

Northern Niagara news and notes

BY TERRY DUFFY
Editor-in-Chief

As the northern Niagara County lakeshore region continues its COVID-19 comeback, news of community interest finds the following:

•The Niagara County Legislature approved \$30,000 in funding to assist both the Town and Village of Wilson pay for its 5% local share of Lake Ontario flood control projects under Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Lake Ontario Resiliency and Economic Development Initiative (announced last year).

The funding will go toward local assistance intended to improve shore areas of Sunset Island and Roosevelt Beach and decommissioning of the village wastewater treatment plant, according a re-

cent Buffalo News report.

•On a related note, according to the latest issue of "Talking Points" from Village of Wilson Mayor Arthur Lawson, discussions are continuing with the Village of Wilson and Town of Newfane toward creating "a mutually beneficial network for ownership, service and billing for the new treatment plant in the town. The village remains on track toward completing a grant agreement by spring of 2021, and is working with the REDI Commission and Wendel Engineering to finalize a grant disbursement agreement for the townline pier project.

•Lawson also reported the village DPW has experienced increased usage of "wipes" being flushed over past months that are

disrupting water treatment facilities.

"It is especially important to not flush any wipes as it can be very costly to repair equipment," Lawson said. "They are not biodegradable. As one municipality in our area has experienced already this year, it may cost them up to \$20,000 to repair their equipment. That is \$20,000 of our tax money to repair something that could be avoided. So, please, do not flush wipes!"

•On the COVID-19 count, Lawson said the Wilson-Newfane communities are among the lowest for infection rates in the state, a trend he aims to continue.

"The Village of Wilson has only had four total cases and nothing

new since early June. As a whole, the Wilson community only has 26 positive cases," Lawson said. "While we focus on COVID-19, we also need to prepare for flu season in the fall. More than \$30 million in grants was awarded to counties, allowing them to enhance COVID-19 contact tracing and flu prevention in advance of the fall flu season. The upcoming flu season is expected to add stress to both contact tracing and testing infrastructure; these funds will allow counties to prepare accordingly."

•Lawson reports village elections have been rescheduled to Sept. 15. The postponement from last spring conforms to Gov. Andrew Cuomo's executive order 202.26 covering village elections.

•The Village of Wilson Board will meet next at 7 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 20, at Town Hall, 375 Lake St. The public may attend. COVID-19 protocols will be followed.

•The Niagara County Veterans Service Agency reports WNY Heroes is a recipient of large amount of fresh groceries from the USDA, which are available to area veterans in need. Food packages include a meat box of ham and chicken products; a dairy box consisting of regular milk, chocolate milk and yogurt; and a produce box of assorted fresh vegetables. All products are refrigerated, but not frozen.

For more information, contact Lynn at lmagistrale@wnyheroes.org.

City of Niagara Falls seeks to reallocate CDBG funds for COVID-19 testing

Niagara Falls is on a mission to move forward in maintaining access to COVID-19 test kits for residents.

In a press event held Thursday, Mayor Robert Restaino discussed the proposal for the reallocation of Community Development Block Grant funds toward the purchase of COVID-19 test supplies.

"My administration worked very hard with our various partners to increase test sites in the community, increase testing in the general community, and decrease the spread of the virus in Niagara Falls," he said. "The sudden shift in resources at the request of federal authorities endangers the community and can significantly roll back

the progress we've made."

Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center was acting as a leader for the Niagara Falls community testing. However, NFMCC had to pause its community COVID-19 testing program when Kaleida Health Laboratories, its testing partner, encountered testing supply chain issues.

Michael P. Hughes, Kaleida Health's senior vice president and chief of staff, said, "Testing has been a challenge since COVID-19 hit Western New York. You have to remember that we are competing statewide, nationally, and internationally every day when it comes to testing and the supplies related to it. So, it's a battle for our laboratory and purchasing teams."

The City of Niagara Falls is considered to be an area with a highly vulnerable population in regard to COVID-19. To combat this, the city wants to ensure access to testing and significantly reduce turnaround times that would be exclusively for Niagara Falls residents.

The proposal in partnership with NFMCC would act to get testing facilities up and running once the

funding is approved and these tests become available.

"We are grateful to Mayor Restaino, the Niagara Falls City Council and the city's Community Development team for providing grant funding that will help defray costs and enable our mobile COVID-19 testing teams to restart community testing," Memorial Medical Center President and CEO Joseph A. Ruffolo said. "We have mapped the addresses of every person we have tested as positive for the novel coronavirus, identified hot spot clusters, and will target those locations as we focus on making tests available to the most vulnerable populations in the city."

Niagara Falls is looking to utilize funds, deemed eligible by the city's comptroller, from CDBG accounts toward this cause. Restaino explained the urgency for this funding to be authorized, as testing has become a scarce resource without it.

"At a critical time when schools need to reopen, the city can ill afford to be limited on the supplies needed to provide a safe reopening," he said. "In addition, I am

concerned that our seniors, nursing home residents and other vulnerable populations will not obtain the prompt testing necessary to protect them. Working with (NFMCC), I am confident that the resources the city is providing will properly attend to the needs of our seniors, schools, university and other community groups. This will help the city stay ahead of the virus and protect our residents."

Congressman Brian Higgins said, "Widespread access to testing and timely results provide our community with the best opportunity to limit the spread of COVID. Using a portion of the more than \$1.4 million in federal CDBG funding, the City of Niagara Falls received through the CARES Act to expand testing meets the need of this public health emergency. I commend Mayor Restaino for proactively seeking solutions to keep the residents of Niagara Falls safe and healthy."

Restaino is asking the City Council to hold a special meeting Aug. 7 to authorize the use of these CDBG funds as an emergency expenditure for residents.

Democrats to select nominees for Village of Lewiston election

A Democratic Party caucus to nominate candidates for two, four-year terms as Village of Lewiston trustees will take place beginning

at 6 p.m. Monday, Aug. 17, at the Red Brick Municipal Building gymnasium, 145 N. Fourth St.

Only registered Democrats who reside in the Village of Lewiston are eligible to nominate and vote for candidates. Candidates selected must reside in the Village of Lewiston. Those wishing to nominate or vote at the caucus are asked to bring photo identification.

Niagara County Democratic Chairman Jason Zona appointed resident Frances Flanagan caucus chairman.

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, all attendees should bring with them and wear a facial mask or cloth covering, and social distancing will be followed during the caucus.

The election is Tuesday, Sept. 15.

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