

DOT will continue to accept responses

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changes to the areas while its larger plan was drafted. The speed limit in that section of the boulevard was permanently lowered to 45 mph and new signage was added including "Signal Ahead," "Be Prepared to Stop" and "Do Not Drive on Shoulder."

At Wednesday's public hearing, DOT officials debuted drawings and mockups highlighting the proposed major changes. At the Ward Road intersection, the plan calls for the road to be widened to accommodate the addition of dedicated left-turn lanes on all four legs of the intersection. Additionally, the existing concrete box culvert carrying Sawyer Creek under Ward Road will be replaced.

At the Witmer Road intersection, dedicated left turn lanes will be added to both legs of Niagara Falls Boulevard and Witmer Road. Additionally, at the request of the Town of Wheatfield and Niagara County, the Oppenheim Park driveway will also be realigned directly across from Witmer Road to create a four-legged intersection. Currently, drivers traveling down Witmer have to make a left and then an immediate right into the park entrance. This will require the installation of a new box culvert to carry Sawyer Creek under the new driveway.

Elsewhere, plans call for existing traffic signals and signs to be upgraded and for sidewalks to be added to the south side of Niagara Falls Boulevard within the work limits at both intersections. They will also see the installation of ADA-compliant curb ramps and pedestrian signals on all four corners of each intersection.

To facilitate the additions, the DOT said small parcels of land will be acquired for road widening, but no residential buildings will be required and the purchases are not expected to adversely affect businesses. Affected property owners will be contacted directly by the DOT prior to purchase.

The DOT said that, to minimize construction impact, two-way traffic will be maintained during most of the project, although some lanes will be temporarily closed on all three roads. Delays are anticipated. It also said that, during an approximate two-week period, the north leg of Ward Road will be completely closed to accommodate culvert replacement. A six-mile signed detour will direct motorists to use Walmore Road and Lockport Road. No night work is planned as part of this project. Travel advisories will be issued in advance of work.

Bid opening for the project is expected to begin in spring 2022. Construction is expected to begin in summer 2022 and to be completed by summer 2023. The project will be entirely state and federally funded.

In the meantime, the DOT is collecting public feedback on the project and will include those responses in its updated design report in September.

While only a limited number of citizens spoke during the public hearing, the DOT said it will continue to accept responses in writing and online until Aug. 11. Comments can be mailed via first class mail to 100 Seneca St., Buffalo, NY 14203-2939. Online comments can be submitted at www.dot.ny.gov/Rt62WardWitmer/contact.

Those who gave feedback at the hearing said they were all in favor of the project but raised different concerns and questions. Steve Wingrove, owner of Alder Creek music, urged officials to move the proposed sidewalks away from the road, noting many drivers ignore the posted speed limit and they would be unsafe.

Mark Pierson, who owns land that will need to be purchased to facilitate the project, had concerns about how the state would purchase the lands.

"I want this project to happen. I just want to make sure that I'm compensated," he said.

In a presentation, DOT Real Estate Specialist Anthony Dispenza said, "We realize this is not the typical buyer-seller relationship. Although the eminent domain process allows the state to acquire private property for public use,



you are entitled to just compensation. The goal of the Office of Right Away is to make sure that this process proceeds as smoothly as possible for all concerned."

For more information concerning property acquisition, DOT officials pointed to the pamphlet, "How NYS Acquires Property For Public Purposes," which is located at www.dot.ny.gov/Rt62WardWitmer/reports.

ny.gov/Rt62WardWitmer/reports.

The last comment came from Doris Carlson, who noted \$1.8 million had been previously allotted in 2016 as part of a federal grant for remediation specifically for the Ward Road intersection. She asked whether those funds were available to be used for the project. Surdej said they are and will be.

Carlson, who lives right off the in-

tersection and has seen the dangers firsthand (and frequent annoying traffic backups), has been among the most active community voices to raise awareness of the roadway's dangers. Last year, she spearheaded a letter-writing campaign for residents and local businesses to raise the issue with state officials and the DOT. She said while she's happy to see activity relat-

ed to the project, after so many years of false starts, she's still skeptical. Moreso, she had concerns whether resident concerns related to the current project would be truly addressed, or whether the DOT would choose to ignore them.

"I'm happy they're getting something done but, you know, it's still what they want in. ... If they aren't going to take the residents into account, then what is their point?" she said. "I mean, (this) was an argument 20 years ago. I've been in my house 25 years. People in town have been arguing that they needed a left turn lane, not only from the boulevard but for Ward ... and it's been unconscionable they haven't been able to put all this together and say, 'Hey, we need to do something.' Now they are, but how long are we going to have to wait. Is this just to keep us quiet, because I made some noise a couple years ago? I don't believe it anymore. I went to this kind of a meeting 10 years ago; I saw the same renders; and then it's talking about the acquisitions of the property and things like that. It hasn't changed."

Incidentally, as if to underscore the issue, at 4:30 p.m., the Niagara County Sheriff's Office reported a two-vehicle accident at the Ward Road intersection, just as the meeting was getting underway. As the accident report has not been released yet, there are no further details.

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