

Village of Lewiston suspends July 4 fireworks

Faced with uncertainty over crowd size regulations, cost, board cancels 2020 event

BY JOSHUA MALONI

GM/Managing Editor

There will be no Fourth of July fireworks in Lewiston this summer.

Not knowing when New York will again allow large gatherings to occur, and without the usual sponsors, the Board of Trustees canceled the event on Monday.

“Usually in May, the fireworks letters go out asking for donations. Our contract calls for \$9,000, I believe, to put on a fireworks display. I don’t even know if it would be permitted, because then you’re having a large crowd of people,” Mayor Anne Welch said during the municipal work session. “I know North Tonawanda has already canceled their fireworks. I’m sure others are doing it.”

Trustee Nick Conde said, “I think we’re going to have a hard time raising money from the restaurants and (businesses) like we normally get.”

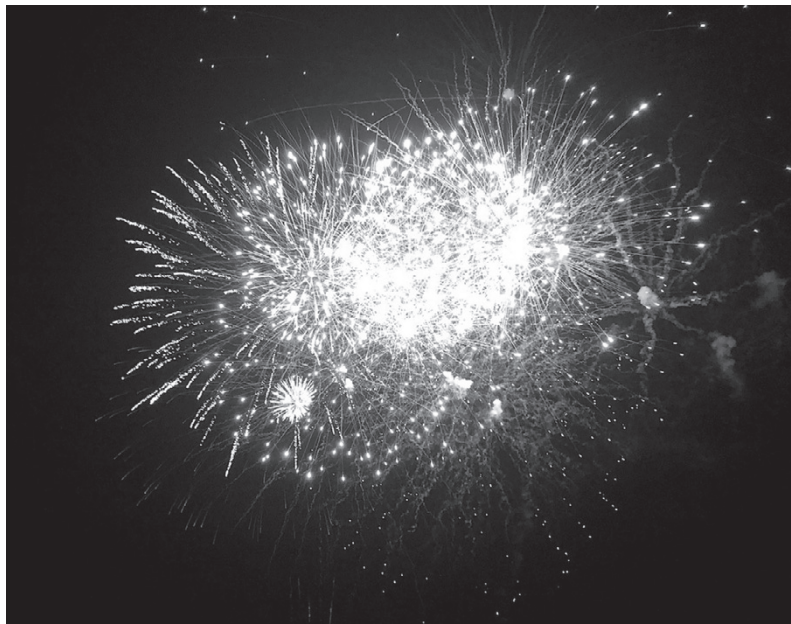
“That’s my take on it, too,” Deputy Mayor Vic Eydt said. “Not only that, but the social distancing and everything else. I think this is going to be another one we’re going to have to pause for a year – unfortunately.”

Welch said, “I would like to give something that the people can see and enjoy, but we’re not going to get the donations, and people being in a large group again, I think it’s too soon.”

She added, “It’s not money that we can afford to pay out for a fireworks display, when we’re going to have a hard time just trying to meet our budget needs this year.”

Public Safety in a Time of Coronavirus

Trustee Claudia Marasco said, “People are going to try to come here – they’re coming already. ... If we have anything going on too



Residents will have to wait until 2021 to again see July 4 fireworks over the sky in Lewiston. (File photo)

early, I think it would be a problem for us, and for everybody’s safety and health.”

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has prohibited large gatherings in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Welch said, “I’ve been on the county calls, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, talking about this COVID. The Village of Lewiston is following the governor’s guidelines and continuing the ‘New York PAUSE.’ Niagara County is still seeing new cases and hasn’t met the requirements to do a reopen yet. I’m hoping to reach those requirements – at least some of them – by May 15 – maybe the construction or something.”

She later said, “Niagara County will reopen as a region, and that includes us, and we have to come up with our ideas for our village when we restart. I thought, maybe even if they let us open slowly, we could allow restaurants to do

an open-air patio. Maybe that would help them restart a little bit?”

“We’re just bouncing ideas off each other to see how we’re going to be able to do this. But, even when we restart, we’re still going to follow those guidelines to practice the social-distancing, and wearing gloves and masks, and wiping everything down. Hopefully, that will help.”

