

Springville Journal, Thursday, May 20, 2010

NYSERDA not receiving funding for cleanup of WVCP

Notes from the May 12 Ashford Town Board meeting

The Ashford Town Board meeting got off to a somber start when Tom Attridge, representing the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, confirmed what the board suspected, an \$11,000,000 loss of federal monies. The funds has originally been targeted for cleanup work at the West Valley nuclear site.

Attridge announced during the May 12 meeting that the money had been re-routed to the Brookhaven, Long Island facility in an effort to finish cleanup work there. He also stated, "There is no way of knowing if this money will be available again."

The town was hoping this stimulus grant would create several dozen new jobs in the area. According to Attridge, 10 subcontracting companies being added to the local project would feel the loss.

On a brighter note, Attridge was able to announce that West Valley Nuclear was set to release nearly 400 acres of property back to the town. This property includes the bulk storage warehouse.

Arrangements were made for the town board to tour the land on June 5. If approved, the property will go back onto the town tax rolls.

Additional business continued with the notification that Town Attorney Charles Harrigan had submitted a plan for dealing with unsafe, abandoned or burned buildings. The plan is under review by the building committee.

Councilman Charles Davis reported that the P.E.S.H. anti-violence directive does not require a small town like Ashford to establish a program. The town only needs to have a recording mechanism in place.

The Fox Valley Road project has received two different design concepts from E&M Engineers. The first style is a three-sided box culvert with a natural bottom. The second is an arch system. The board approved putting both designs out for bid.

Supervisor Chris Gerwitz said the town judges are in need of storage space for court records. It was thought that a spot within the community center could be found.

Building Inspector Gary Perkins noted that 17 building permits were issued during the month of April. Total value of this construction will be \$166,500. Year-to-date figures show new construction within the town totals \$432,500.

Perkins also announced that he is changing his hours. He will no longer be available on Saturdays, but will have hours from 6 to 8 p.m. on Wednesday evenings.

The board voted to purchase a new truck/snow plow for the highway department. An expenditure of \$105,000 was approved for the chassis from Kenworth of Buffalo. Bids will be accepted to fully outfit the vehicle for year-round work.

The board voted to amend the Town of Ashford Highway Budget and accept \$286,050 from F.E.M.A. The money comes from a disaster fund set aside to assist communities in combating damage from storms, floods, tornados, etc.

Highway Superintendent Tim Engels brought to the board's attention that road damage done near the bird sanctuary is being repaired by the parties most responsible, D&H Excavating and the town of Yorkshire.

Engels and Councilwoman Beverly Hess also brought to the board's attention several other roads in need of repair.

Present at the meeting were Gerwitz, board members Davis, Hess, William Heim and John Pfeffer. Also in attendance were Engels, Perkins and Town Clerk Patricia Dashnaw.

The door is open

Buffalo welcomes presidential visit, and would welcome presidential help

Updated: May 10, 2010, 10:44 pm /

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Dear President Obama,

Welcome to Buffalo, two days early. We're glad you're coming, but we want to offer you a fair warning: It can be hard to get people to come to Buffalo, but once they do, it's even harder to get them to leave. This is a great American place. So stay a while. Land prices are cheap.

That's one of the advantages ... actually, one of the only advantages ... of a weak economy, and ours has been weak for decades, tracking the decline of steel and other manufacturing. We're not complaining; we've got some good things going here right now, and more is coming. We can see the outlines of better days starting to take shape, and our sense of history and heritage is growing. But we need some help.

The fact is, there are some things only the government can do and we need Washington's attention. We need you to help set the table here ... to make sure that, after a half-century of decline, our new economy takes root and blossoms. That will help us, it will help Albany (don't get us started) and it will help you in Washington.

Here are some areas where your assistance could make a big difference in how our future unfolds:

The Peace Bridge: This is Buffalo's connection to Canada and, more important for us, Canada's connection to Buffalo. If you look around on Thursday, you may see a lot of Ontario license plates. There's even more on the weekends.

