

Residents encouraged to 'remain vigilant during this pandemic'

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Brian Higgins and Sens. Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand to support federal funding related to the coronavirus pandemic that is directly delivered to all municipalities, regardless of population size.

Section 601 of the CARES Act (P.L. 116-136) provides a \$150 billion fund for units of local government with a population in excess of 500,000 people, of which Grand Island does not meet.

While the resolution, being proposed by all municipalities of populations under 500,000, speaks about the depletion of revenue sources for local government – specifically the loss of sales tax – Town Board members said that is not a major concern for Grand Island, because of the conservative approach Accountant Pamela Barton has used in creating the annual budget.

During board member's comments, prior to adjournment, Councilwoman Jennifer L. Baney spoke about the high number of unique viewers on

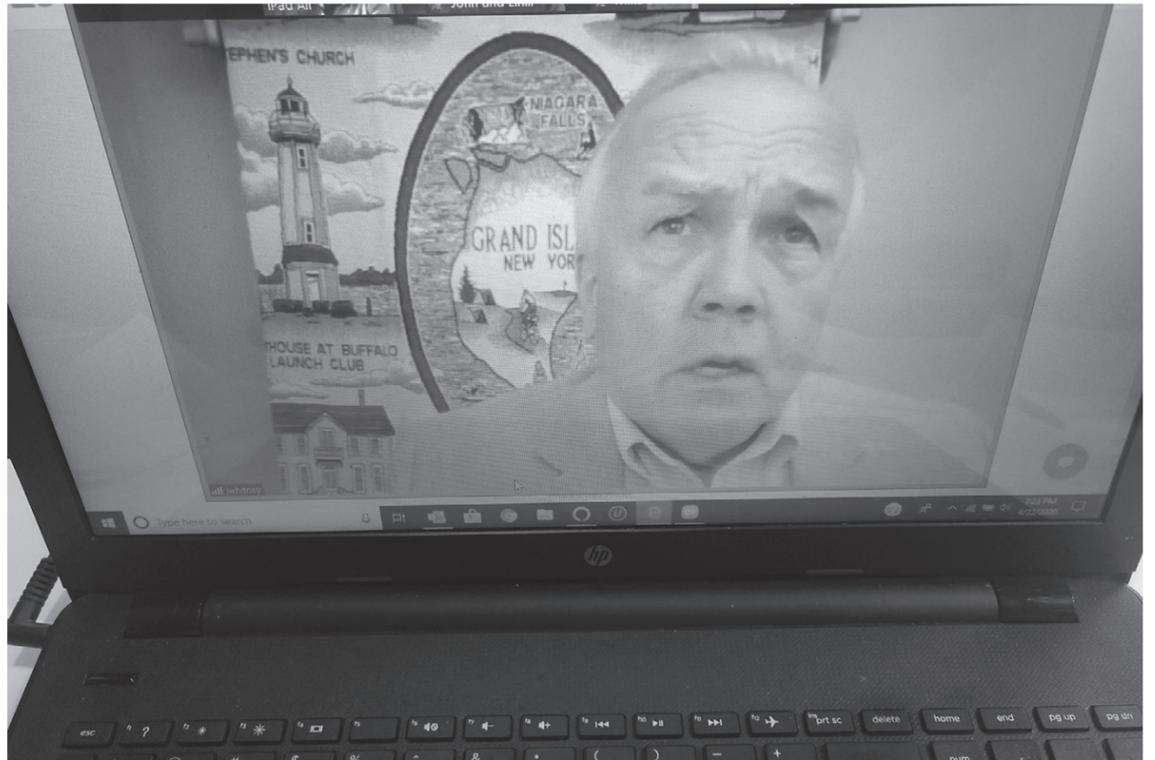
the town's YouTube channel for meetings and how this has "become a unique and successful way to interact with residents." She also promoted the various ways the Grand Island Library is offering things to do for families and children through its website.

Whitney and Digati encouraged residents to remain vigilant during this pandemic by following the governor's orders to stay indoors and, when out, wear face masks and gloves.

Digati said, "Things will be different for the foreseeable future, so we must do all we can to continue hearing from our residents," as he promoted upcoming virtual meetings to include residents

In a comment that probably has not been heard often at a Town Board meeting, Digati added, "Mr. supervisor, I speak on behalf of the town board when we say, 'Thank you' for your dedication to the town and by keeping residents aware through your social media network and our website. We appreciate your efforts."

Rotary Club hears from Whitney



Town of Grand Island Supervisor John C. Whitney, P.E., addresses the Rotary Club.

BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI
Contributor

The Rotary Club of Grand Island held its first virtual meeting with a guest speaker on Wednesday evening. More than 30 members and guests were online to hear and see Town Supervisor John C. Whitney, P.E., speak about the current situation with COVID-19 and future town projects once a sense of normalcy begins.

Whitney said the town is following Gov. Andrew Cuomo's declared state of emergency and only vital services are available handling emergencies. Whitney, who is in his office periodically, is available by phone (773-9600, ext. 616) or email at jwhitney@grand-island.ny.us. He also encouraged residents to visit the town website at www.grand-island.ny.us or its Facebook page at (The Town of Grand Island).

He said the Town Board is meeting virtually and the public can watch on its YouTube channel. He said all court action has

ceased since the pandemic began and he "pities them when they come back, because those will be some very long Wednesday evenings in court."

A big concern among Whitney and the Town Board members is what the "new normal" will be when they begin to return to Town Hall to tackle a mountain of issues, including what he referred to as "the 800-pound gorilla in the room"—"Project Olive," Fantasy Island, and other proposed development projects.

"Fantasy Island is closed and will not come back," he said. "I am working hard on contacting the owners of the land to ensure us on how they will protect it from vandals. I will not give up on that until we have an approved plan."

In regard to the mammoth "Project Olive," which most on the Island believe is going to be an Amazon warehouse and distribution center, Whitney said the proposed developer has funded the town to hire six top consultants who are presently evaluating the 2,202-page application submitted to the town on Feb. 21 from developer Trammell Crow through its attorneys.

"They will report back to the town on everything from the water system and lighting, sound, traffic and storm water drainage," he explained.

Whitney said the Town Board is also discussing how and when it can reschedule a public hearing about "Project Olive."

"Ultimately, the decision will be made by the Town Board, but I can tell you at this point I do not have enough information to say

how I will vote. We are very preliminary at this stage," he said in response to a question after his opening remarks.

Whitney also talked about the Memorial Day service held at the DeGlopper Memorial Park and said that, because of social distancing, it may be some type of virtual celebration. He said it is too early to make a decision about July 4 plans.

In regard to the proposed \$50 million Southpointe housing project on the southwest corner of Baseline and Staley roads, and a project on a 65-acre property on the south side of Whitehaven Road at East River Road, neither project representative has submitted a formal proposal.

Whitney said the sidewalk project in the business section along Grand Island Boulevard from Webb Road to the plaza across from the Fantasy Island property is proceeding as planned, because it is considered an essential project. He also said he is in communication with Erie County about repairing some of the roads it operates in the town.

In regard to the sprawling proposed solar farms on the Island, Whitney said the board is looking into updating the town solar laws and will involve the public through upcoming virtual and live meetings.

Whitney said he was encouraged about the re-building of the Grand Island Rotary Gazebo on the Town Commons outside of Town Hall.

For more information on Rotary Club meetings or membership, visit www.rotaryclubgi.org.

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