

DOT nixes Center Street digital sign idea

Welch asks to use funds for inclusive playground

BY JOSHUA MALONI

GM/Managing Editor

There will be no digital sign at Academy Park.

Prior to Monday's public information session on a proposed marker at Center Street and Portage Road, Mayor Anne Welch said, "At the end of last week, I was notified by New York State Department of Transportation that they do not allow the signs in the right-of-way anymore. So, it's a moot point to have a discussion on a sign we can't even put up."

Center Street is a state roadway, as many have come to learn during its recent repaving.

Welch proposed the new sign, citing its predecessor's popularity. A black and white letterboard was often used to promote community events and activities. However, a windstorm retired that billboard earlier this spring.

Initially, the idea was to install a digital sign next to the Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce office at Center and South Ninth streets. But concerns arose over the project's size, and its visibility – and viability – at one of Lewiston's busiest corners.

A new pitch suggested placing a digital sign at the site of its forerunner. The initial estimate for a two-sided marker and stone pillars was \$60,444. Funding would come from the sale of the "Big Yellow House" at 475 Ridge St., which is expected to net the municipality more than \$270,000.

Welch said the original sign "rotted out and broke, and it's gone. ... It was there for years, and I know we had a lot of people that put a lot of stuff up there, and information. But now we have no sign."

Trustee Nick Conde noted, "We had no letters" for the original sign.

"We had no letters," Welch emphasized. "We couldn't maintain it."

"So, I guess people will just have to advertise in the Sentinel, and do the best they can. At meetings, we'll get the word out on different events and stuff. But unfortunately, we don't have any sign."

Following an initial article on the digital sign proposal, many of the public comments received via social media were in opposition to the idea.

Welch said – and NFP confirmed – local business interests favored a digital sign.

Playground Update

Recreation Department Director Brendan McDermott noted "Spring Fling" had a record 160 youth and parents participate in the one-mile "Fun Run for Kids" outside the Red Brick Municipal Building. He said a basket auction raised \$1,500 for programming.

The new inclusive playground at Marilyn Toohey Park is nearing completion, but wasn't ready to open in time for Sunday's annual event.



Top: New York state will not allow the Village of Lewiston to install a digital sign similar to this rendering from Cooper Sign Co. • Right: Mayor Anne Welch said it's time to consider replacing the basketball court outside the Red Brick Municipal Building. • Below, right: The inclusive playground at Marilyn Toohey Park is nearing completion.



Mark Cerrone Inc. is overseeing construction. Dave Webb Concrete is currently at work on the grounds.

With the digital sign proposal dropped, Welch asked the Board of Trustees to consider using "Big Yellow House" sale proceeds for the playground – and maybe a new basketball court, too.

Welch said, "As you can see, our playground is almost completed. They've been working diligently trying to get everything done. We had rubber surface board (installed last week), which is beautiful. They are going to be pouring the splash pad this week – and we are basically running out of money."

The playground's initial cost was upward of \$750,000, but Clerk Shannon Fundis explained the cost of products and services has increased dramatically since the coronavirus pandemic began in March 2020.

The Village of Lewiston has been fundraising for the project since it was first proposed in 2018. In addition to public support, the Town of Lewiston helped secure a \$200,000 grant from the Niagara River Greenway Commission.

"I would like to ask the board if we can use some funds from the sale of the house on Ridge Street to pay for some of the playground bills that are coming in," Welch said.

She further stated, "I'm sure you all saw that ... there is a \$75,000 estimate to redo the basketball courts, which are really, really in bad shape. We have a million-dollar playground, and the old basketball courts in front. It's all broken, and chunks out of it, and actually hazardous. I'd like to be able to spend money to refinish the basketball courts, as they are used every day."

Welch added, "We also had an estimate for a fence around the playground." This would replace the existing chain-link construction fence. "That is another \$60,000."

Deputy Mayor Vic Eydt said, "We'll have to think about that."

Trustee Dan Gibson asked, "How much money are we talking about?"

Treasurer Stephanie Longwell said she is expecting additional bills this week, so she can provide exact numbers at next Monday's year-end meeting.

"They're trying to finish the playground by the end of this month – that's why I'm asking," Welch said.

McDermott said, "Just some perspective on it, too. I was looking through our records. The last time that basketball court was paved was back in 2001. That's 21 years of usage; 21 winters. The last time it was resurfaced was 2011. Resurfacing is just that red piece that chips off. It's lived its life cycle, for sure."

He said a fence to separate the playground, the basketball courts, and the parking lot would be "ideal – just for safety purposes."

Village counsel Joseph Leone said, "It becomes a liability issue, as well."

Conde said, "We can't stop (the playground build); it's got to get done"; but both he and Gibson again asked for a cost estimate.

Eydt said, "I don't have a problem taking money from the house; I just don't want an open-ended thing. At least have some idea of what we're looking to spend, and where we stand."

The village is expecting some additional playground funding from the state of New York.

Food Donations

Also at Monday's Village Board meeting:

- Trustees approved a petition made by Community Missions and Heart, Love & Soul to request monetary and food donations from the public on Artpark concert nights throughout the months of June, July and August. Collections will be accepted on the corner of South Fourth and Tuscarora streets, with volunteers posted on the sidewalks leading into the state park.

Trustee Claudia Marasco, who has volunteered with and advocated for the agencies, said, "They've been going since 2009, with a two-year intermission due to COVID; so, they're happy to be back out there. I'm sure the public will like to see them out there again."

- The Village Board also ap-

proved motions for:

- ✓ Plans submitted by Tin Pan Alley to build an outdoor bar and covered patio; and designs from The Rose Hanger to build an up-

dated exterior staircase.

- ✓ A facilities contract request to hold the eighth annual Mighty Fitz 5K on Saturday, Nov. 5.

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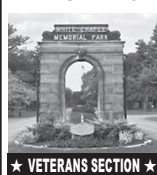
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All motorists are reminded to safely "share the road" with motorcycles and to be extra alert to help keep motorcyclists safe. Motorcyclists are reminded to make themselves visible to other motorists. Motorcycles are vehicles with the same rights and privileges as any motor vehicle on the roadway.

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