

Bike track: Series of public meetings to take place over next 3 weeks

Continued from Page 1

Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce President Jennifer Pauly hosted the Zoom conference call. She said the goal was to “get input from the businesses, so as a business group we can collectively kind of see what the temperature is from these businesses here. Of course, this is not a full collective of what everyone’s opinions are, but I think it helps move forward, as far as a healthy discussion on what businesses are looking to see.”

Pauly said her office has had numerous requests for bike trail information since the coronavirus pandemic began.

“We generally send them down the bike trail alongside the Niagara Scenic Parkway, because that’s the safest bike trail that we have to offer to them right now,” she said.

Pauly noted, “It would be interesting to see what they’re doing, whether they’re looking to shop or what. Most of the inquiries we receive are recreational biking, so it’d be interesting to try to keep that information on file as we go forward for the rest of the year, just so we have some statistics.”

Welch said, “Speaking to Greg, when people are biking – say they’re coming down from Niagara Falls – they need a stopover; and they see Lewiston as the perfect stopover for people biking before they continue on. Or even they could pick up on the Discovery Shuttle, because they have bike racks and, if they didn’t want to bike back up to the Falls or from wherever they came from, they could also use the Discovery Shuttle to go back.”

Business Owners Skeptical

Apple Granny co-owner Chuck Barber said he’s “all for” beautification projects and updating infrastructure, but, “I struggle with is this the biggest need, though. I feel like parking, other issues, are so much bigger on Center Street.”

He explained, “I’m very concerned about the impediment of that, especially being a businessfront on Center Street, as well as having older customers who really need to rely on that parking – with their vehicles to be up front there. I do think this will impede that. I know we talked a little bit about the snowplowing, but I don’t think we appreciate how much that will play into all this.”

“And then my biggest concern to this ... is just the timing of it. My understanding is this is might be rolling out next spring. And I think we all know no job is ever within the timeframe that they project. And after a year where last year the waterfront really had its issues, and this year after having COVID impede business traffic so much with events and festivals, to have something like that going on, on the street, to me ... it could be devastating to have another summer like this.”

Inspirations on Canvas owner Kathy Pignatora said, “We have a lot of bike riders that come down, and skateboarders, and it’s really dangerous. So that is just something, and I don’t know if having a lane is going to make them go there instead of come down (the sidewalk).”

She noted, “I’m totally for the progress and making thoughtful changes going forward. I’m just terrified, too, like Chuck – and I’m sure everybody – how long would a project (take)? Even just to resurface, what is this all going to take? How long is it going to take? I know ... it’s going to be conservative next year, as well, and it’s a frightening proposal to make.”

Pignatora also made the point that restaurants have utilized curbside parking.

“That’s going to be a lot of these restaurants’ saving grace,” she said. “So, having the bike path there and then the parking, those kinds of issues are something that we have to sort of think about as a group.”

Tweak the Track?

Lewiston’s agent, Lee Simonson, said, “I speak as a bicyclist. ... This is the kind of thing you see in big cities – and, in fact, I’ve never seen two lanes going in both directions, between the parked cars and the curb; though there may be some, I’ve never seen it. But this, to me, is a giant step toward urbanization. And if Lewiston wants more business, it has to become more historical. This takes away from our character that we’ve been trying to establish over the years in terms of making a very quaint, historic village. And there’s a lot to be said about that, because, if we lose that, we just become another Williamsville; and we just lose what we stand for here in the village.”

He said cyclists should just continue down Center Street. However, if a bike track is going to happen, he suggested a lane would be better situated between parked and moving cars, instead of between the curb and parked cars.

That idea was better received.

“I have to kind of agree more with Lee. I like the idea of a lane going down Center Street; keep the people on it,” Fiore said. “If there’s a way, keep it in the median; keep it maybe away from the parking. I think that might be the best bet.”

Matt Villnave of Lewiston Digital, a member of the chamber’s events committee, said, “The (proposed) median was just a nonstarter for us to support. I mean, Jazz Festival, the Art Festival, our Harvest & Hops. It just wouldn’t work the way it traditionally has.”

