad.org/underground_railroad_site/site-of-the-cataract-house/).

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