

# Town of Newfane Local Waterfront Revitalization Program 1<sup>st</sup> Public Information Meeting Summary

**Date of Meeting:** June 29, 2023

**Meeting Time:** 6:30 PM

## **Welcome, Introductions, and Open House**

The first public information meeting for the Town of Newfane Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) Amendment was held on June 29, 2023. An open house was held at 6 pm, and audience members were given some time to walk around and view maps of different areas in the WRA. At 6:30 pm, Wendy Salvati of WWS Planning gave a presentation on the current status of the Newfane LWRP. She discussed what the LWRP is and the benefits of updating a local program, as well as the importance of the Newfane Waterfront Advisory Committee (WAC) that was established to guide the effort. The process of preparing the LWRP was explained, from kickoff to the final program update; it was mentioned that the coastal consistency law for Newfane also needs to be updated, as it is outdated.

Following the presentation, the meeting was opened to the public, giving audience members of the audience a chance to offer comments and ask questions.

## **Public Comment Period**

The audience discussed issues and concerns they would like to see addressed in the LWRP update, identified local resources and places of interest in the Town, and brainstormed ideas and activities they felt would enhance the waterfront area. The following comments were offered:

- The kiddie arcade and hotel pier were mentioned. The LWPR should include a focus on the restoration of the pier, as it could be a draw for the public who visit the beach and park in the waterfront area.
- There was a comment that the attractions are very seasonal in Olcott. The spring and summer are best times for events but winters see little visitation.
- People from other parts of Niagara County, Erie County, Monroe County and even international visitors have been coming to Olcott and the marina.
- A question was asked about the process of the State review and the cooperation of the State, and who wanted to do the LWRP update. It was mentioned that the Town of Newfane initiated the project and applied for grants from the State to update the existing program, as it is over 20 years old.
- It was noted that Olcott thrived in the early 1900s due to the rail line, hotels, and spas. The challenge is to find people to invest the capital needed to enhance the waterfront.
- Internet service wasn't common/readily available in the area, but it is now.

- A lot of people use propane and there are places in the Town that are isolated from natural gas. The lack of natural gas service has been detrimental to increasing businesses in the area.
- A question was asked about the bringing of natural gas to the waterfront; is that being considered in the LWRP goals?
- Basic infrastructure (internet, natural gas, etc...) is needed to make Olcott more than just a seasonal destination.
- There was a comment that the new breakwater that was constructed is not large enough to address the two-foot swell that prevents development and threatens slips. It needs to be extended another 100 ft on either side to provide sufficient protection.
- Most weather systems come from the east. There was substantial flooding and bad weather in 2017 and 2019 in the Town that impacted Olcott Harbor.
- A comparison was made with the Town of Wilson's harbor area, where there are many food choices and activities. The harbor in Newfane needs more investment because people want destinations. It was mentioned that McDonough Marine is reopening the restaurant and bar in the harbor.
- On Coomer Road, there is a brewery and winery. A question was asked about making stronger connections to the Niagara County wine trail. This presents opportunities to bring people into the area and keep them there, expanding the draw from outside the region.
- Clear Energy Hydro, who owns the Burt Dam, is undertaking repairs at the reservoir. The Dam hasn't produced electricity for 5 years. Energy production was restarted in June 2023.
- It was noted that NYSDEC approached Clear Energy Hydro regarding the installation of a portage for kayakers. It was noted that the Fisherman's Park area, which is part of the dam property, is owned by this company and not the Town, who charges patrons to use the area. It is unknown whether the Town can gain ownership of this property.
- It was noted that residents want to see a path or some kind of trail from the Burt Dam to the marina to enjoy walking, birding, etc.
- There used to be sandy beaches in Olcott on the east and west sides of the harbor.
- The REDI project was initially designed to provide access to the beach on the west side of Olcott harbor. As this is no longer proposed, a boardwalk will be installed from the upland area by the Olcott Yacht Club to provide access down to the beach.
- There is an erosion issue on the east side of the harbor, which had to be stabilized so that the beach could be reopened. There is a FEMA plan to try to create a concrete seawall with steps down into the water in this area.
- Locations along Lake Road and in the Olcott hamlet area need safer accommodations for biking and walking. The path in Krull Park is currently being paved.

