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Village of Lewiston Board votes to lower speed limit; no start date set

Several steps still need to be completed before law takes effect

BY JOSHUA MALONI

GM/Managing Editor

Trustees in the Village of Lewiston on Tuesday voted unanimously to amend local law 3-2022 and lower the municipal speed limit from 30 mph to 25 mph. They sought to take advantage of legislation signed last month by Gov. Kathy Hochul (A.1007-A/S.2021-A) permitting municipalities to implement such a change.

Board members did not set a start date for the new law to take effect, however, as several steps still need to be taken.

First, there remains a question about Center Street, which is under the Department of Transportation's control.

Mayor Anne Welch said she spoke with DOT Region 5 Director Francis Cirillo, who was "going to check on the requirements ... and get back to me."

"All the other streets are fine; it's just Center Street we have to wait to hear from DOT, to see if we're going to make that 30 miles per hour. I'm sure he'll get back to us shortly, once he finds out what the requirements are - if there is any."

In addition, village Department of Public Works Superintendent Larry Wills said he will have to order new speed limit signs, and then have his crew install them.

Municipal counsel Joseph Leone also noted, "This has got to be filed with the state, too, so it becomes finalized" as law.

Wills said, "Hopefully, in the meantime, DOT switches over Center Street for us, and basically we do it all at one time."

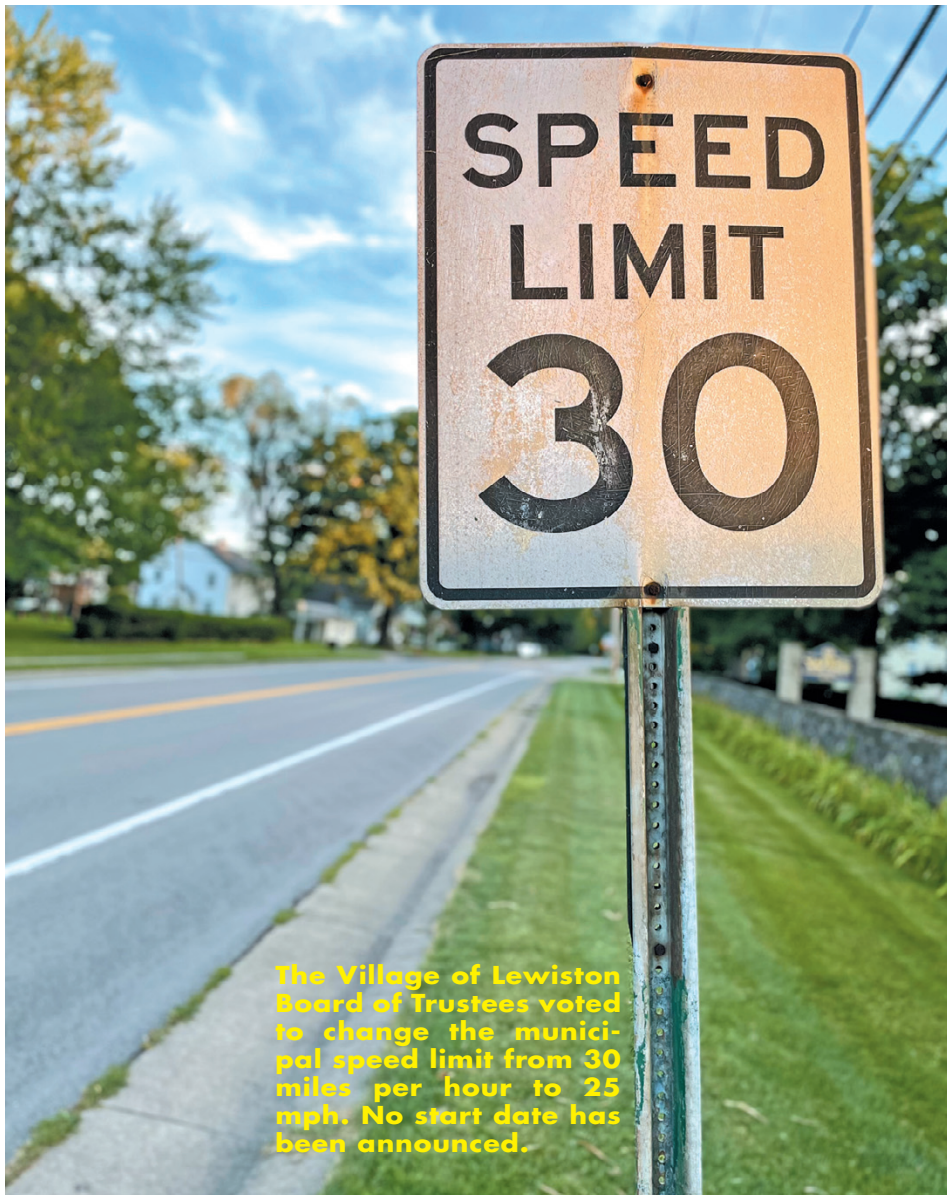
At a public hearing prior to the work session, residents Robert Giannetti and Ron Craft spoke on the proposed speed limit change.

