

News

Ashford Town Board addresses insurance

Thursday January 26, 2012 | By: Robert Lorenz



At the Ashford Town Board meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 11, officials discussed the town's insurance problems with Phil Moyer of the Weast Insurance Agency. Deliberated that evening was a \$9,939 tow to Buffalo for a town truck that was damaged by fire in 2011.

Moyer, who helps the town shop for insurance coverage, explained that he did not receive confirmation from the Trident Insurance Agency, the company that insured the damaged truck, that the \$9,939 bill was paid. He added that the company "may be fighting" the bill, as well.

Moyer said that if Trident paid the bill, he believed it was because they "looked at the bill and said, 'We dropped the ball. We should have paid this back in March or April and we didn't.'" As a result of this, Moyer said, "When they realized it was their screwup, they probably just went ahead and paid it."

When asked by Board Member Bill Heim if Weast had a record of whether the bill was paid or not, Weast Agency Vice President Lauren Moyer explained, "We looked into the system and it just shows that it's still open. It doesn't show a confirmation that they've paid it."

Phil Moyer said, "There is always a gap in the process from when something actually gets paid and we, as an agent, gets notified."

Heim said, "I would like to know for myself if we're dealing with an insurance company that actually would allow someone to bill them something like that and actually pay it."

Moyer said that he would contact the Trident Insurance Agency to see whether the bill was paid or not.

He also said that the town's premium is going to be "around \$3,100 less this year than it was last year." Explaining that the reduction in the premium's cost does not mean the town is receiving less coverage, Moyer said that the reduction in the cost of the premium "has everything to do with how Trident is structuring their policies [and how] we were able to take advantage of that and create a savings of \$3,100."

He added that, "If your premiums went up, it's because you have added vehicles or have a larger budget. The actual rates that are charged," he explained, have "all remained the same or have gone down."

Board members asked Moyer about purchasing terrorism insurance, but he explained that he thinks it is "unnecessary" for a municipality to have this type of insurance.

Board Member John Pfeffer asked Moyer if he thought that "a town with a high-level nuclear waste facility and a bioterrorism research facility" should have this type of insurance, and Moyer responded

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that “the state, as I understand it, is ultimately responsible. They’re the ones that adopted the terrorism policy that operates in New York, so they’re going to cover us.” The board chose to not add this type of insurance to its coverage.

In other matters, the board discussed the closing of the old Route 219 high level bridge. Supervisor Chris Gerwitz reported that he was contacted by a New York State Department of Transportation engineer on Jan. 5 and was told by the official that “they found something questionable” and that the bridge was going to be evaluated for the next four - six weeks.

Board Member Charlie Davis said, “I talked to Senator [Catherine] Young’s office yesterday and I can tell you that she’s pushing for them to get it done as quickly as it is possible. With that being said, keep in mind this design is the same one of the bridge that collapsed in Minneapolis, Minn.”

In discussing the bridge’s closing, the board also raised its concerns for the Amish individuals who have utilized the old Route 219 bridge to travel between Ashford and Springville and are reported to be using the Mill Street Bridge in light of the closing of the old 219 Bridge.

Heim said that using the Mill Street Bridge may be dangerous for these people, as he explained that “Mill Street is very narrow and coming down there with horses would be a real issue in the winter time.” He described the bridge as “steep” and “windy.”

In other news:

- A resolution was passed placing a six-month moratorium on signage that is different from what the town currently allows in its sign law.
- According to Code Enforcement Officer Gary Perkins, the Odosagih Bible Conference and Retreat Center in Machias is looking to erect an LED sign on the old Route 219.
- The board passed a motion to allow the town clerk to advertise for bidding concerning the Fox Valley Road Bridge Replacement.
- A motion to add signs on Riceville Road was approved by the board.

- Paul Bembia, program director for West Valley Site Management, asked whether or not the town had joined the Energy Community Alliances.

Gerwitz responded that he believed the board previously approved a motion to join the group and mentioned that he would look for confirmation to see whether or not the board officially approved the motion.

