

letters



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Trees are loved by their owners

In the Dec. 20 tree disaster meeting at the Amherst Museum, Deputy Highway Superintendent Joe Speth told us that the town trees — those between the sidewalk and the curb — were our trees, that they belong to the citizens of Amherst collec-

tively. He backed that statement with the pledge that if anyone has a tree with an orange ribbon around it in front of his house and particularly wants to save that tree, he is willing to talk and possibly compromise.

Arborist Rick Stedman stated that many of our town trees have to be taken down because they are damaged beyond their ability (Please turn to page six)

Corrections

The Dec. 20 edition of the Amherst Bee incorrectly stated the date of the next Amherst Town Board meeting. The next meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 2 in town hall, 5833 Main St.

The Dec. 20 edition of the Amherst Bee misidentified a Sweet Home boys indoor track photo. The runner pictured was Ryan Poley.

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Last week's question:  
**Should an official campaigning for another office resign?**

You said:  
**82% YES 18% NO**

How to reach The Bee

The Amherst Bee publishes community news free of charge. Mail items to The Amherst Bee, P.O. Box 150, Buffalo, NY, 14231-0150. Our telephone number is 632-4700. Our fax number is 633-8601. Our Web sites are www.BeeNews.com and www.AmherstBee.com. Amherst Managing Editor David Sherman's e-mail address is dsherman@BeeNews.com. Amherst Associate Editor Jessica Finch's e-mail address is jfinch@BeeNews.com. Senders should state on their contributions whether their e-mail address can be published.

Letters to the editor must be typed, double-spaced and are limited to a maximum of 300 words. Names will not be withheld unless the author demonstrates a clear reason for anonymity. No unsigned letters will be printed. You must supply your name, address and telephone number for verification. Authors are limited to one letter every four weeks. Letters are subject to editing.

Our deadline is 5 p.m. on the Friday prior to publication. For engagement and wedding announcements, The Bee offers a form to list names and details. Call for a copy. There is no charge to publish engagements, weddings or anniversaries.



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Web sites: www.BeeNews.com & www.AmherstBee.com

Subscription rates:

	One Year	Two years	Three years
	\$39.00	\$72.00	\$98.00
Sr. Citizen	\$36.00	\$66.00	\$89.00
Out of county	\$55.00	\$91.00	

Adam L. Rinewalt, Publisher/Founder 1879-1907  
George J. Measer Sr., Publisher 1907-1965  
George J. Measer, Publisher 1965-1994 (USPS 024-300)

5564 Main Street, P.O. Box 150, Buffalo, NY 14231-0150

(716) 632-4700 ▲ FAX 633-8601

Circulation: 632-1791 ▲ Classified: 632-4712

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Amherst Bee, P.O. Box 150, Buffalo, NY 14231-0150

Published every Wednesday by Bee Publications Inc. Periodical postage paid at Buffalo, NY 14240

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Waterfront development still needs an anchor

Any good outdoorsman knows you can spend idyllic hours casting into the water, only to get a thrilling bite on "that one last cast" as the sun sinks slowly on the western horizon.

It's about one minute to sundown for Buffalo's Bass Pro plan. Obviously, it's unlikely they will suddenly decide, after more than two years of hemming and hawing, that casting its line into the Lake Erie shore waters will land anything more than a perch or blue gill.

Build they will, just not here. Among the attractions of such a store were the people from far and wide who would travel to the unique and nonpareil shopping experience, not to mention the emotional jump-start of saving a beloved building like the Aud.

Bass Pro is projecting no fewer than 11 new store openings in 2007, bringing the total number of massive retail outlets to 49. It's not exactly the pace that, say, Starbucks might be on, but the one-time "Disney World" of outdoor stores is becoming more like Fantasy Island. It's nice, it's fun, it's cute, but one hardly has to pack overnight provisions just to get to one.

Tulsa, Okla., might be why Bass Pro has dipped nothing more than a big toe in Buffalo's waters. With stores already up and running in Oklahoma City, 90 minutes in one direction, and Springfield, Mo., a little more than two hours in the other, Tulsa's store, which opened late in 2005, has hardly been the blockbuster predicted.

Seems as though their lease arrangement there is tied to sales; 2 percent of that figure is what Bass Pro pays under the terms of its deal. Supporters argued that would mean at least \$1 million a year in lease payments to the public coffers; some suggested it could hit \$1.2 million or more.