With the proposed cycle track, he said the village would have to sacrifice some parking spots in the interest of safety and providing necessary vantage points for motorists.

“I just don’t see how you’d have clear vision with parking as it is now with the cars moved 7 feet out,” he said. “I think you’d have people creeping into the bike lane to kind of peek around the car that’s parked there – which defeats the purpose of having the bike lane, right, because then your bike lane has cars parked in it.”

What about 2022?

Welch was asked several times if the DOT can postpone paving until 2022.

She said, “We will have discussions with DOT, but I really don’t see us moving into 2022. It was hard enough just to get on the schedule to have it redone in 2021, and I don’t want to lose that. They have other projects planned, and ours is for next year.”

Welch said DOT wouldn’t interfere with summer festivals. Moreover, “I believe, when I talked to DOT, that it was only going to take a couple weeks – because it’s not the complete dig-out like we had 20 years ago. It is just a milling down of 3 inches of the pavement. And then the resurfacing. So, no, it’s not going to be long, drawn-out process.”

She added, “They are removing all the brick crosswalks. They are deteriorated and the ADA does not allow them anymore; so, it will just be striped pavement.”

Pauly asked, “Is this a done deal, mayor, where next year is definitely where they’re going to mill down the street? I know it’s in their budget, but is that a definite for next year?”

“Yes, as far as I’m aware,” Welch said. “Nothing has changed; they will be resurfacing next year.”

“Do we have any say in that timing?” Barber wondered. “I understand the project needs to be done, it’s just the timing.”

Pauly questioned, “Is there an opportunity for us to inquire to the DOT if they can push it to 2022, given the fact that our businesses really cannot take any more of a hit that they possibly can. And scheduling this in between festivals is really only giving small windows of opportunity. If we

RESIDENTS CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT CYCLE TRACK PROPOSAL

Four additional “Lower Niagara Shoreline Trail Connectivity Study” meetings have been scheduled.

•Niagara River Greenway Commission Executive Director Greg Stevens and his design team may present a revised conceptual package to the Village Board at 5 p.m. Monday, Sept. 21. The public can listen in via Zoom, but will not have an opportunity to speak.

Join Zoom meeting

√ <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7167548271>

√ Meeting ID: 716 754 8271

√ On mobile: 1-646-558-8656 or 716-754-8271#

•One week later, trustees will hold a public information meeting as part of their 6 p.m. meeting in the Red Brick Municipal Building gym, 145 N. Fourth St. Residents and business owners can speak and ask questions at this time.

As capacity is limited to 50 people, an RSVP may be required.

•Stevens and his team will hold two public workshop meetings on Thursday, Oct. 8. The first will take place at 2 p.m. outside of Artpark, 450 S. Fourth St. The second is slated for 6 p.m. inside the Lewiston Senior Center, 4361 River Road. Those looking to attend can RSVP at this website: <https://lowerniagaratrailstudy.com/community-engagement/>.

Those attending one or all meetings are required to wear a facial covering and adhere to additional COVID-19 safety requirements.

go forth with the Taste of Lewiston Memorial Day weekend, and then go forth with the Garden Festival – of course this is given that we can do festivals – there’s really only ... a couple of weeks between the Garden Festival and the Art Festival, which of course is July – that’s the peak tourist season for Lewiston, when we hope to get the most amount of people in our village.

“Is that realistically the timeframe they can get that done, and do we want the street torn up during a month where our businesses are really waiting for people to come in? I mean, this year was awful. We cry every day about it. And to think about a month – let’s say a solid month, because we know nothing is going to take a few weeks – it’s going to take at least a month, four weeks out of our summer. Can we really give that up?”

She added, “We are in a different circumstance now than we were a year ago. So now we’re pretty much fighting for our lives to make sure that businesses can stay open. And ... as a chamber president, I am worried to death that our businesses are not going to make it if a street is shut down for four weeks at a time to remill the entire street. It’s going to divert traffic, people are not going to come here with that, and we’re coming off such a year.”

Pignatora asked if the DOT could pave the road in a slower month like March, April or October.

