

Military Road School update

NYSDEC accepting public comments on plan to investigate contamination

Last week, The Town of Niagara added a message from Supervisor Lee Wallace to its website regarding the former Military Road school. The school, which closed in 1992, was all but burned down in 2019 as the result of arson. It has remained an eyesore for residents ever since.

The message reads:

"I understand the frustration that folks have with this 'eye sore' (Military Road School) on our most traveled road, and I assure you that it is a major concern for the Town Board and myself as well. With that said, I wanted to update everyone on the status of the school as of today's date.

"Over the past few months, I have been in constant contact with the developer/owner regarding the status of the building and the future of the site. After recent discussions

with the demolition contractor, as well as Niagara County Brownfield personnel, please find below an estimated up to date analysis and timeline for the demolition:

- The property has been accepted into the State Brownfield Clean-Up Program and thus is under contract for complete remediation as per NYS Department of Environmental Conservation guidance and guidelines.

- The remediation investigation is scheduled for any time after Dec. 1, 2020 and the developer is waiting on approval of the work plan as submitted.

- Once the investigation phase is complete (January/February 2021), the remediation phase can begin. This phase could take up to 6 months, providing a 'clean' site sometime during the summer of 2021.

"I realize that the timeline for the

demolition seems lengthy. Unfortunately the overall process of acceptance into the NY State Brownfield Program, as well as the NYSDEC requirements are completely out of the control of the Town Board."

In related news, NYSDEC said it is now accepting public comments about its draft work plan work plan to investigate contamination through Nov. 20. A fact sheet containing details about the draft plan, as well as instructions on how to provide comment, are available at www.dec.ny.gov/data/der/fact-sheet/c932175riwp.pdf.

The fact sheet is in PDF format and can be saved, open, and read the fact sheet by using Adobe Acrobat Reader. Those without Adobe Acrobat Reader, can go to the following web page on the DEC web site to download the program: www.dec.ny.gov/about/590.html.

NT: 6.52% in proposed property tax increases

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Interim Tribune Editor

Despite numerous cuts, North Tonawanda Mayor Arthur G. Pappas said a property tax increase was imminent as he presented his general, water and sewer budgets for fiscal year 2020 to the Common Council on Tuesday.

The announcement came in the form of a written statement Pappas read to the council:

"My role and the role of all North Tonawanda city officials is to provide needed services to our residents that promote health, public safety, economic growth and opportunity. We must do so in a fiscally responsible manner and in a manner that places as small a burden on taxpayers as possible. I believe this budget does that, but given the difficulty of the times, it still requires increases in revenue. ...

"The fact is, cutting things like support for volunteer fire companies or closing Memorial Pool might save a few dollars, but these are important services to our community and the savings did not come close to closing our gap. North Tonawanda city government itself has been doing more with less for years. Our departments are down to a bare minimum of workers since there have been many cuts over the years. Department heads have been asked to reevaluate their budgets more than once this year to further reduce costs and look for efficiency. We implemented a hiring freeze and required any expenditure over \$1,500 be approved by the mayor. Yet, these and other steps were not nearly enough to stem the tide, especially taking the following into consideration:

- "State aid was cut this year by 20%.

- "Substantial decrease in sales tax revenue (which was actually on pace to exceed budget projection before the pandemic).

- "The state has not given any projections for revenue sharing.

- "Funding is being lost while expenses are contractual and rising due to step increases

- "Our state retirement costs have gone up 6%.

- "The federal government has not given assurance for stopgaps funding.

"Therefore, the unfortunate reality is that we have no choice but to

raise property taxes. I am proposing a 6.52% increase in property taxes and believe this is the most prudent course to fund needed services while minimizing as much as possible the impact on taxpayers. This clearly reverses the trend we have tried to follow in North Tonawanda over the last 12 years, which saw three years of no increase, three years of decreases, and six years of increases of less than 2%.

"What this means is that the General Fund Balance will increase the tax rate from \$13.88 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation to \$14.78. The total budget from 2020 to 2021 is an increase of \$321,805. A home assessed at \$150,000 will see an increase of \$135.71. Water and sewer base rates will increase from \$12 to \$15. Sewer rate will rise from \$4.50 to \$5 per thousand gallons. These rates have not been changed in 10 years. ...

"I fully understand no one wants to see an increase in their property tax bill and if I had other reasonable alternatives to implement, I certainly would. However, North Tonawanda is experiencing a rebirth because we are not afraid to make difficult choices that ultimately move this community forward. I stand 100% behind this budget as the right way to navigate our way through this pandemic."

Pappas' full letter can be found at www.wnypapers.com.

