

Village of Lewiston will not pursue Center Street bike path

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GM/Managing Editor

When the New York State Department of Transportation mills and repaves Center Street next year, a Center Street bicycle track will not be included in the redesign.

On Tuesday, Village of Lewiston Mayor Anne Welch said neither a conceptual plan nor a second option proposed by Lee Simonson would work.

Following two weeks of contentious meetings with business owners, and upon further consultation with the DOT, Welch said the Board of Trustees will not pursue the idea any further.

Niagara River Greenway Commission Executive Director Greg Stevens pitched the idea of a two-way bike track situated on the southside of the street, in between the walkway and parking spaces. He was met with lukewarm response from a half-dozen business owners.

"I've talked to DOT, talked to Greg, and we are not going to do a bike lane down Center Street," Welch said. "The reasoning being is when I talked to DOT yesterday, the engineer, she said that we couldn't have a bike lane over the drains – and we have the drains all along the curb there. That won't work. So, we can't do the bike lane next to the curb."

"And then the other proposal to have bike lanes in the street (Simonson's idea), they were only 3-foot-wide – they have to be 4-foot-wide. The chiefs (Lewiston Police Department's Frank Previte and Lewiston No. 1 Fire Co.'s Les Myers) – especially Frank –

he was worried about riding next to the cars. Because a big truck, the mirrors stick out; and people opening doors and stuff. He said once you designate the bike lane, you're basically responsible if anybody gets hurt."

Simonson's "Plan B" called for one lane on each side of Center Street. The former Niagara County legislator and current Lewiston historian/advocate said his proposal "eliminates the hazards associated with pedestrians forced to traverse a two-way bike path to get to the curb; eliminates the possibility of cars inadvertently infringing on the bike path by parking next to the curb; places the bicyclists in the road next to the car traffic where they traditionally, and legally, expect to be; provides more room for drivers to exit their parked cars without the fear of oncoming car traffic. (Drivers exiting parked cars will probably encounter bicyclists less than 1% of the time, so Plan B provides an extra buffer of safety with 4 feet of additional space for drivers to get in and out of their parked cars.)"

As Welch explained, however, "The numbers didn't add up, because we didn't have enough room to do 4 feet on each side – that would be back to the 8 feet again," which was rejected both by her board and the business owners. "So, it just didn't work on Center Street."

The Empire State Trail connecting Manhattan to Montreal – and, as it pertains to Western New York, Buffalo to Youngstown – will still continue to and through Lewiston. A bike path was re-



An existing bike path begins at Cayuga and South Ninth streets; it crosses Center Street and goes down North Ninth Street, extending over to Mohawk Street.

cently completed along the escarpment and down the Niagara Scenic Parkway to the corner of Seneca and South Ninth streets.

"I talked to Greg, and we're still going to work on Academy Park, with having it come down and go around Academy Park, but I said we'll do signage – and we can tell them they can go down Center Street and bike like they always have," Welch said. "Or they can go down Cayuga Street, because I said it goes straight through to Fourth; or they can go down Ninth Street to Mohawk and along the parkway. Those are the options. Or they can go up into Artpark."

"We're just going to try to figure something out from Academy

Park, that's all."

Stevens had suggested a new comfort station be built in between the existing bathroom building and the Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce office. It's unknown if that amenity will still be pursued.

He is scheduled to present a Niagara County bike plan at two public meetings on Oct. 8.

The Village of Lewiston had scheduled a public information session for Monday, Sept. 28, but that is now canceled.

"We (trustees) discussed it and

went over it last night before we went to the meeting, and everybody said, 'Yeah, that just doesn't work,'" Welch said.