A good number of those people are coming here to spend their money. The Canadian dollar is strong right now, and that makes us a great place for them to shop. And there's more. When the Buffalo Sabres aren't busy being blown out of the playoffs, a number of Canadians come here for hockey. Canada also sends us Buffalo Bills fans, theater-goers, symphony-lovers and more. We've got the goods, but our economic hopes depend in large part on the ability of Canadians to cross the Niagara River easily and reliably.

You may have heard that we've been trying for the past 20 years or so to build a new bridge. It's crucial, but it's been tied up for so long it seems it will never get done. Things are moving along slowly, but now there's a new potential obstacle, one that could set this project back another decade.

Rep. Brian Higgins (a huge Springsteen fan ... you guys should talk) tells us that the Office of Management and Budget is making noises about wanting to own the new Customs plaza instead of leasing it. We understand there may be reasons for that but, Mr. President, this project is too important and has been in the planning for too long to change the rules now. This project should be grandfathered in under the old rules. Otherwise, it will be years more until this project gets done, and our economy will suffer.

We're still smarting from the border-documentation rules that curtailed what had been a very open border here. The federal government played a large part in that, including torpedoing hopes of a shared-border customs and immigration inspection accord that would have made bridge plaza design so much easier. Could we get a little help with what's left of this process?

The Medical Corridor: We know you know about our developing new economy in health care. Just last week, you sent Buffalo a \$16 million grant for electronic medical records; it was the largest of the 15 grants announced that day. Thank you for that.

Cutting edge and growing daily, our health care sector is one of the main pillars of our new economy. It's an exciting time and we would welcome Washington's help in ensuring that it becomes a sturdy, long-lived addition to Buffalo's makeup.

But here's something else you can do that will help the entire nation while simultaneously bolstering this city's economy: Increase funding to the National Cancer Institute. You may not know that Buffalo is where cancer research began in this country. It continues at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. Money devoted to the National Cancer Institute will find its way to research centers in Buffalo and elsewhere, while moving the country toward better treatment ... and prevention ... for these diseases.

Infrastructure: We know highway funding is often considered pork, but this pork would be not only tasty but life-sustaining, here. Our waterfront has been largely out of reach to the residents of Western New York since the region was first industrialized. Reserved for other uses, hard to get to and sometimes contaminated, the geographic feature that should be our main strength is, instead, out of reach.

We're starting to change that. Land is being detoxified. Sites are developing for new public uses. And new roads are being built to allow public access and, at the same time, encourage development. That's where you come in. We're building a new parkway that will help open the waterfront, but as part of that effort, we also need to build a new bridge and then, we hope, to take down the big, expensive one called the Skyway. If he hasn't already, Higgins can fill you in.

There's more, of course (isn't there always?). We'd love you to make Buffalo a regional home office for a federal agency ... Customs and Immigration or even all of Homeland Security, for example. This is a prime crossing area, after all, and did we mention that land is cheap here? And, by the way, thanks for the new passport office. And take some time to admire the new federal courthouse under construction, an award-winning design that will be an interesting addition to Buffalo's collection of world-class architecture.

We do need you to pay attention to a couple of other federal needs in this area ... we'd love to see a faster track to total cleanup of the nuclear mess at West Valley, and enhancement of the air base at Niagara Falls would be a plus for this region and its economy, too. The Coast Guard is important here, as well, and could use some help with base relocation plans that would free more of Lighthouse Point for some key waterfront parkland that's also on the drawing boards. And we have hopes for high-speed rail that could link the East Coast and your hometown, Chicago.

In the meantime, we hope you have a terrific visit and that you'll come back again. There's a great chicken wing festival in a couple of months, and summer here is like heaven.

Oh, and one last thing, if you don't mind: See what you can do about Osama bin Laden. He needs to be gone.

Can crumbling road cause catastrophe?

Decisions on roadway needs to be made fast

Updated: Tuesday, 11 May 2010, 7:24 AM EDT

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- Luke Moretti
- Posted by: Emily Lenihan

SPRINGVILLE, N.Y. (WIVB) - Could a crumbling roadway, cause catastrophe in Springville?

Officials in Erie County and the Village of Springville have some big decisions to make, and they need to make them fast.

Time is running out on securing millions of dollars to fix a very unstable situation impacting traffic, and possibly the environment.