Last week, Bass Pro wrote out a \$63,719 check for its November payment, bringing the 2006 total to \$562,000 for the year, half what some had expected. Buffalo's store would now be snugly wedged between ones in suburban Toronto and Auburn, hardly destinations that require the packing of overnight provisions to get to.

Make no mistake, our waterfront redevelopment still needs an anchor, and not just the one attached to the Naval Park's battleship. Shopping

malls, you might have noticed, aren't just a series of purse stores and pretzel stands.

It's no coincidence that the latest artist's rendition of what the inner harbor should look like doesn't quite extend over to the Seneca's soon-to-be-open \$125 million teepee of temptation. If you're one of the few who haven't figured

out that casinos are specifically designed to keep their patrons within their own walls for everything from buffets to beaded buffalos, then you don't understand why the Senecas picked the spot they did. You'd need a dream catcher to see the meaningful spin-off development this particular casino will bring.

And if Bass Pro is lost, it's hardly an auspicious start for the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp., which in part was formed specifically to ensure the potential trophy mount got into the boat. And lest we forget, Uniland's

grandiose outer-harbor vision, to the tune of \$750 million and which was announced a year or so ago, now already metaphorically sits next to the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.

The ECHDC's latest \$200 million inner-harbor proposal looks sparkly and colorful and inviting on paper. So has every single other plan put forth in the last 30 years.

It's equally inauspicious that the group already has admitted that Bass Pro played a major role in drawing up this specific dream; just how damaging to move forward without it remains to be seen.

Bass Pro clearly isn't the anchor it was once envisioned to be. It doesn't mean it can't still work, even at some very meaningful if not slightly less spectacular way, should this 30-day casting period still get Johnny Morris to finally make a hit. If not, the bobber has already gone under the surface twice and popped back up with an empty hook attached.

Bass Pro and the Buffalo Creek Casino represent two more large ones that got away. Someone needs to land a big fish. And soon.

*(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers of Western New York. To provide feedback on this column, visit our Web site at www.wnynewspapers.com. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)*



BRIAN ACKLEY

Political Columnist

Work underway to streamline budget process

The 2007 budget for the Town of Amherst was adopted by default on Nov. 20 for \$112.55 million against the 2006 budget of \$107.88 million, a 4.3 percent increase.

The 2006 budget in reality should have been \$110.88 million if we fully accounted for health care and utility costs. Out of this \$112.55 million total budget, \$73.74 million will be raised in property taxes. The 2007 budget has allocated \$2 million for flood-control projects, \$1.7 million for totes for rodent control and a half-million dollars for the purchase of the Eggertsville Community Center for youth programs, in the Capital Improvement Budget.

The costs of garbage and other waste materials went up close to \$800,000. The major cost in the budget is the cost of personnel. We have a hiring freeze and are trying to reduce personnel through attrition.

The overall tax rate for 2007 has, however, come down by about 3 percent. The owner of a home assessed at \$150,000 would pay an estimated \$1,547 in town taxes in 2007, down \$40 from \$1,587 in 2006 for those homes that were not reassessed upward in 2006.

This reduction in taxes will result because total assessed values of real estate in the town increased by 4.1 percent, from \$6.87 billion in 2005 to \$7.15 billion in 2006. A portion of this increase was due to new buildings increasing the tax base. A total of 10,439 homes had an average of a 9-percent increase in their assessed values. Those homes will now pay 6 percent more in town taxes in 2007 against the 9 percent increase in their assessed values.

The town borrows money every year to fund long-term capital projects such as sewer lines, water lines and flood-control projects. On Dec. 31, 2005, the town's outstanding debt was \$67.18 million. I am trying to reduce this debt amount, which would have to be paid by the future generation.

The budget process, as I went through it, was very time-consuming and tense. The department heads submitted their budgets that totaled 6 percent higher than in 2006 in spite of my request for a 10-percent reduction.

With the first year's experience, I am now streamlining the budget process to be smoother and with no contentious environment between the departments, the supervisor and the Town Board.

We clearly have to review and establish the need for every service we provide to town residents.

I am now asking all department heads to submit their budgets for the next five years within the next two months. This exercise will prudently and efficiently time the purchases of capital equipment and will forecast the demand for personnel in the various trades so that we can train and develop the future required trades from within the existing town personnel.

The budget determines what we can do throughout the year and directly affects the quality of services.

Its monitoring and control are as important as the initial formulation of the budget, and I am now working with the town comptroller and Town Board to do just that.



SATISH MOHAN

Amherst Supervisor