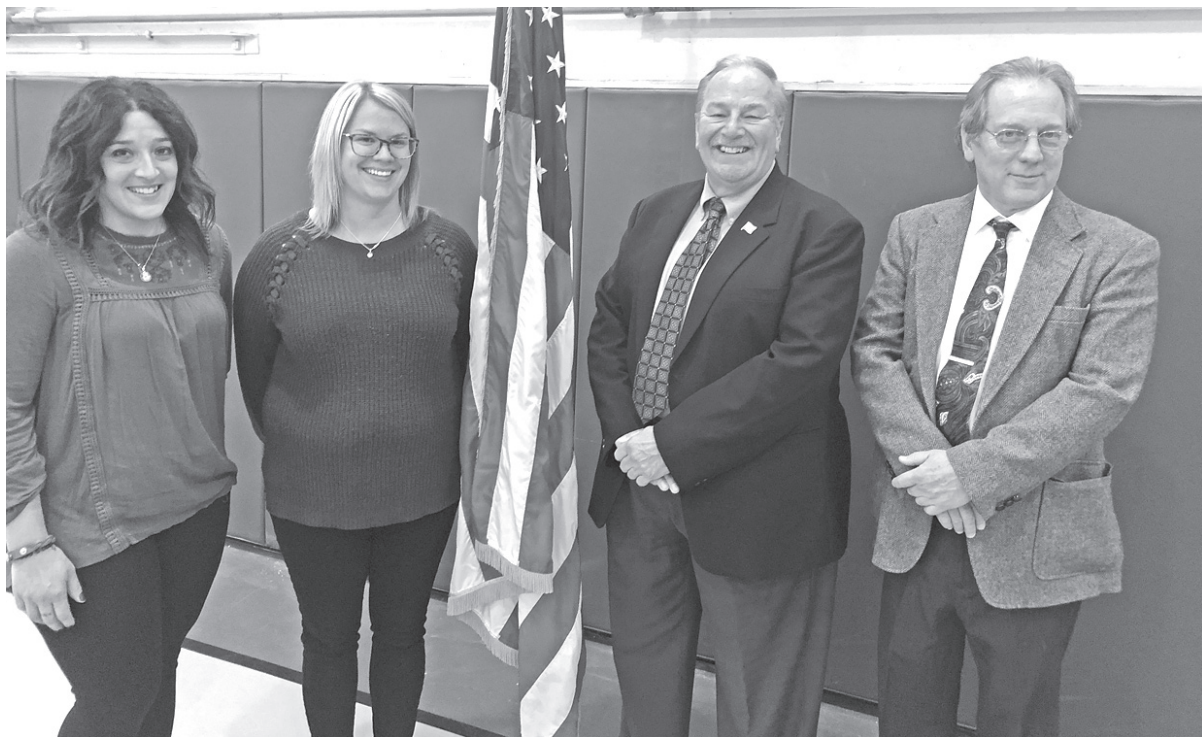
The mayor supported the conceptual bike track idea because, "This was something I was hoping to bring more business to the businesses, and keep our kids off the sidewalks – keep them safe," she said.

"I know some of the businesses wanted it; some didn't; but the numbers don't meet the DOT standards, so we can't do it," Welch noted.

"That plan was conceptual – we wanted to know if people wanted to have a bike lane," she added. "If we could have figured it out where it was wide enough and still safe, then that would have been fine; but it just didn't work out to the DOT standards – and they get the say on it."

On Thursday, Stevens said, "The Greenway anticipates, and is working to encourage a large increase in active recreational tourism bringing more bicycle traffic to Lewiston. Center Street could have been a major attraction on our trail system, and we wanted to help the village move forward to a less auto-dependent economy."

"But the community is saying they want a safe, well-connected trail system and this is our goal. We look forward to public input on trail network options for the lower Niagara Region at our next meeting (on Oct. 8)."



Conde, Gibson sworn into office

Village of Lewiston trustees Nick Conde and Dan Gibson were sworn into office ahead of Monday's regular meeting. The two men were reelected to serve another four-year term. They said it is an honor to serve the residents and thanked those who voted on Sept. 15.

Pictured from left: Clerk Shannon Fundis (who administered the oath of office), Treasurer Stephanie Myers (who held the Bible), Gibson and Conde.



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