- It was mentioned that improvements are needed on Lake Road to improve access to the harbor area, as well as between the east and the west sides of the harbor.
- There have been improvements made on Ontario Street near the carousel to enhance walkability to the harbor, but there is more work to be done to improve the sidewalk connections. It was noted that traffic is dangerous in that area when there are events in the gazebo area by the carousel.
- There is a need to improve wayfinding and signage to identify destinations in the Town. It was noted that some people do not follow signs and stripping in the downtown area of the hamlet, and sometimes people drive the wrong way on Main Street (one-way streets).
- There should be bicycle improvements running north to south along Lockport-Olcott Road to better connect Olcott with the hamlet of Newfane to the south.
- State Routes 18 (Lake Road) and 78 (Lockport-Olcott Road) are bikeable; however, the Town and county roads are not.
- The Olcott Hotel, which was destroyed by a fire, represents an important historic resource that should be recognized with interpretative signage to tell the story of Olcott's rich past.
- Better signage and wayfinding to the harbor area is needed. People take advantage of scenic views from the harbor and should be drawn/better directed to these places. There should also be a sign that informs visitors about the area, Lake Ontario, and that they are looking across the lake at Toronto, Canada.
- Krull Park is missing pickleball and frisbee golf facilities.
- Better informational signage and pathways between Krull Park and the shops in the hamlet would encourage park visitors to go to this area.
- When there are tournaments there will be a need for people to stay. AirBNBs are increasing in Newfane.
- The Town recently adopted a short-term rental law.
- Bye's Popcorn is a local business that has historically been a popular attraction. It is currently up for sale. Loss of this "institution" was noted as a concern.
- More parking is needed in the hamlet to accommodate people coming to Olcott for various events.
- The existing gazebo does not have utilities. There is an opportunity to make the gazebo a permanent entertainment venue by installing electrical service and other utilities.
- A new gazebo is being built in the northern portion of Krull Park that will have electric but no water service. While this is a benefit, it will be located east of the hamlet and the fear is the people who visit will not venture into the center of the hamlet or to the harbor. Again, wayfinding signage could help.

- Overall, the community needs to find ways to better attract visitors who utilize Krull Park to come into the downtown area.
- There are stormwater drainage issues on the west side of Olcott Harbor.
- A resident noted that the west side of Olcott Harbor tends to be forgotten. Improvements for this area should also be considered.
- It was suggested that a ferry service could run between the two sides of the harbor to improve access between these areas.
- On a larger scale, a ferry service could be established between Wilson and Olcott harbors that would improve activity in both areas.
- Cell phone (wireless communication) capabilities and service issues in the Town should be addressed.
- The Town should make the terraces at Krull Park more accessible for scenic viewing.

The primary topics discussed during the public meeting included signage and wayfinding, public access and walkability, tourism and economic development, and infrastructure improvements. It was agreed that getting from the marina on the west side of the harbor to the attractions on the east side is a problem. Additionally, while there are several attractions that draw people to the area, such as Krull Park, the Newfane marina, the Lakeside Village Shoppes, etc.), there is a need for economic investment and other improvements to make Olcott a more inviting destination. Sidewalks are missing or too narrow in many places; Route 18 has high traffic volumes and lacks safe pedestrian accommodations. The terraces above the beach at Krull Park impede access (steep change of grade) and the stairways can be treacherous. The flat areas are also underutilized. Overall, these areas provide opportunities for scenic viewing and passive recreation.

### **Next Steps**

- Wendel will finalize the existing conditions and policies sections of the LWRP update, which will be reviewed by the Waterfront Advisory Committee. The PowerPoint presentation from the meeting will be emailed to the Town Supervisor for posting on the Town website. A second public information meeting will be scheduled for some time in the fall or in early 2024.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joshua Rogers