

Village voters could be peppered with questions

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Officials consider making big-ticket decisions subjects of referendums

With the presidential election on the horizon, next year already promises to be a busy year for voters, but the slate of decisions could be substantially longer in the Village of Fredonia.

The Village Board started preliminary discussions last week on a host of referendum questions that could be brought before local voters.

Village President Chuck Lapicola told trustees there are at least three referendum questions he would like to pose to voters next year.

One of the questions, Lapicola said, would be whether the community supports paying an estimated \$500,000 to bury utility lines when Fredonia Avenue is reconstructed. If matching grant money can be secured from the state, engineering for the project would be done next year, with construction slated for 2013.

He said voters could also be polled on their feelings about the expansion of the bike trail from Wheeler Avenue to Highland Avenue. A tentative plan for that expansion has drawn heat from residents along St. Rose Avenue, because the proposed trail would be past their backyards.

A final question, Lapicola said, could be whether the community supports the creation of a local dog park.

If any of the referendum questions are to be included on the April ballot, he said the wording would have to be finalized by the middle of next month. If that timetable could not be met, Lapicola said the village would consider holding some or all of the referendums during the fall election.

Expanding the village's trail system was a cornerstone of the recently approved parks plan crafted by Lapicola.

The fact that the bike trail question was being considered before promised alternative routes were considered drew the ire of several residents of St. Rose Avenue who attended last week's board meeting.

At the direction of the Plan Commission, the possible options for the bike trail route are scheduled to be discussed at the Thursday, Dec. 8, meeting of the Parks Committee.

"This is not the wording you would see on the ballot. We are still developing the concept and just starting the discussion," Lapicola assured the neighbors.

He said possible options could include installing sidewalks on the south side of St. Rose Avenue that would be paid for with special assessments to property owners, or designating a portion of the paved area on the rebuilt Fredonia Avenue as a bicycle lane, which would

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eliminate on-street parking and gobble up most roadside trees.

“All of these options have problems,” Lapicola said. “Just what the wording for a referendum question would be has to be refined a tremendous amount before being put to the voting public.”

Trustee Mark Edbauer Sr. shuddered at the thought of what the village’s main street would look like if room must be made to accommodate a bike path in the new road design.

“All you have to do is drive to Saukville near the bridge where the retaining walls are up against the homes to see what it would look like,” Edbauer said.

Trustee Don Dohrwardt said the question dealing with burying utility lines along Fredonia Avenue is more direct — are taxpayers willing to pay to improve the appearance of the village’s main street.

“My feeling is that this is a beautification project that would benefit everyone in the village, so everyone — not just the people who live along Fredonia Avenue — should be asked to pay for it,” Dohrwardt said.

If the timing works out, he said expiring debt for the village’s share of the cost of the Fredonia Government Center could be replaced by the debt linked to the Fredonia Avenue project, essentially allowing the local tax rate to remain unchanged.

Dohrwardt said the reconstruction of Fredonia Avenue is expected to cost about \$2 million, with officials hoping that the state will pay 80% of that cost. The remaining construction cost would be split between the village and the county.

Discretionary projects, like improving the sewer and water mains or burying the utility lines, would solely be the village’s expense.

Trustee Scott Ehaney balked at the suggestion that the beautification work on Fredonia Avenue could be paid for without great pain to taxpayers.

“We could replace the current debt with this new debt, but doing that would hamstring us for what we could do in the future,” Ehaney said.

The Public Works Committee was asked to come up with wording for the proposed utility line referendum question.

Lapicola said the need for a dog park was raised during the public review of the parks plan, and suggested the proposal should be put to local voters.

Dohrwardt said yet another referendum question could ask voters if they support the idea of buying approximately 10 acres south of St. Rose Avenue for development as a neighborhood park, allowing the Fredonia Fire Department to use the current Firemen’s Park for expansion of

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the firehouse.

“We would just be transferring the park across the street. I don’t think the land would cost us a lot of money,” he said.

Although trustees were open to the idea of holding referendums on the various unresolved questions, they were reluctant to have their hands tied by the outcomes.

They unanimously approved a motion that whatever referendum questions are placed on upcoming ballots be advisory, rather than binding.

“If we don’t do what they want, they can always boot our butts out of office,” Dohrwardt said.