

Wheatfield 2021 tentative budget: Slight tax increase to cover garbage costs

Town gets Aa3 rating from Moody's

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO
Interim Tribune Editor

On Tuesday, the Wheatfield Town Board formally received its 2021 tentative budget, which includes a small tax increase attributed to rising garbage collection costs. Budget Director Ed Mongold was on hand for a brief presentation where he explained some of the developments.

“As a result of the coronavirus crisis, we made every attempt to reduce our budget appropriations wherever possible, or at least keep them at the same level. However, the 2021 tentative budget does include a slight tax increase,” Mongold said. “For a typical homeowner that’s assessed at \$125,000, the tax levy increase would be \$7.99 on an annual basis. The total taxes would increase from \$514.91 to \$522.96. That represents a 1.55% increase.

“This tax increase is basically 100% attributable to the garbage district. The cost of garbage pickup has increased by almost

\$290,000 since 2019.”

Mongold outlined some other pertinent figures. Total budget appropriations have been reduced by almost \$350,000, while total estimated revenues have been reduced by almost \$253,000. The tax levy is increasing by \$53,715 (from \$3,802,981 to 3,856,696), representing a 1.41% increase, which is below the statewide tax cap of 1.56%.

Mongold also noted there would be no salary increases for any of the elected officials.

Supervisor Don MacSwan said some of the cuts included trimming budgets related to equipment. He said town engineers, the sheriff’s department and the Niagara County SPCA have all agreed to no increases next year. Elsewhere at the meeting, the board passed a motion approving an agreement between the town and the SPCA regarding dog and animal control services to be offered at the same rates and terms as last year.

A 2021 tentative budget work session will be held at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 14.

Also on finances, MacSwan announced that Moody’s rating services rated the town as an Aa3, the fourth highest rating in Moody’s Long-term Corporate Obligation Rating. Obligations rated Aa3 are judged to be of high quality and are subject to very low credit risk, per Moody’s website.

Niagara Falls Boulevard Updates

The town has made some additional requests to the New York State Department of Transportation regarding the infrastructure improvement projects on Niagara Falls Boulevard at the Ward Road and Witmer Road intersections. Councilman Curt Doktor shared a pair of letters sent to the DOT outlining the requests.

In one, the town is looking to add a pair of left turn lanes from Witmer to NFB, and from Oppenheim Park to NFB as a revision to the currently “in-flight” project.

Per the letter, “The area where Witmer/Oppenheim Park meets NFB is especially curvy. Vehicles often attempt right turns on red lights, creating a safety hazard. This is exacerbated because the

approach to the intersection only has one lane. The car attempting to make a right hand turn often has to navigate around a vehicle waiting to make a left, further obstructing views. A left turn lane would help to keep waiting vehicles back from the intersection. A ‘No Turn on Red’ designation would also undoubtedly go a long way to improving safety for oncoming traffic turning onto NFB from Witmer Road and from Oppenheim Park.”

The town is also requesting a 2.1-mile center turning lane added on NFB from Sy Road to Mavis Drive. The town is requesting that this addition not be added to the current Ward/Witmer project, as to avoid creating delays. Rather, it requests the DOT evaluate this as an “incremental project.”

Explaining the need for the proposal, the letter reads, “The vast majority of Niagara Falls Blvd. from Kenmore to Niagara Falls already has a center turn lane. The Sy to Mavis stretch through Wheatfield is packed with businesses and residential properties that requires frequent left turns. This creates a significant collision risk given the substantial traffic flows in both directions. Numer-

ous accidents occur along this stretch from ‘fender benders’ to serious injury accidents. A center turning lane would undoubtedly go a long way to improving safety and traffic flow in general.”

The letter also notes that a center turn lane for this stretch was previously a part of DOT project plans for NFB but was deferred. “This highlights DOT acknowledgement regarding the need for this important improvement,” the letter reads.

“I think it’s great that you prepared these letters because what it does is it continues to put pressure on DOT. And I think we’ll continue until such time that they award this project and we’ll stay on top of it,” MacSwan said.


On a related note, the board also passed a motion requesting the Niagara County Highway Department to install a “No Passing on Shoulder” sign on Nash Road near the intersection with Rachele Drive, as Nash Road is a county road and the previous sign in that location was destroyed. Per the motion, “Shoulder passing is not legal, and in that area, it represents a traffic safety hazard.”



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Niagara Arts Guild 72nd Fall Art Show

The Niagara Arts Guild opens its 72nd Annual Fall Art Show, “Pandemic Paintings,” at the History Center of Niagara on Saturday, Oct. 17. Award-winning members of the guild exhibit a variety of artworks, sculptures and assemblages in various media. The show, presented in the History Center Meeting Room, first floor, will feature artwork judged by Jean Jain – with some

works available for sale.

The show is free.

A selection of student artwork, exempt from judging, will also be displayed.

Chairpersons for the Show are Maggie and Phil Eaton.

The show continues 9-5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, through Nov. 17. The History Center is located at 215 Niagara St., Lockport.

The Niagara Arts Guild was formed by Lorana Rogers in 1948, and has represented and informed artists in various visual media ever since. The guild is accepting new members who practice art, or are art lovers or historians.

Information is available on Facebook at www.niagaraarts-guild.com.

NT: New Walls of Fame give proper prominence to notable alums

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fellow volunteer John Gattas. Gattas, who runs the “Everything NT” Facebook page, helped create the group’s promotional videos along with video producer Dan Oshier of Dan Oshier Productions.

“When you see NT, this small little town, and you see these great success stories; your (WGRZ anchor) Maryalice Demlers, your Aaron Mentkowskis ... people that have gone on to have great careers and great lives; it could happen to anybody. It can actually happen to you. ... So if I could say what I hope the legacy of this Wall of Fame project is, is that students can look at it and know: Don’t let your dreams just be dreams. Make

them a reality,” Gattas said.

The group members offered repeated thanks to all who have supported the project thus far through its numerous successful fundraising opportunities. However, as it looks forward to its next phases (which Baran says aren’t completely finalized, but some concepts are viewable via the project’s website) the group will be looking to the community for further support.

Fortunately, a number of local groups and businesses have created other interesting opportunities to raise funds. Jaime’s Ice Cream (1401 Nash Road) offers a special “Lumberjack Sundae” with a portion of the proceeds going to the Wall of Fame Project. Additionally,

Oncore Golf (whose president, Keith Blakely, graduated from NTHS in 1974 and was a member of the school gymnastics team) is selling commemorative Avant golf balls emblazoned with the school’s logo.

Additionally, direct donations can be made on the project’s website at www.nthswof.com.

For those hoping to see the new and improved Walls of Fame in person, Superintendent Gregory Woytila said this week that the school will be having “open houses” from 5-7 p.m. on Wednesdays. For more information, follow the NTHS Wall of Fame Project’s Facebook page, www.facebook.com/groups/228066798324821.



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