Welch said she’d have further conversations to discuss options. She noted, “I do not want to move the date for resurfacing. Center Street is not in very good shape. We’ve had a lot of people falling and getting hurt, and then, of course, they want to sue the village, the state, whatever. So, this was important to get this on their schedule, and I do not want to disrupt that. I want to see the road repaved next year.”

She also explained, “I’m sure that you’ve seen, over the last few months, that the village has repaved some of our streets. They go in and they mill it down, and then usually it takes like a day for them to do the whole street. It’s going to basically be the same for DOT to do that: They’ll come in, mill it down – it won’t shut the street down – they will mill it down, and then they’ll come in and they will pave it. It’s not going to be months later. They will do it right away.”

Trustee Claudia Marasco said, “I think the DOT probably has communities that have nothing really seriously going on that they would maybe jump at a chance to change their schedule and switch off with another community – maybe like the Village of Lewiston – who may need more time in getting back on their schedule. I

think the DOT possibly should be invited to this public meeting, so that we could get really good answers from them, and then distribute and make a really good decision as a community, because it’s getting more and more layers as we continue to talk – and people have great ideas, and there’s other people in the community that have great ideas, as well.”

What’s in Lewiston’s Best Interest?

Welch said, “I just want to be clear that, when this first came up and this was all about resurfacing Center Street, when this bike lane came up, I thought it would be great for the businesses and to bring people into the village. That was my take on it, one way or the other. I mean, if we don’t have a bike lane, we don’t have a bike lane. ... That was my intent was to have people come to the businesses ... and also for the residents, to have a safer place to bike. That was my intent.”

Pauly said, “I think all the businesses and everybody could agree that connecting the bike trail from different points in Western New York all the way through Youngstown is a great thing. It’ll move people around. We’re not opposing that, of course.”

“Now, of course, we’re getting into the nitty gritty, though, of how it directly affects business one way or the other. So, you know, these types of conversations are important, and they lead to the best possible idea when all of the minds are put together.”

DOT was tight-lipped on the project.

Region 5 Assistant to the Regional Director/Regional Public Information Officer Susan S. Surdej, P.E., would only confirm, “The New York

State Department of Transportation is working with the Village of Lewiston and the Greenway Commission to explore the possibility of adding a bicycle path along Center Street as part of our upcoming resurfacing project, which is still in the preliminary design phase.”

Cycle Speak

In between Monday’s Historic Preservation Commission and Planning Board meetings, Stevens said, “There’s an opportunity right now for the village. This opportunity won’t come around for another 30 years, to have some input on what the DOT does with Center Street (when it repaves next year).”

“We have an expert team working on our trails. They know all about how to improve pedestrian safety and cycling safety and improve economic activity in a village.”

He explained to the audience inside the Red Brick, “A dedicated cycle track is an exciting concept, because it defines the state-of-the-art in village cycle safety. There are very few places outside of Portland and Seattle that have dedicated cycle tracks. The City of Buffalo just put a tremendous one in from City Hall all the way to Hertel on Niagara Street. It’s going to be a fantastic example of upgraded safe pedestrian and cycle mobility.”

“Our experts think there’s room for one on Center Street.”

The conceptual cycle track would continue from this intersection to Academy Park at Ninth and Center, cross down Center Street, go down to the waterfront, then back up and around the Red Brick to either Mohawk Street or Lower River Road.

Stevens was asked if he presented alternatives to the New York State Department of Transportation.

“Yes,” he said. “We actually went to DOT with three different varieties of what Center Street could look like. One is just put some paint on the road, and that’s where the cycles are – between cars and parked cars – which is problematic in some ways.”

He noted, “The cycle track is the most secure; it’s the highest level for a cycle-friendly village, and (for Center Street to be) a significant part of the regional cycling economy. So, that’s one direction to go.”

“Pointing it down some other street and having a bypass. You don’t care about that (cycling economy), and you want an automotive main street with angled parking on it – that’s a completely different strategy. It’s the kind of thing a planning board should be weighing those options. ...”

“We went to DOT with three options, all of which were improvements over their basic plan, which is just to repave Center Street.”

Stevens said DOT has the final say in which design is selected, because “It’s their money.”



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