"I think this is a very good idea, but I think the enforcement is a critical piece of this," Giannetti said. "There is a lot of traffic that simply ignores the crosswalks that were put in."

He added, "I think Center Street has become a real busy place, whether you walk the dog in the morning; whether you happen to be walking while people are getting home from work."

"I think Fourth and Center is a real problem, with people in the morning cutting that light short and then making a lefthand turn."

"I guess all of this goes to say that lowering the speed limit from 30 to 25 could conceivably be absolutely ignored,



The Village of Lewiston Board of Trustees voted to change the municipal speed limit from 30 miles per hour to 25 mph. No start date has been announced.

unless there's a real strenuous enforcement provision. And that would involve police presence, and the trailers with the lights, etc."

Giannetti noted, "There's a lot of stuff going on with ignoring the crosswalks that's very troubling."

Welch agreed.

"We do have those crosswalk signs, however, there's not a lot of people that stop for the pedestrians," she said. "We try everything for safety."

"People will probably still drive faster than 25 miles per hour, but, right now, if they know they can go 30, then they'll go 40. So, maybe if (we) go 25, maybe they'll go 30 or 35."

"Even our chief of police had said that the stopping distance - even 5 miles per hour difference - the stopping distance can really make a difference."

Craft said, "I live on the corner (of Center and Fourth). You did a great job on the street (repaving), but I've got motorcycles doing wheelies down, speeding through the light. Cars and mufflers. If you sit on Center Street any length of time, it's very hard to carry on a conversation sometimes."

Not all roadways will see a change in speed limit. Certain areas that border the Town of Lewiston are exempt from the change in law:

SEE COULTER, continued on Page 6

Town of Niagara begins discussion on next budget, cites challenges

BY TIMOTHY CHIPP

As summer comes to an end, all ears and eyes on the Town of Niagara Town Board are shifting from smiles to financial figures.

And Town of Niagara Supervisor Lee Wallace's fiscal outlook for the 2023 budget isn't exactly rosy.

Wallace said he's submitting the preliminary budget to Town Clerk Sylvia Virtuoso's office next week, signaling a tricky time for the town's elected leaders. They'll have to contend with a New York state tax cap hampering financial growth, and figure out exactly what an estimated sales tax revenue might look like in a year that's seen extreme inflation run amok and hamper consumer spending.

"We've had two (payments in lieu of taxes) end," Wallace said during Wednesday's work session, a preview of the financial struggle the town is going to face in the coming months. "That counts directly against the tax cap, which is really handcuffing us."

Niagara remains a rarity in New York local politics, charging no townwide property tax to fund the general fund of its budget, roughly \$5 million in spending. Wallace and others are debating ending this practice as they balance residential needs with the soaring costs of town functions.

Wallace said he's learned the town's credit rating remains set at AA, short of the best available rating of AAA, slightly affecting the rates bonding agencies would be willing to lend the town. That, along with other factors like increased interest rates in general as the economy remains out of balance following the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine, may hurt revenues this year, as well.

What About Past Financials?

While Wallace provided a tease of the budget coming soon, Luke Malecki, partner at the town's auditing firm, Drescher & Malecki LLP, spoke to town leadership about the year that ended in December.

Malecki helped provide a look at the town's financial past, spanning over the past five fiscal years.

The past year's financials looked odd, he said, compared to 2020's, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on local governments. Departments like Parks and Recreation, Malecki said, saw a big spike in expenses year-over-year because those departments were mostly closed in 2020.

SEE TOWN, continued on Page 2

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