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Cleveland Submits Reimagine the Canals Proposal

Earlier this month, the village of Cleveland submitted a project proposal entitled *The Cleveland Dock: Connecting the Central NY Region by Water and Land in All Seasons* to the Reimagine the Canals statewide competition. In the proposal, the village makes a strong case that the Cleveland Dock is an integral site for revitalization of the central section of the Erie Canal, Oneida Lake and the greater Central NY region. Project partners include the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, the NYS Canal Corporation, NYS Department of State, NYS Office of Parks and Recreation, town of Constantia, Oswego County, and Central NY Regional Planning and Development Board. The proposal was also supported locally by the Oneida Lake Association, North Shore Council of Governments, and the Cleveland Historical Society.

Announcements on Phase 1 of the competition are expected by the end of the month.

Historic Company Closes in McConnellsville

Many workers in Northern Oneida County are facing a new challenge with the suspension of operations at Harden Furniture following its sale at auction last week, leaving about 175 people without jobs. Harden Furniture, which was founded in 1844 and is one of the oldest furniture manufacturers in the country, was sold to Big Shoulders Capital, a specialty lender in Northbrook, Ill., following an Article 9 foreclosure auction that was held by lender Gemcap Solutions.

Until the sale, the landmark in the region had been a family business, under operation by fifth generation CEO Greg Harden.

Efforts to organize a local bid continued up to the bid deadline of the auction but were unsuccessful. It is unclear if production will resume at the plant following the transition to new ownership.

Empire Forests for the Future Initiative

The Governor's 2018-19 Executive Budget proposal included several proposals related to forestry, collectively referred to as the Empire Forest for the Future (EFFI) proposal. The EFFI addresses items related to: state agency procurement preference, Empire Forest Incentive program, amendments to the Right to Practice Forestry law, Community Forest Grant program, Commercial Timber Harvest Notification, and changes to the Forest Property Tax law (480 and 480-a). Of particular interest to Tug Hill communities are the proposed amendments to the forest property tax law.

Proposed Changes to the Forest Property Tax Law (480-a)

Under the proposed amendment, the current 480-a would be continued for current enrollees, but no new enrollments would be allowed. The stumpage tax requirement would be eliminated and regulation changes are planned to reduce costs, increase participant flexibility and reduce administrative workloads (i.e., replace mandatory work schedule with 10-year "work windows" and extend required 5-year plan updates to 10-year cycle). Assessment reductions would also be reduced from 80% to 60% after 10 years. There would also be a penalty-free opt out period in year 1 or a penalty-free conversion to another 480-b option.

The new 480-b Forest Certification option would include a minimum 25 acres of land under a DEC-recognized forest certification program and may include some forms of group certification as well as individual certification. There would be a 70% assessment reduction provided, and the same "10-year rolling commitment" as 480-a now.

The new 480-b Sustainable Forest Management Program option would include a minimum of 25 acres of land, with at least 10 acres of forest or 25% forest, whichever is greater. Broader management objectives could include sustainable forest management, wildlife habitat maintenance and improvement, and open space conservation. The assessment reduction proposed is 40% for all eligible and enrolled land, with the same "10-year rolling commitment" as 480-a now. There would be no overall "Forest Management Plan" required, no mandatory work schedule required, no mandatory timber harvesting required, no mandatory 5-year plan updates or required plan amendments and no stumpage tax on any commercial timber harvests

The proposed changes also address reimbursing the taxing jurisdictions. Any county, town or school district in which the total assessed value exempted under RPTL Sections 480, 480-a or 480-b represents 1% or more of the total assessed value on the final tax roll is eligible to receive forestry exemption assistance from the state to make them whole to the 1%. For towns where adjustments to reimbursements were made in 2005, the final amount will be reduced by that earlier reimbursement. The new 480-b program would not go into effect until 2019, so there is no money currently allocated in the proposed budget for this reimbursement. The bill language is available on the commission's website at <http://www.tughill.org/services/natural-resource-management/proposed-forestry-legislation/>

Budget Proposal on State Land Tax Payments

Also included in the 2018-19 executive budget is a proposal to change the formula for how tax payments from state lands are calculated. The following is from the Office of Real Property Tax Service:

1. For taxable State lands that are currently taxable, the payments will be determined by taking the prior year's taxes and multiplying them by the allowable inflation index used in the tax cap formula (i.e., the allowable levy growth factor). So in those cases, the assessed values determined by the assessor will no longer be used to determine the taxes due on such lands.
2. For newly acquired taxable State lands, the payments will be determined in the traditional manner in the first year (i.e., based on a local assessment), and then the new indexing formula would apply for the determination of State payments in subsequent years.

The proposal does not change the taxable status of any State lands, so lands that are now taxable will remain taxable and lands that are now exempt will remain exempt, assuming no other legislative changes are made. The proposal only changes the method for determining tax payments on those lands that are taxable.