It doesn't take an engineer to see that there's a big problem here.

"This is a very critical road. Not only does it act as an access for those on Mill Street to get to the village proper. It is also an emergency route for the West Valley Demonstration Project," said Springville Administrator Tim Horner.

The problem goes beyond this collapsed section of South Buffalo Street in Springville.

The erosion downstream, very close to the village's waste water treatment plant.

News 4 asked Springville Public Works Superintendent, "In the event that this cut back to your primary tanks what would happen here?"

Superintendent Karl Lux said, "It would be catastrophic. The tanks may hold themselves together but they may start sliding and rupture a lot of problems."

We first reported on the road collapse last year. Erie County DPW Commissioner Gerard Sentz thought repairs, rather than a full replacement, could get the road reopened. But then, the August storm hit.

"It worsened it to the point that the repairs that I was hoping would work were now no longer feasible," said Sentz.

Three phases of work need to happen.

First, there's the road, spillway and culvert.

Second, bank stabilization needs to take place downstream.

Third, halting the erosion which is dangerously close to the waste water treatment plant.

Erie County Legislator John Mills said, "We have to get the ball rolling immediately."

"Can you imagine what would happen if that plant failed," Mills said.

Mills says a pot of federal money has been identified for these projects.

But, he says the stakeholders need to act soon or possibly risk losing the federal money.

"Shame on us if we can't put this project together, between the village government, the county government and the federal government. I think it's going to go forward, but we have to fast track it," said Mills.

It's an aggressive timetable, but Gerry Sentz thinks it can be done.

"I'm hoping by September that shovels are out there in the ground," said Sentsz.

"We can't let this get by us. Really can't. It's too important," Sentsz said.

County and village officials say about \$3 million of federal money is available to do the work necessary, but the work must start before the end of September.

Springville officials say they're about ready to start work on stabilizing the stream bank near the treatment plant.

Why is this taking so long to fix?

Money is a big factor. It's a big job requiring millions of dollars. The other consideration is deciding who's responsible for what. Both Erie County and the village are finalizing those details. But again, they have to move fast or risk losing that pot of money.

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The Indian Point nuclear power plant is a New York facility.
VIA BLOOMBERG NEWS

Nuclear power now

No other option offers quicker path to ending dependence on foreign oil

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If you were to name the top three problems now threatening the United States, the country's dependence on foreign oil would be one of them, perhaps number one.

Our dependence on foreign oil not only negatively impacts our foreign policy, it threatens our economic well-being. We are at the mercy of Arab and other nations where some teach their children that the United States is a foreign devil, that we should perish, that American support for an Israel that must be wiped off the face of the Earth is reason for doing us wrong.

We are in a vicious cycle. We pay unfriendly nations ever higher amounts of money for their oil so they can harbor or support terrorism that can kill Americans and American soldiers. But there is an obvious solution to this problem.

The way out of this cesspool is to replace foreign oil with nuclear power.

There is no other non-oil opportunity that can begin to deliver what nuclear power can.

It is an obvious direction that has been blunted by fears that have been proven wrong not only in this country, but the world over. Currently, 20 percent of America's electricity and 69 percent of its carbon-free generation of electricity is from nuclear plants. France creates 80 percent of its electricity from nuclear power plants. China starts a new nuclear reactor every three months, but the United States hasn't started construction on one for 30 years.

The 25 coal miners killed in West Virginia earlier this month provide a comparison to the fear of nuclear reactors. Hundreds of miners have been killed in the United States, but not one life has been lost because of a nuclear generator.

In the past 60 years, not one sailor has been lost on our fleet of nuclear submarines, where confined proximity to nuclear reactors is the norm. If further comparison is needed, what could be more dramatic than the oil spill on the Louisiana coast and how it may devastate parts of the country?

Our elected officials know of the problem of foreign oil, but have spent billions on ethanol, wind turbines, solar power and other concepts instead of on nuclear energy.