Elsewhere, the council also voted unanimously to allow the city to break New York state's imposed 2% tax cap. Pappas and council President Eric Zadzilka made assurances they would be scrutinizing the budget to look for more ways to bring the tax hike down.

A public hearing regarding the budget is scheduled for Nov. 2. The council is expected to vote on the budget on Nov. 12.

City Requests Outside Aid

The city unanimously passed a resolution serving as a formal request to Niagara County for \$1 million in aid.

Last week, Alderman-at-Large Austin Tylec explained the \$1 million figure wasn't an arbitrary amount. Rather, based on conversations with City Accountant Jeffrey Zellner, the city is looking at a \$1 million sales tax revenue gap due to the impact of COVID-19.

There was some dispute among

the council members as to how much the county had in its coffers. According to County Treasurer Kyle R. Andrews, the county's unassigned fund balance for 2019 was \$23,309,369. He went on to explain that the county has a fund balance policy requiring a minimum of 6% of the previous year's appropriations to be maintained to protect its bond rating and to ensure "solid fiscal footing."

"So anything over and above that amount could be the only amount in which the legislature could authorize to be spent, which amounts to \$2.625 million in 2019," Andrews said. "And I know the budget office is trying to apply that towards the county budget for 2021. We're a municipality, too and we've also been dealing with some turbulent times; and we're going to do everything we can to come in underneath the New York state property tax cap."

The resolution was also amended to include a request to the state for a share of CARES Act funding, which the city said it has not received thus far.

Porter Town Board reviewing 2021 budget plan

Slight increase in property tax rate eyed

STAFF REPORTS

The Town of Porter continues to proceed – albeit slowly – toward development of its budget plan for 2021.

The Town Board, at its Oct. 13 regular meeting, announced it will hold a public hearing on the 2021 preliminary budget at 6 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 5, at Town Hall. Members have been reviewing the budget numbers over past weeks. At this point, the budget remains incomplete.

Discussions heard earlier indicated the town has been contending with a number of factors, all of which have contributed to the challenges found on this year's plan. Included are significantly lower sales taxes from past years due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic; new financial hardships due to reduced state assistance – again reflective of the coronavirus' impact; budget considerations found in Highway Department equipment spending and staffing needs, town employee health care and retirement costs; a continuing drop in revenue from the CWM gross receipts tax account; and ongoing town spending needs.

Preliminary budget numbers show \$5,503,691 in planned appropriations for the 2021 plan. This reflects an increase of \$261,992 in appropriations from the adopted 2020 budget.

Included are: general fund A – \$1,162,861.58; general fund B – \$1,429,111; highway DA town-wide – \$1,683; highway DB outside village – \$1,085,780; Water Department – \$404,740; Sewer Department – \$494,016; Ransomville light – \$11,500; garbage refuse – \$400,000; Ransomville Fire – \$261,000; Youngstown Fire, \$188,232; lakeshore sewer improvement area, phases I, II and III – \$52,175; Mallory/Groveland Road project – \$467.42; and Harrison Lane road project – \$12,125.

Tax impact projections to town property owners from general fund A reveal \$819,436 to be

raised from property taxes. This comes from a \$290,575 reduction in estimated revenues and \$52,850.58 in unexpended fund balance. The proposed tax rate under the 2021 plan amounts to \$2.0587 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. By comparison, those same numbers in the 2020 plan show \$795,915 to be raised by taxes and a tax rate of \$2.0183 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

Special districts taxes and their respective amounts to be raised by taxes (identical numbers) include: Ransomville light, \$11,500; Ransomville Fire, \$261,000; Youngstown Fire, \$188,232; and lakeshore sewer, \$52,175.

Finally, proposed salaries for town officials under the 2021 plan include: town supervisor – \$35,067; town justices (two) – \$18,571.14; town clerk – \$58,716; superintendent of highways – \$75,264; and town tax collector – \$6,554.

At this writing, town officials continue to work on crunching the budget numbers en route to the planned Nov. 5 public hearing.

"It's still tentative at this point," said Kim Boyer, town bookkeeper.

The budget faces adoption by the Town Board for submission to the state by Nov. 20. Further information is available by calling Town Hall at 745-3730.

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Presented by
Dr. Glenda R. Rose
Chiropractor



Aging Well

According to a three-year study authored by a member of the RAND Corporation Research Institute, older people who utilize chiropractic care experience better overall health than seniors who do not avail themselves of chiropractic treatment. Specifically, the older chiropractic patients reported fewer symptomatic chronic conditions, shorter stays in hospitals and nursing homes, and greater mobility. In addition, older individuals who went to the chiropractor regularly were less likely to use prescription drugs and were more likely to exercise regularly. Chiropractic care addresses the preventative and rehabilitative needs of older patients, a prescription for good health maintenance.

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