



Initial estimate: \$19 million for storm cleanup



U.S. Army National Guard troops use heavy equipment to clear storm debris at Arend and Belmont, Williamsville, on Oct. 18. Sgt. Corey

Baskerville is at left. Village side streets were among the hardest hit by the Oct. 12 storm.

Photo by Albert T. McCracken Jr.
More photos on page 24

by JESSICA L. FINCH
Associate Editor

The 60-day storm cleanup plan for the Town of Amherst began this past weekend.

(See editorial on page four)

In addition to town workers and National Guard forces, the mess left behind from the surprise October storm will be cleared under the direction of DRC Emergency Services from Alabama and GPI Engineering & Construction Services.

Supervisor Satish Mohan agreed to the contract last week, and work began immediately. DRC, a debris removal company, is expected to clear 15,000 cubic feet of branches a day. Mohan had previously estimated that the town had 2 million cubic feet of debris.

"DRC and GPI are the town's authorized contractors for this work, and we ask town residents and their private contractors to be courteous and cooperative as they work to return our town back to normal," Mohan said.

GPI will be monitoring the loads collected by DRC to ensure they are collecting the weight per unit the town has agreed to pay for. When settling the contracts Mohan requested local workers be hired for the job and as of Monday, six subcontractors were hired. They had not been identified at press time.

Mohan said his first estimate for the cost of storm cleanup will be \$19 million, with FEMA paying 75 percent and the state the remaining

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Young soloist

Pianist Duo Xu will perform this Sunday with the Amherst Symphony Orchestra. See page 28

Storm fallout

Sports teams scramble to finish seasons. See page 15

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E-mail:
newstips@beenews.com
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Village Halloween parade cancelled

The Village of Williamsville annual Halloween Parade, which was scheduled to take place Saturday, Oct. 28, has been cancelled due to the severe storm damage in Island Park.

The event will not be rescheduled, according to the Youth and Recreation Committee.

The next community event will be held at 6 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 2 at Village Hall for the annual tree lighting in the village.

Minimal tax savings, large cut to services Reductions in assessor's office could prove costly

by JESSICA L. FINCH
Associate Editor

If the money cut from the 2007 Town of Amherst Assessor's Department's tentative budget is not restored, it will prove to be very costly, Assessor Harry Williams said. (See related story on page 10)

Williams said a budget of \$871,956, reduced from \$970,409 in 2006, would not be enough funding for the town to continue to assess at 100 percent annually. And if the town is unable to maintain a 100 percent level, then it will lose the \$211,000 granted each year from the New York State Real Property Tax Law.

The amount of funding and staff available would allow the department to assess at only 85 percent, Williams said.

The town has taken part in the annual reassessment project since 2000 and has 43,000 parcels.

The department is also expected to end its relationship with GAR Associates, the real estate appraisal and consulting firm. According to Williams, Supervisor Satish Mohan said he will no longer sign agreements with the company, which has worked with the town for more than 30 years.

Williams said the town will soon be terminating agreements with GAR Associates.

A quarter million dollars was cut from the

“The Town of Amherst has been a leader in the State of New York in assessment fairness and equity for over 10 years.”

— Harry Williams,
town assessor

professional and contractual lines of the budget, which was used in part to pay GAR Associates.

"Dr. Mohan has put emphasis on using the town's own staff, OK, but then he cut mileage and overtime," Williams said. "If you (cut) those two things how can they assume the role in the field. There is no money to pay them to drive their own cars around."

Many of the staff members in the assessor's office have been certified by New York State to do assessments, but with cuts also made to education, Williams said the town's staff can't receive the proper training and accreditations.

"You can't have it both ways," he said about cutting funding and requesting the

same, or more, services.

Mohan said the town would be bidding for the contracts currently held by GAR Associates because he said the town can't afford to continue paying \$500,000- \$600,000 for the services the company provides.

A suggestion from Mohan of using students from the University at Buffalo would be more costly than continued use of a professional, Williams said. Not including any training, Williams estimates that using students to assess homes would cost \$350,000 if each were paid just \$7.50 an hour. He did not indicate the number of students he thought would be sought.

"The Town of Amherst has been a leader in the State of New York in assessment fairness and equity for over 10 years," Williams said. "We have received Excellence in Equity awards from the Office of Real Property Services for seven years."

The supervisor has submitted his tentative budget, but the Town Board now has the opportunity to reconfigure the totals. A public hearing will be held at 7 p.m. Monday, Nov. 6 at town hall.

In a letter to Mohan, Williams said, "Your plan does not take into consideration all the necessary steps that are needed to complete an annual reassessment project and qualify for the maintenance aid check for \$211,000."