Exploring other alternative energy sources is important, as are energy conservation measures, but in the short term nuclear power holds greater promise as a significant energy source. Solar power accounts for less than 1 percent of our electricity, and its growth is nowhere close to solving the larger problem. Wind power generates less than 1.5 percent of our electricity, soaking up \$30 billion in tax breaks and other subsidies ... a cost of \$18.82 per megawatt hour, 25 times as much as the combined subsidies for all other forms of electricity. Coal's contribution to carbon emissions is staggering, and an Oak Ridge National Laboratory study estimated that public exposure to the low radioactivity of coal-plant ash emitted to the environment results in a dosage 100 times higher than that from nuclear plant operations.

Safety is a common concern, but in the history of American nuclear power there has been only one major incident, a meltdown more than 30 years ago at the Three Mile Island plant in eastern Pennsylvania. No one was killed in that incident, there were no medical consequences and technology has improved. Chernobyl was a real disaster, but reactors no longer are built that way. Meanwhile, our economic and foreign policy exposures from dependence on foreign oil are real and present dangers, and a huge risk we can ill afford to keep taking.

Fortunately, President Obama not only has pointed to the benefits of nuclear energy, he now has put \$54 billion for that effort in the federal budget ... enough to construct seven to 10 modern reactors. Unfortunately, the lead time to get a reactor on line is measured in years, not months.

There is work to be done, in funding and siting new "passively safe" fission reactors, researching fusion reactors and resolving issues of when and where to safely store spent fuels that remain radiation risks for hundreds of years if processed and up to 10,000 years if untreated. Leaders in the Senate and House need to get to work now. The importance and urgency of this course should be clear to them.

Update on WVDP decommissioning

WVDP workers moving project forward

Efforts to prepare West Valley Demonstration Project for eventual decommissioning are still going strong. In April, the United States Department of Energy released their Record of Decision, which WVDP says defined a two-part decision-making process for the decommissioning and cleanup efforts.

Phase one covers the removal of the main plant process building, vitrification facility, remote handling waste facility, lagoon areas, unneeded facilities and "contaminated soils under and around those facilities."

Inside the main plant process building, extraction cell-1, the cell with the highest level of contamination, will be decontaminated by robotic tools. The 57-foot-high cell is accessible through a hatch in the ceiling. According to WVDP, "A mechanical arm will be deployed through the hatch in May to begin the tedious work of removing the nine vessels and more than one mile of piping that are inside the cell."

Also inside the main process plant is a cell containing 275 canisters full of high level waste glass. According to WVDP, before the main process plant can be demolished, all of these canisters must be removed. "West Valley Environmental Services developed a conceptual design for DOE consideration for an on-site storage facility for the canisters earlier this year," says WVDP.

When the main process plant was built in the mid-1960s, asbestos existed in the insulation throughout the building. Asbestos abatement is necessary, but is being hindered by the radiological conditions present throughout much of the building. Asbestos cleanup has been successfully completed on the fourth floor of the main plant process building and WVDP says, "work has resumed throughout the facility."

Four metal underground waste storage tanks exist on the north plateau at the project. WVDP has installed a system, which is expected to last for 30 years, to dry out the liquids in those containers. Additionally, "Zeolite will be used to construct a permeable treatment wall along the leading edge of a contaminated groundwater plume ... later this year," says WVDP. This wall will extend for 800 feet, be three feet thick and will filter out the Strontium-90 contained in the underground plume. Additionally, the wall will be as deep as 27 feet in places.

"One of the objectives of the current West Valley Environmental Services contract with DOE is to prepare the radioactive waste stored on site for disposal," says WVDP. Workers wear personnel protective equipment when they come in contact with the waste. Approximately 92,000 square feet of contact-handled waste existed at the beginning of the contract period. Now only about 17,000 square feet of waste is left.

The remote-waste handled facility and the vitrification facility at the project are both being processed remotely. Items that cannot be handled by workers are dismantled and prepared by a remote-controlled demolition robot called a Brokk®. Approximately 75,000 square feet of remote-handled waste existed at the beginning of the contract period. Now 39,000 square feet of waste remains.

Goals for phase two of the United States DOE's record of decision will be defined within the next 10 years. "This includes decommissioning the underground waste tanks and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission licensed disposal area," says WVDP.

For more information, visit www.wv.doe.gov, www.nyserda.org or wves.org. The DOE record of decision can be viewed at www.westvalleyeis.com.