- An agreement to spend highway funds was approved.

The next board meeting is scheduled to take place on Feb. 8 at 7:30 p.m.

Springville Journal, Thursday, February 9, 2012

**West Valley Demonstration Project
Quarterly Public Meeting**

Wednesday, February 22, 2012, 6:30pm

Ashford Office Complex

9030 Route 219, West Valley, NY 14171

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) will hold a public meeting to provide an update on the WVDP project activities and to discuss progress on the Phase 1 Studies. NYSERDA and DOE will provide the public with an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments.

For further information, please contact
Lynette Bennett at
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Obama plan bodes well for Falls air base, border Simulator budgeted, as well as bridge flow

By Jerry Zremski

NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF

Updated: February 14, 2012, 7:33 AM

WASHINGTON — President Obama on Monday unveiled an election year budget proposal that offers some surprising news for the Buffalo area, including a \$28.1 million simulator project at the supposedly endangered Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station and a potential infusion of funds for border improvements.

Funding for other key local projects, such as Great Lakes restoration and the community development block grant program, would hold steady.

But the spending plan also includes two big local losers, both perennial targets for cuts: Low-Income Home Energy Assistance and the **West Valley Demonstration Project**.

Obama touted his \$3.8 trillion spending plan — which projects a \$901 billion deficit — as a responsible attempt to control costs while pushing for faster economic growth.

But the budget now heads to the paper shredder called the U.S. Congress, where Republicans lambasted it as a spendthrift cop-out in an era of a record-high federal debt.

While Congress is expected to ignore many of Obama's proposals, the funding targeted for the Niagara Falls base seems particularly solid.

Congress set aside \$22 million last year for a new simulator to train Air Force Reserve pilots in the Northeast on how to fly C-130 cargo planes, but the Air Force never announced where that simulator would go until Monday.

Buried in the details of the Pentagon's military construction budget for 2013 was the answer: \$6.1 million would come to Niagara Falls to add a building to house the simulator.

It's the only Air Force Reserve construction project in the entire budget — and it's the project Rep. Louise M. Slaughter, D-Fairport, has been advocating for years as a lifesaver for the base.

"This facility is expected to bring 400 military personnel and their dependents to our region annually [for training], which is exactly why I have been fighting for this project," Slaughter said. "This news couldn't come at a better time for the thousands of employees who rely on the Niagara air base."

Rep. Kathleen C. Hochul, D-Amherst, said she, too, was pleased with the funding but added, "There is still much more work to be done."

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That's because less than two weeks ago, the Pentagon announced a budget-cutting plan that would strip away the flying mission from the 107th Airlift Wing of the New York Air National Guard, one of the base's two major units. The 107th has 845 employees, including 580 part-time Guard personnel.

"I would wonder about the wisdom of taking the 107th Air National Guard C-130 flying mission from them when the plan is for [the Niagara base] to be a Northeast training center for these planes," said John A. Cooper, vice chairman of the Niagara Military Affairs Council, the local base support group.

Nevertheless, Cooper said he was thrilled with the simulator project, which base supporters long have seen as an asset that might just save the base from the ax to be wielded by future base-closure commissions.

"This is huge," Cooper said. "I say that from the perspective that it makes us special. ... And when you have something like this, it's not easily movable."

More money for the Peace Bridge is a far less certain bet, but it was one that local lawmakers said they will try to turn into a winner.

"It is good news that there is \$2 billion for cross-border transportation in this budget, which I will work to tap into to expedite pre-clearance on the Peace Bridge," said Sen. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y.

Schumer hopes that part of that \$2 billion can be used to start moving some of the cargo pre-clearance to the Canadian side of the Peace Bridge to expedite the traffic flow.

Yet that's just a hope. And there some serious obstacles in the way of any of that \$2 billion coming to Buffalo.

For one thing, the money couldn't be used to expand the Peace Bridge plaza on the American side because the environmental review process for that project has already been completed, according to the office of Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo.

