



A NOVEL IDEA — Dr. R. Sachar sorts through the thousands of books available at the Amherst Audubon Library's book sale being held through 8 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 10 at 350 J.J. Audubon Parkway. Photo by John Rusac

WiFi — Is it in the town's future?

by JESSICA L. FINCH
Associate Editor

Hotspots, meshed networks and wireless access points are terms the Town of Amherst may be hearing more in the upcoming months.

Stuart Shapiro, of the town's Information Technology Committee, spoke on behalf of the group during Monday's Town Board work session in regard to wireless fidelity and bringing the town into the 21st century in regard to Internet accessibility. Shapiro is a professor for the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at the University at Buffalo.

Shapiro said 100 residents responded to a poll on the town's Web site asking how they use the Internet and were asked questions related to WiFi capabilities, desires and future use.

The survey results were:

- More than 90 percent respondents already have WiFi capabilities.
- More than 93 percent have an existing broadband connection to the Internet.
- Approximately 75 percent have a wireless network at work or home.

This information was collected following a resolution from Council Member Dan Ward to upgrade the town's technology.

"We hear about other communities around the United States coming online," he said. "We have to understand the technology of the future to be one of the leaders, not a follower."

Ward added that Amherst is considered a wealthy, leading community in Western New York and needs to move forward with a WiFi system. He also emphasized the need to grow as a "university community."

There are several options the town can consider — installing hotspots that provide Internet connec-

tion in a small radius; mesh networks that provide to a larger space and overall municipality access.

Currently, coffee shops, restaurants, airports, shopping malls and hotels provide a WiFi service.

Providing WiFi on a larger scale is taking place throughout the entire state of Rhode Island and cities such as Philadelphia and San Francisco.

Cost is one of the biggest issues to consider, with privacy also near the top of the list. The town can apply for funding, sell advertisements or have a user fee. It can also be bonded as was the case in St. Cloud, Fla.

The presentation on Monday did not include prices for Amherst. However, St. Cloud, with a population of 28,000, bonded \$2 million to provide the WiFi service.

The Town Board seemed to be in agreement that more information was needed to move forward. Council Member Shelly Schratz suggested opening the survey to more people, especially high school and college students, to understand what people who use WiFi are looking for.

Ward said he wanted to move forward with a request for proposal to see what service the town could get at what cost. He was concerned by the board's lack of knowledge on the subject and enthusiasm to move forward.

Amherst Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Colleen DiPirro recommended the town meet with Verizon about its options.

Shapiro said the committee would be looking for a "go, no go" answer from the Town Board on whether it was interested in moving forward.

"If (the board) was interested we would need to do a better survey," he said, adding that would include formal details on the cost and service options.

Town fined \$5,000, must remove sanitary sewer overflows

by JESSICA L. FINCH
Associate Editor

The New York State Department of Conservation has implemented a consent order for all sanitary sewer overflows in Western New York as part of the Clean Water Act.

With that order came a fine of \$5,000 to the Town of Amherst for its three SSOs located at Kings Highway, North Drive and Capen Boulevard.

Town Engineer Jeff Burroughs said he had been informed this past summer that the DEC would be moving forward with the requirement. The consent order arrived the beginning of January.

Region 9 of the DEC recognized the work done by Amherst to mediate the problem but had been under pressure to require the estimated 20 communities to remove all SSOs. An estimated 130 SSOs are located throughout WNY.

"It's a water quality issue the DEC wants to take care of," Burroughs said during Monday's work session.

The fine is a one-time penalty, unless the town doesn't follow a five-year plan to remove the SSOs. The town had the option to request a hearing against the DEC's consent order, but town attorney Tom Jones advised the town not to — due to lack of a defense.

"It is happening all over Western New York. (The DEC) wants to reduce or eliminate the sewage that is going into streams around here," Jones said. "We don't have much of a choice."

Burroughs said the town has until Feb. 1 to submit its plan on how it will remove the three systems located in the Snyder/Eggersville areas. That region of town is considered older, with failing pipes. He estimated the SSO systems are 40-50 years old.

When heavy rains hit the area, the sanitary sewers become full of rainwater, causing the sewage backups. What is left is a lot of rainwater with diluted sewage, Burroughs said.

Two of the SSOs, at North and Kings, should be "fairly easy" to remove, but Burroughs said the one at Capen will be the most expensive.

The initial estimate for the work is \$2-5 million dollars.

Burroughs said that if there is any silver lining to the consent order, it is that once the work is complete the town will be considered for grants intended for sewer work.

Supervisor Satish Mohan stressed at the meeting that the amount of water currently filtered through the SSOs is miniscule.

"It's 11.4 million gallons a year. Daily (the town water flow) is 30 to 200 million gallons a day, times 365 days a year," he said. "It's a very small fraction of the total water."

Burroughs said although the town knew of the issue this past summer there was still no way a \$5 million project could have been completed in six months.

"It comes down to resources. We know what needs to be done," he said.

He added that since 1993 the town has spent \$12 million on the Sanitary Sewer Improvement and Rehabilitation Project to maintain more than 500 miles of sewers.

Meaghan Boice-Green, representative for Region 9 of the DEC, said the consent order is a draft and negotiations will take place between the Town and DEC on how to handle the issue. The terms discussed could include the \$5,000 fine.

"Our goal is to get the situation of the sanitary sewer overflows addressed in a timely manner," she said. "No one living in Amherst wants Ellicott Creek to become more polluted."

Holiday affects Town Board meeting

In observance of Dr. Martin Luther King Day Amherst Town Hall will be closed on Monday, Jan. 15.

The next town board meeting will be at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 16 at the town hall, 5582 Main St., Williamsville. For information on agenda items, visit <http://www.amherst.ny.us>.

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