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Town hopes for more infrastructure funding from Albany

by STEVEN JAGORD

Editor

The Town Board is calling for increased state funding for deteriorating local infrastructure. During the board's Jan. 20 meeting, it adopted a resolution asking the state for additional money for local roads and increases to the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program funding in the 2016-17 state budget.

Supervisor Pat Casilio said funding to downstate is disproportionate and roads throughout New York need improving.

"To make a long story short, they're going to spend a lot of money on the rapid transit system in New York City and not on our highways and roads upstate," Casilio said.

The following day, town Highway Superintendent James Dussing joined representatives from national transportation research group TRIP at AAA Car Care Plus on Main Street in Clarence to discuss the current condition, use and funding of New York's surface transportation system.

According to a report by the nonprofit organization, the average driver in the Buffalo area loses nearly \$1,900 annually as a result of driving on roads that are deteriorated, congested and lack some desirable safety features.

Dussing said the report gives an indication of the poor overall general condition of many area roads.

"We need more funding for infrastructure to allow us to fix the roads, bridges and utilities that need it to allow for the safe travel of the general public," Dussing said in an email to The Bee.

Dussing also said increased infrastructure funding could help in the Town of Clarence by allowing Erie County to fix Tonawanda Creek Road, which partly caved in last year and has seen a portion closed for an extended period of time. He added that a proper fix could cost in the \$3 million to \$5 million range.

Growing population stress on town roads has also led to hope for more financial help.

"If more funding were available, we could have [the] ability to increase the capacity of our local roads to accommodate the additional 15,000 residents that Clarence has received since the 1970s," Dussing said in the email.

He said roads could be widened, signaled and modernized; sewer systems and projects could be completed throughout the town and pollution to creeks and streams could be alleviated; and there would be the potential to repair sewer systems that close Lake Erie beaches and kill the ecosystem.

"We can accomplish all of this and use our local workforce to make it happen," Dussing said.

The highway superintendent also said that while other mandates and programs have to be funded, people still need safe and dependable roads to travel on. He said a study completed in 2013 determined that \$7 million would be needed to make all necessary repairs to accomplish basic updates and maintenance of road surfaces, curbs and drainage structures in the town.

"At current funding levels and living in the 'tax cap era,' it was determined that we would be able to do less than half of the needed repairs and more funding is necessary," he said. "The Town of Orchard Park is now working on getting infrastructure updates to be exempt from the tax cap."

Also in the meeting, a public hearing was set to consider a special exception use permit for the proposed addition to Clarence Fire District No. 1's existing fire hall. The permit is needed because the addition will bring the facility's total size to more than 20,000 square feet. The hearing was set for 7:15 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 10.

The next Town Board meeting will take place at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 10, at Town Hall, 1 Town Place. email: sjagord@beenews.com