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Wording of questions must be finalized next month to be included on village's spring election ballot

Village of Fredonia trustees were given the tentative wording for five potential referendum questions last week, but several trustees doubted the need to put all of the queries before village voters.

Village President Chuck Lapicola has championed the idea of getting voter input on a number of pending issues, and drafted wording for five referendum questions.

"I like the idea of referendum questions and getting people involved in the democratic process and the way we make decisions," Lapicola said.

With that justification, he asked trustees to provide feedback on the proposed wording of five possible referendum questions:

• Should the Village of Fredonia build a bicycle/walking trail connecting the parks trail which ends on Wheeler Avenue with a location on Fredonia Avenue either by the Regal Drive intersection or by the Highland Drive intersection? (Grant monies would be used primarily for land acquisition, engineering and construction costs.)

• Should the Village of Fredonia attempt to purchase 5-10 acres of land between Meadowbrook Drive and the developed lots on St. Rose Avenue for developing a replacement park which will be needed when more of the existing Firemen's Park is taken up by an addition to the fire hall and parking for the fire hall/meal site? (Grant monies would be used for the park land purchase as available.)

• Should a dog park be created somewhere in the park system in the Village of Fredonia?

• When reconstructing Fredonia Avenue, should we bury utilities even if the village needs to pay for burial?

• Some of the costs for burial of utilities would be on private land and on private homes. Would you be willing to allow the use of tax dollars to help with the costs of these improvements on private land?

Lapicola said the last two questions seem to be of particular concern for village residents, especially because the cost of burying utilities lines along Fredonia Avenue has been estimated at $600,000.

Even if village officials determine the beautification project is worth that cost, the question

remains whether property owners should get help in covering the cost of connecting to the relocated electrical lines.

“I talked to an elderly lady who lives on Fredonia Avenue who said she couldn’t afford the $2,000 it would cost to change the utility service. We wouldn’t want to bankrupt anyone,” Lapicola said.

He said the village would need to finalize the wording by the board’s second meeting in January for any questions to appear on the April ballot.

“That would be the drop-dead date to have the wording done,” Lapicola said.

If trustees approve preliminary wording for the referendum questions at their Jan. 5 meeting, it would allow for review by the village attorney and final action at the board’s Jan. 19 meeting.

Lapicola said some issues, such as the bike trail and dog park, could be deferred to a future election. However, he said the village doesn’t want to do anything that would hold up progress on the Fredonia Avenue reconstruction.

If state and county funding can be secured, engineering for that road project is expected to be done next year, and construction in 2013.

Although trustees agreed the Fredonia Avenue utility work is an appropriate topic for a referendum, several board members challenged the need for other questions.

“I think part of our review should be to decide which of these questions should even go to referendum” said Trustee Scott Ehaney.

“A referendum should be saved for big tax decisions — issues that are divisive in the community. There are some people on St. Rose Avenue who don’t want the trail, but I don’t think there is division elsewhere over the bike trail.”

Trustees previously agreed that whatever referendums appear on the ballot will be advisory rather than binding, which Ehaney said takes away some of their significance.

“At some point we have to make the decisions,” he said to his fellow trustees.

That view was shared by Trustee Mark Edbauer Sr.

“In essence, the community hired us to do the job of making decisions. If they don’t like the job we are doing, they can always give us the old heave-ho in the spring election,” Edbauer said.

Even without referendums, Trustee Jill Bertram said residents are always encouraged to offer their views on proposed projects at any board meeting.