“I’m anxious to open up, but I don’t want to do it too soon. We want people to be safe.”

“We have to open as a region because, if we don’t, if we open before somebody else, everybody will come here – and that’s not what we want to do.”

One-Way Traffic on Ridge Street

Department of Public Works Superintendent Larry Wills has begun a process to add parking spaces on Ridge Street. As he set out Monday to restripe the roadway, Wills said it became

apparent traffic should be one-way (from Fourth Street to Fifth Street).

Welch said Wills spoke with her and Previte, and all are in agreement.

“Because that road is one of our narrow streets – I believe it’s 66-foot-wide – if he stripes the road (with room for additional parking spaces), the pavement of the road, the lane, will be right up against the sidewalk,” she said. “If you veer over in the lane at all, you’re on the sidewalk – and that just is dangerous.”

Wills noted, “If I put a buffer back in, then I’m right back to where I started. To gain all the angled parking spots on the south side, I had to shift everything over about five, six feet.”

He added, “If we made it a one-way, we would have a little bit wider, comfortable road for all these people to pull in and out of the parking spots on the south side.”

Marasco said she liked the idea of one-way traffic on Ridge Street, and “I think that the residents would be happy with that.”

Reconfiguring Ridge Street in this manner would require an amendment to the local law. As such, trustees will hold a public hearing prior to their monthly meeting at 6 p.m. Monday, May 18.

As was the case this week, residents are not allowed to physically attend the meeting, but can participate via Zoom. Call-in details are found in the legal notice on Page 11.

“This is a big move; it’s not like putting up a stop sign – this is big,” Eydt said. “We’ve got to let the people know in the village, and let them voice their opinion on this, and get the feedback that we need to make the right decision.”

WNY leaders anticipating June reopening

County leaders are not counting on Erie County or Niagara County coming off Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s “New York State on PAUSE” program when the executive order expires May 15.

Speaking with the New York State Association of Counties on Wednesday, and again in a daily briefing posted on YouTube, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz said June 1 is more realistic. He spoke of Cuomo’s seven steps that need to be completed before a region can reopen. These include standards for new infections and capacity related to health care, diagnostic testing and contact tracing capacity.

Currently, Western New York meets three of the seven metrics.

“Based on the governor’s own metrics, with only three of the seven having been met as of (Tuesday), it’s highly doubtful we’ll meet May 15,” Poloncarz said. “It’s possible. Remember, they’re looking at two-week rolling averages. So, if the next nine days is that much better with regards to these hospitalization and contraction numbers, then we’d have a shot.”

“I am working very hard to meet the things that we can do on our end, with regards to contact tracers and ramping up the testing. But there are things that are

out of our control in county government, and it often has to do with hospitalizations and deaths.

“I said a couple days ago that I thought we’d have a much better chance of opening by June 1. I’m hopeful we meet the May 15 deadline. But right now, I don’t think we’re there yet. And if any place did open up on May 15, it would probably be the North Country, Southern Tier and maybe the Mohawk Valley.”

Poloncarz said he’s confident Western New York will soon check-off five boxes, as numbers of hospitalizations and new hospitalizations continue to decrease.

In Niagara County, Legislature Vice Chairman John Syracuse recently announced the formation of three working groups charged with preparing for post-pandemic operations.

On Wednesday, during her community update on LCTV, Niagara County Legislature Chairwoman Becky Wydysh spoke with Department of Economic Development Commissioner Michael Casale about “ReStart Niagara,” which is focused on helping businesses get started back up and running, accessing government programs, and providing any other support.

“I think we all understand that, while the reopening will be regionally driven ... as a county, we will still have our own specific focuses and needs that we’ll need to address ourselves outside of that regional group,” Wydysh said.

Casale noted the importance of Niagara County being considered as its own entity.

“We are in the Greater Niagara Region – it’s the REDC (Regional

Economic Development Council) region, which includes Niagara, Erie, Chautauqua, Cattaraugus and Allegany. And obviously the largest county in our region – one of the largest counties in the state, period – is Erie County; so they’re going to be doing a lot of the driving. But we are making sure that Empire State Development and **SEE BUSINESS, continued on Page 11**

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