

Amherst Bee: Village board hears mill update, mulls smoke-free parks

by KATE MOCKLER Reporter

After many years of setbacks and slow progress, the Village Board is ready to issue a request for proposals to develop the Williamsville Water Mill.

Mill architects Flynn Battaglia returned to the work session on Monday with color renderings based on the board's input on the suggestions they presented during the summer.

The renderings called for textured pavement on Spring Street and new development on the north and south ends of the site. East Spring Street would become a one-way street from Main to the mill, and the mill "plaza" would extend into the current roadway. The other end of Spring Street would remain a two-way street and provide the primary access for vehicles.

The renderings will be incorporated into the request for proposal materials that will be issued later this month. Village trustee Jeffrey Kingsley said they expect to issue the request for proposal on Sept. 23. Kingsley also emphasized that the renderings are more like guidelines for developers.

"These are possibilities. They aren't set in stone," Kingsley said.

The board expects to have a 30 to 60 day turnaround time for the request for proposals. They will work with the architects and consultants Preservation Studios to evaluate the proposals as they come in, and hold a public hearing before selecting one. On Monday night, Kingsley held to the timeline he has stated all along for a decision.

"By the end of the year or early January, we're going to decide this," he said.

The board also discussed the possibility of a smoking ban in the village parks. Tony Billoni, director of the Erie-Niagara Tobacco Free Coalition, gave a presentation on the issue during the work session. His organization has persuaded 10 other municipalities in Western New York to enact a smoking restriction in their parks.

Billoni argued that a smoking ban would make parks cleaner, reduce litter and the associated labor costs, and would set a good example for youth. He also offered his organization's support, in the form of free metal signs, free handouts and free t-shirts for kids.

Though the board members agreed that smoke-free parks are desirable, they disagreed as to how to get there. Kingsley favored an outright ban. He related an instance when he was at Garrison Park and a handful of people were smoking near the wading pool and refused to stop or go elsewhere when parents asked them to. The parents were forced to leave the park, and Kingsley wanted people to have some recourse in that situation.

Mayor Mary Lowther and trustee Brian Geary favored an “advisory ban,” similar to the Village’s no-idling policy.

“We’re trying to regulate people too much. People who live here are considerate,” said Lowther. “I don’t think we need a law. It...smacks of Big Brother.”

Trustee Basil Piazza proposed a compromise with a law forbidding smoking within 100 feet of any playground equipment, athletic field, or pool, and prohibiting smoking at any large event held in the parks. The board accepted this compromise, and a public hearing on the matter will be held at the board meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 12.

During the public comments, several people spoke in favor of the smoking ban.

“As a mother and resident of the village, I’d like to see the parks have a ban on smoking,” said Lori Rosso.

“As a runner, it’s not fun to run through smoke,” said Donna Costanza.

“I don’t think anyone should be smoking with that many people around,” said Dan Delano, speaking about events. He added, “I think over-legislating people isn’t a good idea. Smoking technically isn’t illegal yet.”

In other matters, the Village Board also:

- Announced that the Glen Park wall is now officially structurally replaced. They will be doing landscaping work near the Main Street entrance to the park.
- Announced an open house at the Meeting House from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Oct. 2.
- Announced that Erie County is now officially under quarantine for the Emerald Ash Borer. This especially affects Williamsville because around one-third of their trees are ash. Property owners can inoculate their ash trees against the pest for a cost of approximately \$150. The inoculation lasts two years.

Geary stressed that anyone pursuing this course of action should save their paperwork in case New York State orders a takedown of ash trees.

- Announced that Erie County is holding an electronic waste recycling day from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 18 at the GM plant on Vulcan Street off Niagara Street in Tonawanda.

The next village board meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Sept. 27 at Village Hall, 5565 Main St. near Cayuga Street, Williamsville. A work session will precede the meeting at 6 p.m. Both are open to the public.