

2-10-14 Clarence Bee

Town bonds \$6.8 million for new police barracks

by STEVEN JACORD
Editor

The Town of Clarence is another step closer to seeing a brand-new State Police barracks come to fruition after last week's Town Board meeting. During the Dec. 3 meeting, the board passed a bond resolution for \$6.8 million, which will cover all future costs of the project including design and construction.

The project has been in development for more than 18 months. Town Engineer Jim Lavocat detailed the timeline of events that led to the bond resolution, including a 20-year lease agreed upon in

February and subsequent approvals from the State Attorney General and Comptroller offices. A programming phase began in April when Lavocat and consultant Ken Pearl began meeting with officials from the State Police, the Erie County Sheriff's Office and Town Court to develop an approximate budget.

"It was during this process that it was revealed that the court portion of the project exhibits some significant challenges as far as remodeling Town Hall and adding space to accommodate both existing and future needs of the court," Lavocat said. "Some of these challenges were related to operational challenges, (Please turn to page six)

record management, security, state building code compliance, state fire code compliance, office of courts guideline compliance and connectivity issues with a new structure and a well more than 40-year-old building here."

In order to address those issues, Lavocat and Pearl added a new court facility to the police barracks, which will also house the Erie County sheriff's substation, currently located on Goodrich Road. The building will be erected on the south side of Town Hall with access to Goodrich. It will have 9,000 square feet for State Police, 7,700 square feet for court facilities and 2,200 square feet for the sheriff's substation.

Supervisor Dave Hartzell was pleased the town was able to convince State Police to agree to a new lease in Clarence because it further delays the town from having to establish its own police force — an expenditure that has been estimated by the Town Board to cost as much as \$9

million per year.

Not everyone in the audience was as thrilled as the supervisor, however. Resident Michael Patterson took to the podium during a public comment session to chastise the board for not making more information about the project public the past year and a half.

"I do believe that this is a good expenditure, but I haven't seen a proposal to the citizens to justify why you think it's a good expenditure," Patterson said. "You've talked about it, but we've seen nothing in writing to explaining why this is a good expenditure or what the benefits will be."

"This is \$6.8 million, and you're going to pass this without informing the public why you think this is a good idea? I don't think that is correct at all."

Councilman Bernard Kolber explained to Patterson that the bond resolution was only to have the money available for the project. Town Attorney Lawrence Meckler also explained that the

project is in its infant stages and will come before the Town Board multiple times with more opportunities for public comment.

Town Justice Michael Powers addressed the transparency concerns during the public comment session, stating that there are some projects where officials err on the side of caution when deciding how much information to release.

"I agree with citizen transparency, but there are some projects where you're going to get a lot and some where you're not," Powers said. "This project not only saves us the money from not having to create our own police force, it provides badly needed security."

"We have people charged with violent felonies standing outside the Supervisor's Office. We have people accused of violent crimes walking through confidential areas of the court facilities. We have prisoners in manacles and in orange jumpsuits sitting in the gallery with people here to pay traffic tickets. We have domestic violence victims having to be in the same areas as the people who allegedly committed the domestic violence. I could go on and on and on."

Under the terms of the lease, the town will receive \$1.2 million in rent from the State Police for the duration of the 20-year agreement. Afterward, the town will retain full ownership of the facility.

According to Hartzell, more than 90 engineering and architectural firms attended and/or requested specs on the project at a meeting several weeks ago, and their cost proposals are due next week. The design phase is slated to begin around February, with completion of the project tentatively scheduled for late 2016 or early 2017.

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