



Bins of absentee ballots cast in the Grand Island Central School District budget vote and trustee election. (Photo by Larry Austin)

Grand Island Central School District Cuomo extends deadline to mail absentee ballots

Gov. Andrew Cuomo extended the state deadline one week for voters to submit their ballots by mail for the 2020-21 proposed budget and Board of Education election.

Grand Island Central School District now have until Tuesday, June 16, to vote by mail pursuant to Cuomo's June 7 executive order.

Postage-paid absentee ballots were mailed to registered voters in late May. Initially, all ballots were required to be in the district clerk's office by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, June 9, however Cuomo's executive order now gives voters additional time to vote by mail. Pursuant to the executive order, mailed ballots must be received in the district clerk's office at 1100 Ransom Road no later than June 16 to be counted. This is a week after the deadline for hand-delivered ballots, which were accepted until 5 p.m. on June 9.

New York State School Board Association Executive Director Robert Schneider said the extension "will help those districts that, through no fault of their own, faced problems with vendors in getting absentee ballots out on time. However, in extending the deadline for every school district, the executive order will likely cause confusion among voters in districts that did not

face supply chain issues, thereby adding to what has been an extremely frustrating, costly and cumbersome board election and school budget vote process."

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, on May 1, Cuomo issued an executive order delaying school board elections and budget votes statewide. All school board elections and budget votes in the states are being conducted by mail and all qualified voters will be sent an absentee ballot with return postage paid.

Go online to www.grandisland-schools.org/budget2020 for details about the budget.

"Our proposed budget balances the needs of both the taxpayers of the Grand Island School community and our students through the development of a fiscally responsible budget designed to provide our students with the best diversified educational program," said Dr. Brian Graham, superintendent of Grand Island schools.

"As a result of the extensive planning, analysis and future projections, the Grand Island Central School District is committed to providing our families and community with the necessary budget information to make an informed decision," Graham said.

Town Board, Planning Board hold online joint Project Olive hearing

BY LARRY AUSTIN
Island Dispatch Editor

Project Olive returned to the town government's agenda with an online joint meeting of the Grand Island Town Board and Planning Board Thursday night.

The joint meeting, held online as the Dispatch went to press Thursday night, was slated to take place months ago before the current COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the normal course of the development. It was held online due to restrictions of public gatherings.

Phillips Lytle attorney Kim Nason presented on behalf of the developer, TC Buffalo, and said filings are all on the town's website as well as tcbuffalograndisland.com.

"It's an exciting project, again a symbol of the economic vitality of the town, a project that will bring significant job creation and economic benefits to both the town and the region," Nason said. Project Olive, planned for 2780 Long Road on 145 acres.

Nason said since the developer and government had last got together, "TC Buffalo has undertaken extensive outreach to provide detailed information on the project plan and to solicit feedback on any potential issues or concerns in connection with the project."

Nason said, "In response, TC Buffalo has provided detailed comprehensive responses to all of these comments received. And as necessary, TC Buffalo will continue to do so to the extent there are any further new issues that arise that haven't been addressed in the substantial materials submitted thus far."

Nason said TC Buffalo has received input from agencies that include the Erie County Department of Public Works, the New York State Thruway Authority, the New York State Department of Transportation, the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

TC Buffalo presented Tuesday before the Traffic Safety Advisory Board, and has also met with the Conservation Advisory Board, Long Range Planning Committee and the Economic Development Advisory Board, she said. Since the original filing in February, TC Buffalo has added a supplemental traffic letter April 9 "to address bridge questions." May 4 and 21, TC Buffalo submitted additional supplemental reports on traffic.

A greater analysis of bridge traffic concluded that the project



The Grand Island Town Board, Planning Board, developers of Project Olive for TC Buffalo, and residents met online Thursday night to discuss the giant e-commerce distribution facility under consideration.

would see the North Grand Island Bridge traffic rise 2.4% and remain below historic peak levels, Nason said. South Bridge traffic would rise 3.1% according to the study, again below historic peak levels.

The revised traffic study came to the same conclusion as earlier studies, Nason said, and the traffic report by SRF Associates was "proposing the same mitigation" as in its earlier report: installation of a signal on Long Road/I-190 southbound ramp; and addition of a right turn lane for traffic exiting the I-190 northbound off-ramp to Grand Island Boulevard. Nason said "the project can be reasonably accommodated by the existing roadway network."

In the public comment portion of the meeting, speakers supported the project for its economic potential, while critics raised environmental and traffic concerns.

Michael Lockett of the Island agreed with Nason that the traffic impact as described in the report would be "fairly minimal" and he said the project will provide jobs, help with taxes, and will cause "minimal" environmental impact.

Mark Valle also cited the traffic study in saying the impact "won't be as bad as everybody is anticipating," and he also pointed to the positive impact of the project on jobs and taxes.

Giorgio Panepinto of Second Avenue, an Island business owner himself, said Project Olive would be great for the town by generating jobs not just for the project, but for surrounding businesses as well. Eric Fiebelkorn, as president of the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, announced the chamber was offering "our whole-

hearted support for the project" and will elaborate in detail in the coming days on "why this is going to be great for the Grand Island community" with benefits outweighing the negatives.

Jim Mazza, who called himself an "immediate neighbor" to the project site, had concerns with pollution: air, noise, visual, and odor. He asked about noise mitigation between the project site and homes on Long, Sunset, Bedell and West River. He also worried about "a dramatic effect" on property values of neighbors to "an industrial complex," as well as possible flooding with the project creating an enormous hardscape footprint.

Roger Cook of West River Road and a member of the EDAB said that board passed a motion in March to hire an economic consultant to do a cost benefit analysis of the project and to review the economic estimates of what he called the "fourth largest company in the world," alluding to Amazon, the e-commerce company widely assumed to be the property occupant.

"I'm not convinced. I want to see the data," Cook said in asking for a consultant. He called for something akin to "a community benefits agreement" to guarantee the windfall the developers estimate.

Dave Reilly of Whitehaven Road cited a report that estimates shipping goods to and from warehouses in the region produced millions of dollars "in uncompensated public costs for noise, road damage, accidents and harmful emissions in 2018 alone."

Reilly said the project would "overwhelm the Island."



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Joan Dlugokinski
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