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Trustees say park issues would be better addressed in surveys with utility bills

The Fredonia Village Board decided last week to cut back on the number of referendum questions they place before village voters in spring.

In the interest of getting more citizen involvement on key community issues, Village President Chuck Lapicola has advocated including four referendum questions on the April ballot.

To accomplish that electoral feat, the referendum wording needs to be completed by the end of the month.

Lapicola asked the board to consider four referendum questions:

Should the Village of Fredonia build a bicycle/walking trail connecting the existing bike trail with Fredonia Avenue?

Should the village purchase five to 10 acres between Meadowbrook Drive and the developed lots on St. Rose Avenue and use the land for developing a new park which may be needed to replace Firemen's Park when the fire department is enlarged?

Should the Village of Fredonia bury all utilities when reconstructing Fredonia Avenue?

Would you be willing to share in all costs to bury utilities knowing that the cost to the village might be upwards of $600,000 and some costs would be for doing work on private property?

"I tried to cut back on some of the verbiage," Lapicola told trustees.

However, trustees said last week they are still not ready to embrace the referendums — or even the idea of placing all of the questions before voters.

"We don't need to put all of the questions to the voters. People should be heard, but that is why we have open meetings," Trustee Fritz Buchholtz said.

He especially objected to posing any referendum question with only vague reference to the cost of a proposal.

Rather than having a series of referendums, it was suggested that some of the issues be addressed in a survey that could be included with an upcoming quarterly utility bill.

That is especially true, some trustees said, if the referendum questions are only considered advisory.

“I think you’ll get more response to a survey that goes out to everyone than you will from referendum questions that are answered only by those who go to the spring election,” Trustee Mark Edbauer, Sr. said

Trustee Scott Ehaney took his criticism further, saying the question about pursuing a bike trail extension is a decision the board should make on its own.

Ehaney said the possibility of buying land off Meadowbrook Drive could be a suitable referendum question, “but it is premature at this point.”

He said both of the questions regarding burying utility lines in conjunction with the Fredonia Avenue project could be combined into a single referendum.

“No matter what direction we go, I think we will want to hold several public meetings on before the vote. If we are talking about spending $600,000, that is a decision that could

hamstring us or future boards on what we can do,” Ehaney said.

“It is a decision we will want to get a lot of people involved in.”

Trustee Don Dohrwardt said he has heard considerable resistance in the community to spending money on the utility project, which would remove the clutter of overhead lines along Fredonia Avenue.

“If it was up to me, I wouldn’t pay a dime to bury the utility lines. But I am an old curmudgeon,” Dohrwardt said.

Lapicola said he would have proposed wording for a single referendum question on the Fredonia Avenue utility lines ready for the board’s Jan. 19 meeting.

He stressed the need to determine a direction for the project soon, so engineering planning can proceed unimpeded this year on the road reconstruction.