For another, there are serious doubts about whether Congress will agree with Obama to set aside \$2 billion for cross-border improvements. After all, he proposed something similar last year — and in these belt-tightening times in Congress, the idea went nowhere.

Congress has been much more amenable, though, to funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the Obama administration's multiyear commitment to cleaning up the huge freshwater resource that borders Buffalo.

While cutting environmental funding overall, Obama's spending plan for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 would keep funding for the Great Lakes effort steady at the 2012 level of \$300 million.

"President Obama's budget keeps Great Lakes restoration on track," said Jeff Skelding, campaign director for the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition. "The budget acknowledges that restoration programs are producing results — but there is more work to do."

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Similarly, the Obama spending plan holds the line on funding for the community development block grant program, which would provide \$13.3 million to Buffalo this year for projects across the city.

Predictably, though, Obama aimed his budget ax at the Low Income Home Energy Assistance program, which provides aid to about 100,000 Erie County families.

Funding for the program would fall to \$2.82 billion, from \$3.47 billion, according to a budget analysis prepared by Higgins' office.

There's an annual battle over funding the heating program, though, and this year is no different. Already, 102 lawmakers teamed up on a letter asking Obama to maintain funding at its current levels "so that the neediest Americans are not left out in the cold."

A similar but far smaller battle often occurs over funding for West Valley, the nuclear cleanup site across the Erie County line in Cattaraugus County.

For 2013, Obama is proposing cutting funding for the project to \$48 million, from \$66 million. Department of Energy officials offered no explanation for the proposed cut and no explanation of its ramifications.

Rep. Tom Reed, R-Corning, worked last year with Higgins to boost funding for West Valley. Reed said Monday he was ready to take up the issue again.

"I am disappointed that the cleanup of nuclear waste sites is not a priority for the president," Reed said. "This is a critical safety issue and a legitimate priority for the government. I will work in a bipartisan manner, as I did last year, to ensure that this is adequately addressed."

If so, that's likely to be one of the few notes of bipartisanship to be struck in the coming congressional battle over the budget proposal for fiscal 2013.

Repeating the president's frequent call for higher taxes on the wealthy and holding the line on many budget cuts, the spending plan inevitably led to a sharp disagreement between the Democratic president and his Republican opponents.

"We can't just cut our way into growth," Obama said at a rally in Annandale, Va.

House Budget Committee Chairman Paul D. Ryan, R-Wis., said, "It seems like the president has decided again to campaign instead of govern and that he's just going to duck this country's fiscal problems."

News wire services contributed to this report.

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Springville Journal, 03-22-2012

Ashford Town Board sets date for water committee to present findings on water district

Thursday March 22, 2012 | By:Robert Lorenz

The town of Ashford set a date for the water committee to have a “black and white” answer for the board regarding whether the town should form a water district or stick with a \$3.2 million interest-free loan for the private Crystal Water Company to fix the town’s nearly 100-year-old water system.

At its meeting on March 14, the town board arranged to have the water committee present its findings on April 25. Board members reported that, if the committee does not have some answers by then, the board would “drop the issue of forming a water district and continue with the solution of having the Crystal Water Company,” which owns the system, fix it through the \$3.2 million loan it was previously approved for.

Board Member William Heim said, “You satisfy us that you are making some real progress and we will continue [with the idea of forming a water district]. If not, we are dropping it at that point and it is over.”

The board appointed four new members to the water committee: Rich Bernstein, Joe Patti, Robert Conrad and Jim and Gene Bond. Two town board members, Charles Davis and John Pfeffer, will also participate on the committee.

Near the end of the meeting, the new members of the water committee, as well as the town board members, agreed to hold a public emergency meeting on March 21. Additional meetings are also being planned for before the deadline on April 25.

The board members said the main reason they approved delaying the Crystal Water Company’s process to fix the water supply was because a large number of townspeople expressed an interest in seeing whether or not the water committee could find a cheaper alternative for the town through creating a water district.

