

Sirianni leaving Niagara Town Board for highway role; Covanta project gains clarity

BY TIMOTHY CHIPP

Contributing Writer

Change is coming to the Town of Niagara board, as Councilman Richard Sirianni is bowing out early.

Sirianni is running unopposed for the town's highway superintendent position in the November election, ending eight years on the town's governing body.

But current Highway Superintendent Robert Herman is ending his service early, retiring later in August, and Sirianni is anticipating beginning his new position a bit early.

"I had tossed around a couple different ideas," Sirianni said after the town's August work session – his last – on Wednesday. "I settled on highway superintendent and,

with (Herman) retiring ... and me running unopposed, there's no use leaving the position open for three months."

Instead, it's Sirianni's board seat that will sit vacant starting Aug. 14.

Sirianni has spent a majority of his life representing people, which transitions into a new form when he assumes command of the town's roadway network and workforce. He served in leadership for trades unions, on the Niagara Wheatfield Central School District board, and at Town Hall.

In all, he said, it's been about 40 years he's put himself in positions to help people who, for one reason or another, don't represent themselves.

"I'm going to miss the council,"

Sirianni said. "I just love representing people who find it difficult to represent themselves. But, in a way, I'll still be representing them."

As for Sirianni's past eight years, he said he'd like to be recognized as a leader who spoke up.

Not afraid to ask tough questions, Sirianni said, he approached town business with a conservative mind and a fiscally responsible attitude.

Even as his time is ending – his resignation will be effective on Monday, before the Town Board's next meeting set for 6:30 p.m. Tuesday – Sirianni brought his questions and attitude to Wednesday's meeting, refusing to mail it in as business was discussed.

His tenacity rang true in one particular discussion Wednesday: the proposed rezoning and approvals for Covanta Environmental Solutions' improvements at its Quarry Road waste transfer facility that has been a talking point for him for months.

He's long been a critic of the Covanta plan, stressing the board should consider long-term what it would mean changing the facility from a light industrial zone to heavy industrial, the proposal set for public discussion on Tuesday.

But Wednesday allowed him the ability to address those concerns with representatives

from the facility.

Essentially, since Covanta approached the board a year ago regarding a proposed expansion of its facility to accommodate more waste intake and export, Sirianni has been vocally opposed.

He didn't see the need to change the zoning of the facility, fearing it would make any future developments difficult for the town to control.

Those concerns were definitively addressed by Edward Hatten, director of operations at the facility, and Charles Greico, a lawyer representing the company in the matter.

Essentially, the project the company originally proposed last year was determined to be infeasible due to infrastructure issues in the town, Hatten said. But, Greico added, the company is looking to still make one minor adjustment by putting a cover over the facility's loading dock to help with inclement weather.

Because the property was grandfathered in under previous zoning code changes regulating the use of waste transfer facilities to heavy industrial, the "addition" requires the zoning change before any construction can be approved.

It must be brought up to code requirements even if the improvement is minor.

The pair said they feel Sirianni's concerns aren't applicable because the facility sits on property that, should it change hands, would not be large enough for a different heavy industrial use.

The town is also seeking, under its code, a one-year renewal timeframe for any permitting for the facility, a change from the current five-year timeframe in place. Hatten argued Wednesday that the facility, which isn't changing any of its operations or procedures, should be allowed to carry on with a five-year renewal plan.

Currently, the state Department of Environmental Conservation provides the company with a 10-year permit for the facility in addition to the town's five-year permit, Hatten said.

They'd just like to keep that consistent since there's nothing new happening, the pair said.

"Let's be clear here: There's no hidden agenda," Greico said. "No nefarious plan. We're simply operating our facility as it has been operating for decades. Just with a covered roof over the loading dock."

Town officials have scheduled the matter for a public hearing at Tuesday's meeting, which will be at Town Hall, 7105 Lockport Road.

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Air base concert is Aug. 24

Continued from Page 1

"Only a few miles away we have the Buffalo Navy Operational Support Center and two Coast Guard stations," he added.

"The band that is coming to play the event here, and each and every show that they do, regardless of whether it's at an Air Force installation or in a local community, they play a musical tribute to all of the services and all of the armed forces," Williams said. "We felt that, based on the strong military presence from all the services in Western New York, that it would be appropriate if we not only called

it the 75th celebration, but also a salute to the entire armed forces."

Williams summed up the varied services of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, which he said they refer to as "Team Niagara."

"We have the Air Force Reserve Unit, the 914th; we have a New York Air Guard Unit, the 107th; we have multiple Army units that are on the station, both Army Guard and Army Reserve; and we also have the Military Entrance Processing Facility for all of the military personnel in Western New York that join the military. So, we have kind of a broad, impressive footprint here," he explained.

"The Air Force Reserve is a KC-135 air refueler, part of the network that keeps planes up in the air around the world."

He noted the 107th has a drone mission, and the Army Guard and Army Reserve are units that help support any kind of local disaster or emergency that takes place – including the blizzard that took place over the Christmas holidays – as well as serving to help across New York state.

Williams said the public has always been supportive of the air base here. He also praised the Niagara Military Affairs Council that works on behalf of the base and ensuring its future in Western New York.

Preceding the concert will be a special Retiree Affairs Day. The goal is to bring as many area military retirees as possible to the base to learn from various service providers about the benefits the retirees are eligible to receive.

The motto of the celebration is: "75 Years of Combat-Proven Readiness for the Air Force Reserves ...Transforming for the Future."

Other key points Williams wanted to stress:

- The Air Force Reserve has completed the mission in every U.S. conflict for the past 75 years.

- "We are always ready to assure victory for our nation in the future," he said.

- The Air Force needs the Air Force Reserve "to fortify the capability to fly, fight and win; anytime, anywhere."

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