In 2010, the commission wrote an issue paper that summarized the state land tax payments being made to towns in the region. It is available at <http://www.tughill.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/TaxesOnTugHill2010.pdf>

Bridge NY Grant Applications Available from NYSDOT

The NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) is soliciting candidate projects for funding under the BRIDGE NY program, which provides enhanced assistance for local governments to rehabilitate and replace bridges and culverts. Particular emphasis will be provided for projects that address poor structural conditions; mitigate weight restrictions or detours; facilitate economic development or increase competitiveness; improve resiliency and/or reduce the risk of flooding.

Any city, county, town, village or other political subdivision, including tribal governments and public benefit corporations, authorized to receive and administer State and federal transportation funding.

Bridge projects must be on a public roadway that carries vehicular traffic; be eligible for federal aid; and follow the federal aid process. Culvert projects must be on a public highway and shall follow the State-aid process.

Eligible projects costs for bridges are between \$250,000 and \$5 million. Bridge project applications should include all project costs including design/engineering, right-of-way, construction and construction inspection costs. Design/engineering and construction inspection work performed by the applicant is eligible for reimbursement, provided the work is performed by qualified personnel approved by NYSDOT. NYSDOT will provide up to 95 percent of the authorized project costs.

Eligible projects for culvert projects are between \$50,000 and \$1 million. Culvert project applications should include all project costs including design/engineering, right-of-way, construction and construction inspection costs. Design/engineering and construction inspection work performed by the Applicant is eligible for reimbursement, provided the work is performed by qualified personnel approved by NYSDOT. NYSDOT will provide 100 percent of the authorized project costs.

Draft application submittals for pre-review must be received on or before:

March 15th, 2018 at 11:59pm – for culvert applications

March 29th, 2018 at 11:59pm – for bridge applications

Submit draft applications to: BridgeNY@dot.ny.gov

Comments from draft application submittals will be emailed to the sponsor on or before:

March 30th, 2018 at 11:59pm – for culvert applications

April 13th, 2018 at 11:59pm – for bridge applications

Final application submittals including all documentation must be received on or before:

April 13th, 2018 at 11:59pm – for culvert applications

April 27th, 2018 at 11:59pm – for bridge applications

Submit final applications to: BridgeNY@dot.ny.gov

Webinars and workshops are available for interested applicants to attend. Please see details at <https://www.dot.ny.gov/bridgeny>.

Save the Date - 2018 Black River Watershed

The eighth annual Black River Watershed Conference will be held on Tuesday, June 12, 2018 at Camp Turk in Woodgate, New York. Conference organizers, including the Tug Hill Commission, NYSDEC Region 6 and Lewis, Jefferson and Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) have scheduled a keynote titled "Changing Weather in a Changing Climate" by David Eichorn. Dave is a Meteorologist with over 30 years of experience who retired from television in April 2016. While Dave is most widely known for his weather broadcasts on television, he has also expanded his work into lecturing and education, teaching at a number of colleges across Central New York.

Other topics organizers hope to cover include wildlife connectivity, updates on local SWCD projects and a presentation on the importance of stream gages by the national weather service.

The following site will be updated as the conference date approaches. <http://www.tughill.org/projects/black-river-projects/black-river-watershed-conference/>. We hope to see you in June!

2018 Canal Opening Dates

The state Canal Corporation has announced opening dates for the canal for 2018. Oneida Lake, at the southern boundary of the Tug Hill region, is part of the state canal system.

Conditions permitting, the eastern segment of the canal, from Lock E-2 (Waterford) through Oneida Lake to E-23 (Brewerton) will open on Tuesday, May 15 at 10:00 a.m. The rest of the canal system will open on Friday, May 18 at 7:00 a.m. Standard hours of operation are from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with extended hours until 10:00 p.m. at specified locks, including Lock E-23 in Brewerton,

The canal system has waived fees for pleasure vehicles for the 2018 navigation season.

The canal season concludes with the system closing on Wednesday, October 10 at 5:00 p.m.

More information about the Canal Corporation and the canal system can be found on their web site, www.canals.ny.gov

The complete Notice to Mariners on dates and hours of operation for the 2018 navigation season can be found at: www.canals.ny.gov/wwwapps/tas/notices/ntm.aspx?id=1073

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If you would like to receive our newsletter electronically please email your request to gwen@tughill.org or call 1-888-785-2380.

Electronic versions appear in full color!

Oswego County Adopts Strategic Economic Enhancement Plan

At its regular November meeting, the Oswego County Legislature held a public hearing on, and subsequently adopted, the Oswego County Strategic Economic Enhancement Plan, developed by Camoin Associates of Saratoga Springs, New York.

According to the Executive Summary of the plan, the purpose is to develop a "strategy that will significantly grow the local economy; spur large economic investment; establish the county as an economic engine in the region; reduce the local unemployment rate; and maximize economic diversification and resiliency across the county's communities." Natural water resources were identified as one of the key opportunities the county can capitalize on to improve its competitive position, and its tourism resources were seen as a potential basis for recruiting outdoor recreation equipment manufacturing.

The county Strategic Economic Enhancement Plan can be found at: <http://oswegocounty.com/planning/advancement%20plan.html>

Minutes of the legislature's meeting at which the plan was discussed and adopted can be found at: <http://oswegocounty.com/legislature/meetings/2017/Minutes/leg%20minutes%2011-09-17.pdf> (pp. 2 - 3)