Rich Bernstein, who has several times proposed finding an alternative solution to the water problem, said he believes state and federal grants are available that could help offset the cost of fixing the system for residents if the town forms a water district.

Despite Bernstein’s assertions, the town board members said they have many concerns regarding the risks involved in forming a water district.

Town Supervisor Chris Gerwitz said that he talked with an attorney who specializes in “water district formation,” who told him that if “the town forms a district, it will cost more to rebuild and run it.” Gerwitz explained that additional costs would arise in funding a new study and reported that the town’s grant writer said the town would most likely receive a maximum of \$600,000 in grants to fund the project.

Pfeffer said that a water district may not be approved in a permissive referendum, which would most likely need to be held if residents still wish to create a water district. Pfeffer explained that, should the water district be voted down, Ashford will have lost its interest-free loan with the Crystal Water Company and would be forced to start a long and “potentially more costly process” in reapplying for a loan.

Despite the risks presented by those at the meeting, Bernstein concluded that it was still best for the committee to search for a cheaper alternative, saying that it was the board's duty to "hold up their end" to find a solution before residents are forced out of the town because they are not able to afford a water bill.

Pfeffer added that he was in favor of the committee's working to find a solution along with the board, "if it gets us to the point where everybody is on the same page."

The board also discussed the issue of hydraulic fracturing at the meeting, as resident Arthur Munson called for the board "to take a position on the practice of hydrofracking in our community."

Although the issue has been discussed at previous meetings and sent to the town attorney to review for a possible draft law, there is currently no law in the town of Ashford that bans hydraulic fracking.

According to Munson, the New York State Supreme Court recently upheld a different town's law to ban the fuel-extraction technique. As a result of the court's decision, Munson said, "at this point, we know that it's within our rights ... to ban hydrofracking." Munson also said that "over 50 New York state communities have done just that."

Munson also noted a recent report by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, which asserted the connection of earthquakes in the Ohio town of Youngstown to the deep well drilling that occurred there. Expressing his concern about a potential earthquake caused by hydrofracking in Ashford, Munson said, "Imagine the magnitude of the disaster if we had an earthquake that disrupted the **West Valley Demonstration Project.**"

Munson also cited National Fuel's recent actions to restimulate grandfathered wells in the town of Colden as a part of his reasons for speaking up against fracking at the meeting.

He continued, "It is true that we have had natural gas wells in our town for decades without incident. I do not propose that these vertical non-fracked wells would be included in this ban at all. I do not propose to limit or diminish anyone's property rights. I do propose, however, that these existing wells be prohibited from fracking waste, storage or disposal or that they would be fracked or restimulated as they are in Colden."

Both Munson and the board agreed that the likelihood of hydrofracking occurring in the town in the near future is remote, since "Marcellus shale is so deep and so thin here." Munson also noted, "When they use up the other, they are going to come here. If we act ahead of time, maybe your grandkids will be protected," he added.

The board agreed that the town's planning board will have to address the issue of hydrofracking and then a public hearing will have to be held before a law banning the technique can be passed by the town.

In other board news:

- The board also approved a resolution at the meeting that awarded the bid for the town's annual trash and refuse removal this spring to Nu Way Sanitation. Waste Management also put in for the bid, but the board said that its final cost did not include a grand total, which made Ashford reject the bid, which board members called "too open-ended."
- Primary voting for the 2012 presidential election will occur at the Ashford Town Hall on April 24 from 10 a.m. - 9 p.m.
- Construction on the Fox Valley Bridge began on March 19.
- The speed limit was reduced to 30 mph on Rock Springs Road between Ashford Hollow and Dutch Hill roads in the town of Ashford. The highway department planned to add new speed limit signs to the road on March 15.
- The board approved the Highway Department to spend \$3,100 for Valley Fabrication to repair a town truck. Highway Superintendent Tim Engels reported that "the truck is in excellent shape" and that it would cost the town \$170,000 to replace it. He also noted that the truck will mostly likely require additional maintenance in the future.

The next town of Ashford Board meeting will be held on April 11 at 7:30 p.m. at the community center.