

Harlem Road

Reconstruction project moves forward

by KEATON DEPRIEST AND JESSICA L. FINCH
Cheektowaga and Amherst Editors

Technically, it's a project 23 years in the making, but work could begin as soon as January on improvements to Harlem Road.

Thomas Messina, assistant regional design engineer for the New York State Department of Transportation, said bids for the estimated \$18 million project will be opened Nov. 30.

A 45-day review period will follow before a contractor is chosen.

"We anticipate the contract will be signed mid-January, and the contractor will begin work sometime after that date — weather dependent," he said. "People will be seeing orange signs going up in mid-January that there is work ahead."

Messina said the first proposals for improving Harlem Road were dated in 1983 to improve Harlem from Maryvale Drive to Kensington Avenue. Then in 1998 plans were extended to Genesee Street. In the past 15 months, the details of the plan, from Genesee Street in Cheektowaga to Yorktown Road in Amherst, were finalized.

Messina said the community played a major role in pushing for the project.

"The community asked to revitalize the area. They wanted to generate a uniform look out there — create an identity for themselves," he said.

Both Amherst and Cheektowaga have approved funding for decorative lighting to line the street.



The intersection at Wehrle Drive and Kensington Avenue will be reconstruction into a roundabout, one of two being built at Harlem Road where the towns of

Amherst and Cheektowaga meet. Millions of dollars in business development is also taking place in the area. Photo by John Rusac

In addition to the lighting, the design plans also call for decorative sidewalks, masonry walls and trees to be added to the district.

Reconstructing Harlem Road from Genesee Street to Cleveland Drive will take place during the 2007 construction season. Then in 2008, Cleveland Drive to Yorktown Road will be reconstructed with the roundabouts being built — the smaller one at Cleveland Drive and the other at Wehrle and Kensington.

Daniel Ulatowski, Cheektowaga zoning inspector, said the pro-

ject will create a walking corridor for residents of the neighborhood as well as visitors to the district.

"It is a huge concern of ours to have a walking corridor," he said. "We hope this design will be a catalyst for our businesses."

Ulatowski said the Town of Cheektowaga had also been working with Benderson Development Company, which owns the Jubilee Foods' property on Harlem Road.

For several years, the town had been communicating with representatives of Benderson to gain a business perspective of how the

district should be revitalized.

The main concern of the company's representatives was once again making the district a focal point of both Amherst and Cheektowaga.

Ulatowski said that although the reconstruction project has taken years to get to this point, it will be an asset to the community upon its completion.

"We want this to be inviting to everyone who visits the area," he said. "Time will tell how it shapes up for our businesses."

Thomas Schratz, vice president of the Harlem Kensington Cleve-

land Business Association, said the roundabouts will bring distinction to the area.

"The exciting part is the double roundabouts; it's a very unique idea," he said, adding that he thinks it's the only one of its kind in the state. "It's a marketing anchor. It will mark a destination so people will know where we are."

Prior to the work on the roads, businesses have already started to improve. Schratz said the remodeled McDonald's had \$1 million of work and the CVS and Rite Aid pharmacies each invested more than \$3 million into their locations.

With the reconstruction layout came the loss of Jimmy's Restaurant, which has closed.

"We are losing one historical anchor," Schratz said. "People would say, 'It's by the hot dog stand, by Jimmy's.'"

When the HKC Business Association became involved, it pushed for a likeness to Hertel Avenue in North Buffalo — a walking community with decorative sidewalks, restaurants and shops.

With Jubilee, Hector's Hardware, Trillium's Courtyard, Bing's Restaurant, Dairy Queen, Citizens Bank and many other businesses in that area, the HKC Business Association is creating a marketing plan to encourage motorists and residents to patronize the businesses in that area during construction.

Working with business associations from Orchard Park and Hertel Avenue, Schratz said officials are learning about what to do and not do when a highly populated area is impeded by construction.

Veterans Canal Park awarded NYS grant

The Town of Amherst's Erie Canal Greenway Veterans Canal Park rehabilitation project was recently awarded a grant from New York State.

The \$103,226 grant is one of 54 awarded across the state to support recreation, historic interpretation and revitalization along the New York State canal system. The total of the grants was nearly \$8.4 million.

Amherst will use the funding for the rehabilitation of a deteriorated boat launch, resurfacing the adjacent parking lot and the building of a storage facility to house on-site maintenance equipment.

"For more than 180 years, the New York State Canal System has served as a catalyst for economic growth and prosperity," Gov. George E. Pataki said. "As a commercial waterway, it helped fuel the westward expansion of our nation, and (now) our

canal system is being redefined as a vibrant and thriving recreational and tourism destination."

He added, "These grants will enable local communities to capitalize on this tremendous recourse to encourage new development, create new jobs and improve the quality of life for all New Yorkers."

The Erie Canal Greenway Grant Program, administered by the Canal Corporation, was created in 2006 to spur community revitalization along the 524-mile canal system. All grants require a 50/50 local match.

More than 81 applications were submitted and grants were awarded on a competitive basis to local communities and not-for-profit organizations for projects that meet the objectives of Pataki's vision for the canal system.

Visit www.canals.state.ny.us for information.

Mayor requests Christmas decorations

Mayor Mary Lowther has asked residents to sift through old Christmas decorations that can be donated to dress up with Williamsville Water Mill for the holiday season.

Village officials are seeking a large artificial pine tree, lights, garland and other holiday decor.

In collaboration with the Williamsville Business Association Holiday Walk Event, pictures with Santa Claus will be taken from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 2 in the mill.

The deadline to drop off holiday decorations is Wednesday, Nov. 29. Call Lowther at 632-4120 before donating.

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