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Lewiston hopes to use surcharge to repair aging, insufficient lines BBC fire prompts action

BY JOSHUA MALONI GM/Managing Editor

A fire temporarily closing the Brickyard family of restaurants was an eye-opener for the Village of Lewiston Board of Trustees.

On Monday, a budget line was established to provide Department of Public Works Superintendent Larry Wills funds to repair and (hopefully) replace aging water lines in the Village of Lewiston. Trustees voted 4-0 to adopt local law No. 2-2020, section 20-102 (water, sewers, sewage disposal of the village code) to add a surcharge of \$10 per billing cycle for capital water/sewer improvements. Billing is effective Oct. 1.

Board members watched as the Brickyard Brewing Company's second floor burned late into the night on May 26. The fire also caused damage to the adjoining Brickyard Pub & BBQ. Had there not been a metal roof on the BBC, local first responders said the flames could've spread down Center Street.

Onlookers commented on moments where it seemed the water pressure in hoses fighting the fire wasn't up to par.

"We only get like 40 pounds worth of pressure coming into the village, because anything larger than that blows your lines," Mayor Anne Welch said. "This would allow higher pressure for when we do have a fire - that it would be more helpful."

Lewiston No. 1 Fire Co. Chief Les Myers said, "We wouldn't be able to (increase) the pressure until all the lines were changed."

The night of the fire, "We proved that we had a need to put some money into the infrastructure," Myers said.

Following the fire, Myers met with Wills, Deputy Mayor Vic Eydt, Town of Lewiston and Niagara County leaders to discuss ways to improve access to water and increase water pressure in the village. Group members also spoke of adding a new water supply, possibly from Ridge Road.

"This is really an important conversation to have," Welch said. "With this added \$10 every billing, which would be \$40 per year, for residents - we did this years ago and put \$5 a billing cycle, and we were able to use those funds when we had broken water lines. ... (We're) bumping it up to \$10, because of the cost of everything now."

"It will help us. ... It can only be used for the infrastructure. It's to replace all the aging lines, and the water pressure, in case of fire."

Wills said, "The main line that feeds the village is just about 100 years old. So, if something happens to that, the only other way for us to get water immediately is up Fifth



Firefighters battled the BBC blaze on May 26. (File photo by Mark Williams Jr.)

Where's the Water?

In a recent letter to this newspaper, Lewiston No. 1 Fire Co. Chief Les Myers recapped a meeting held with local officials to discuss the village's water lines and capability to fight fires like the one that occurred in late May at the Brickyard Brewing Company on Center Street. Myers wrote, in part:

"To no one's surprise, the water lines in the village are mostly old 4-inch and 6-inch cast iron pipes originally installed in the 1930s. These lines over time are becoming more of an issue to the DPW (because) of numerous water breaks. The cast iron is deteriorating and very susceptible to breakage. The 6-inch line have buildup on the insides turning them into 4-inch pipes, and the 4-inch pipes are now 2-inch pipes."

"After a series of devastating fires in the early 1970s, a new 12-inch line was installed down Center Street to help solve the problem in the busi-

ness district. ...

"There are two issues facing the water system in the village. The first issue, due to the age of the lines, has forced the village to keep the water pressure in the village low to avoid the rupture of the pipes from the inside out. Lower pressure means a lower volume of water available for firefighters."

"The second issue is water supply into the village. The primary source is through a meter at Seneca Street at the village line near Walker Drive. There is also a pressure regulator there that lowers the pressure going into the village water mains. This line was originally installed in the 1930s and runs under the Parkway and 104 (Lewiston Hill)."

"There is also a secondary connection on North Fifth Street at the village line. This is normally a feed from the village to the town, but will back-feed if

the primary source needs to be closed for maintenance issues, but water pressure will be dangerously low on Center Street and the south side of the village.

"The group talked about possible locations for a second source into the village to provide an additional volume of water. A second meeting of the group included the Town of Lewiston Water Department and the Niagara County Water District to discuss the problems and possible alternatives. After a review of the water lines surrounding the village, there is interest in a connection to the town water system on Ridge Road just outside the village. A water meter and pressure-reducing valve would be installed and the line would be extended into the village along the south side of Center Street to an existing 12-inch water line at Ninth and Center."

Street - which there is not enough (pressure) from Fifth Street to feed anything up to Center.

"We're making a move in the right direction."

The Village of Lewiston has "millions of dollars" worth of sewer lines to replace. It's anticipated the roughly \$47,000 this new surcharge will gather can be used to make repairs instead of replacements, and/or be used toward larger grants that require a municipal contribution.

"I like the idea, because we need to start building a bank to work on 100-year-old lines," Wills said. "If we do not make a move now, we're kicking the can down the road - and things get worse and worse and worse."

As part of the vote to approve,

trustees Nick Conde and Claudia Marasco asked to review the new surcharge ahead of approving the next fiscal year budget.

"I think people would be better with this \$10 knowing that (we'll revisit) in a year - that this isn't for perpetuity, but that we'll look at it again," Marasco said.

"Because of the fire, I think a lot of people would be thinking we are not prepared; we need to get better prepared," she added.

Wills noted the DPW was replacing 800 feet of sewer line in-house each year in the 1990s and into the early 2000s, but funding eventually dried up. The \$5 surcharge was added in 2008, but only lasted about five years before trustees voted to repeal the fee.

Every time a water main breaks, Wills said the cost to fix is a minimum of \$300.

A public hearing at the beginning of the meeting yielded no comments.

Eydt was out of town and visited the meeting via Zoom after the vote was called.

•The Village Board was set to hold a public hearing on adopting Juneteenth as a municipal holiday, but there is some question as to whether or not New York villages can take this day off.

"We canceled that because we just figured we'd wait and see how this plays out for the local municipalities. We'll revisit it at another time," Welch said.

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PUBLISHER Skip Mazenauer GM/MANAGING EDITOR Joshua Maloni EDITOR IN CHIEF/SENTINEL EDITOR Terrence P. Duffy INTERIM TRIBUNE EDITOR Michael DePietro DISPATCH EDITOR Larry Austin WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA EDITORS Joshua Maloni, Lucia Spiritosanto, Toni Snyder ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES Colleen Rebmann, Jeff Calarco, Marcy Lombardo, JoAnne Fuerch CIRCULATION Kim Wendt

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1859 Whitehaven Road Grand Island, N.Y. 14072

Phone (716) 773-7676 Fax (716) 773-7190

Editorial:

Tribune@wnypapers.com

Dispatch@wnypapers.com

Sentinel@wnypapers.com

Advertising:

NFPDesign@wnypapers.com

Classifieds:

NFPClassifieds@wnypapers.com

Circulation:

NFPCirculation@wnypapers.com

Legals:

legalnotice@wnypapers.com

Website:

wnypapers.com

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