letters to the Editor

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Why buy land residents can't use?

When Bill Kindel presented his resolution for buying land to control development, I agreed with the concept that the town should be able to direct what is to be built and where. What I found confusing was the need to borrow $12 million to do this and exactly what his intentions are.

I have attended a number of board meetings and have seen developers present their plans for approval. Consent for any construction was based on whether the property was zoned for such development and if the proposal coincided with the Amherst master plan. When residents spoke loudly at one of the meetings in opposition to Wal-Mart on Millersport Highway, the application was resoundingly defeated.

Not once did a board member ask whether the town needed to purchase the land in order to stop construction. So why do we need to borrow money to control growth? Do Amherst residents really need to own and maintain more public property rather than have it generate tax revenue, even as farmland?

When I think of public land, I

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EXCLUSIVE

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Last week's question:

Are feuds hurting towns storm cleanup?

You said:

88% YES 12% 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 email 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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Simple investment could help yield millions of dollars for county

With less than 90 days left in his tenure as Erie county executive, I'm sure the cardboard boxes and packing peanuts have already been ordered as Joel Giambra prepares to vacate the big corner office on the Rath County Office Building's 16th floor.

While this column has been one of the many places you could turn to for open and honest criticism of our region's top elected official, it is my hope that, before he turns in his keys to the vehicle formerly manned by Victor Getz, Giambra would realize the importance of the oft-talked about "bed tax" dedication.

DAN MEYER
Political Columnist

So in case you do not read this column regularly and haven't heard the passionate pleas of Andrew Rudnick from the Buffalo Niagara Partnership as well as folks from the county's Convention and Visitors Bureau, here is some advice to you, the reader, on how you can voice your opinion to Giambra about Erie County's hotel occupancy tax. All it would involve from each of you is a little reading, some basic typing and just a few clicks of a mouse.

First, a brief history lesson on why Rudnick and other stakeholders from the tourism industry have been advocating for the full dedication of the county's bed tax so that those funds can be used for promotion and marketing purposes.

The county's convention and tourism business is not only self-sustaining, it yields approximately a 20-to-1 return on investment, a particularly impressive accomplishment given the fact the county doesn't fully invest in what is a vital piece of the puzzle for business development.

Despite their repeated attempts to convince our elected officials that the full dedication of the hotel occupancy tax is the key that will unlock the door to a strategic plan for convention and tourism promotion and marketing, Rudnick and the fine folks from the Partnership, along with other major players in the local tourism industry, have been denied time and time again.

But, hopefully, change is on the way. There is now a proposal on the table to dedicate a figure that works out to be equal to approximately 80 percent of the bed tax revenues from 2006 to the Convention and Visitors Bureau, with plans to increase the funding to a full 100 percent by 2010.

Rudnick and company figure it is a compromise proposal that meets our community's needs when it comes to marketing and promoting convention and tourism in our region. The quicker this is done the better, especially since the impact of the infamous county budget crisis of 2005 is being felt now for convention and tourism business.

But here is the problem. Members of the Erie County Legislature have made it pretty clear that they are not planning anything dramatic until a new administration is in place. The bed tax issue is important, and it's something that Giambra needs to consider as he puts the finishing touches on the proposed budget for 2008.

Remember that 20-to-1 return on investment that the tourism industry in Erie County generates that I spoke about earlier? That figure could be significantly higher if the 80 percent dedication is included in the upcoming budget, meaning it is imperative that, in the words of Rudnick himself, "the pump be primed" with the inclusion of this dedication.

So now is the time to contact Giambra and let him know that leadership — the very thing he has been criticized for not providing in recent years — is needed on this issue. And leadership is needed now, not when Jim Keane or Chris Collins is figuring out where to place the jelly bean bowl on the big desk in the previously mentioned office at the top of the Rath Building.

The proposed budget is due out at the middle of this month, so time is of the essence. If you have a computer, simply visit the Buffalo Niagara Partnership's Web site at www.thepartnership.org and follow the easy-to-use instructions on how to send an e-mail to Giambra.

The 90-second investment could help yield tens of millions of dollars in visitor spending here in Erie County, and that, in the words of Martha Stewart, would be a good thing.

(Daniel Meyer is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers of Western New York. Comments can be sent directly to Meyer via e-mail to: meyersmusings@gmail.com. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)

Albany stuck on the wrong track

In a speech last week before the Citizen's Budget Commission, a nonpartisan group of fiscal analysts, New York's budget director made the stunning announcement that the state's deficit is now projected to rise to $4 billion next year — $500 million more than originally projected. The main cause of this widening deficit is slower-than-projected revenues coming to the state coffers.

When lower-than-projected income is added to a dramatic increase in state spending (a year-over-year increase of almost 9 percent this year alone), it is no surprise that the deficit is widening.

JAMES P. HAYES
New York State Assembly

My proposals for using windfall profits in good economic times to pay down debt went unheeded during last year's budget debate and is one of the reasons why I voted against most of the current budget. Unfortunately, the majority of the legislature rammed through a budget that hiked spending by almost 9 percent this year alone.

With the announcement of a widening deficit, the STAR property tax cuts enacted over the past several years may be threatened in the future.

That's wrong. Taxpayers must remain vigilant and oppose additional spending programs that will only make the deficit situation worse.

If Albany's spending addiction weren't enough to set us on the wrong track, word came from Gov. Eliot Spitzer that he has given the state Department of Motor Vehicles the authority to issue driver's licenses to aliens without U.S. documentation, even those who may be in this country illegally.

This order threatens the security of our country by watering down the integrity of the driver's license as a trusted form of identification for citizens. It will almost certainly add to the slowdown at the U.S.-Canadian border and increase pressure on Western New Yorkers to obtain passports for identification purposes when cross-border traveling into Canada.

The governor's authority to unilaterally issue this order — without legislative approval — will be tested in the courts over the next several months.

The recent proposal by the New York Thruway Authority to increase tolls by up to 20 percent adds even more costs to overburdened taxpayers and businesses of Western New York.

Albany leaders must change direction, reign in spending, protect our citizens from foreign threats and help increase business and commerce, not chase jobs and families to other states.

The Western New York economy is fragile, and our leaders in government should be working to improve the business climate here, not diminishing it with higher taxes, higher fees and bureaucratic irresponsibility.

I will continue the fight against these "wrong track" proposals and would like to hear your opinions as well. Please feel free to contact me at my district office, 5555 Main St., Williamsville, NY 14221, via telephone at 634-1895 or via e-mail at hayesj@assembly.state.ny.us.