

Capital Project Bids Favorable for School District

by Adam Zaremski
Editor

The Iroquois Central School District received a record amount of bids for its capital project, helping it find better options for the construction.

At last week's Iroquois School Board meeting, the district accepted a variety of bids for the work to improve district buildings and athletic fields. At this time, the bids totaled about \$12.3 million. That only includes construction work for things such as general site work, roofing, plumbing and electrical.

"[There were] 48 contractors that bid on the project. That is probably a record for the district. That is a very, very high number," Timothy Mertzluft, an architect with Gordon W. Jones Associates Architects, said at the Sept. 22 meeting.

Superintendent Douglas Scofield said that the bids were "a little lower than expected," and that could benefit the district in taking care of other construction work on

site. He said the plan was to let construction start to make sure there are no surprises like asbestos that needs to be removed. If there are no issues, he said the board could look at making other changes to re-allocate funding.

In October 2020, district residents approved a \$19.5 million capital project. That total includes money that would also cover costs for architecture and design work, along with the general construction aspect.

For overall site work, Greenauer Blacktop was approved with its \$4.4 million bid. Some other contractors include:

- J&B Installations at \$1.6 million for roofing
 - Allgaier Construction Corp at \$1.4 million for general trades
 - M.A. Ferraulo P&H at \$953,950 for plumbing
 - Myleron Electric at \$1.9 million for electrical
 - A-Turf Inc at \$537,802 for the artificial turf.
- Scofield said construction



should start this fall with solar panels added to the roof of the Marilla Primary School. Other work will continue after that and last until about August 2023.

In other board news, the topic of whether students should wear masks was again part of the meeting. There were about 40 people at the meeting, with about 15 to 20 showing their frustration with state mandates requiring staff and students to wear masks. This meeting did feature people who were in favor of students wearing masks during the day, too.

Board President Jane Sullivan initiated a discussion with other board members about whether to draft a letter to the state, asking for clarification on mask wearing and to clear up "inconsistencies" in the mandates. Board members said they would be open to the idea, but wanted to see an actual resolution in writing before agreeing to any official board statement. No resolution has been written at this time.

One resident, Cindy Bednasz, spoke about the school's quarantining policy for students impacted by COVID-19. She said she understood it and it has her support as a concept, but thought the district's handling of it was not well done. She said it offered zero engagement for students who had to learn at home. She asked that something better be done to make sure those students were not left on their own.

The next school board meeting is set for Oct. 20 at 7 p.m.



Photo by Marty Wangelin

Budding Authors

East Aurora High School student Ryan Zaff, left, and Erin Stevens, from the Middle School, receive annual-level awards from The General Federation of Women's Clubs' Creative Writing Contest, held through its local sponsor, the Aurora Women's Club. The contest is open to members of the club and students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Stevens' award in Youth Poetry is for her poem "A Strange Day," and Zaff received Youth Short Story Category for his short story "Ember."

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Cannabis Edibles Present New Challenges for Communities

by Shelly Ferullo
Staff Reporter

For years, parents and health experts have tried to limit candy consumption because of the ill effects large amounts of sugar can have on health. Now, with cannabis legalized in New York State, there is another concern for what is inside of candies.

Along with the ability to smoke cannabis, the drug can be infused within baked goods, called edibles, like cookies, brownies, or even in gummy type candies. Similar to alcohol, these are not available to anyone under 21-years-old, but teenagers still find opportunities to get them.

"I have been reading about children getting sick where edibles have been legal for a while, but I haven't seen it until recently at Hamlin Park. So it's coming," East Aurora Police Chief Shane Krieger said.

He is referring to an incident that happened around the end of the summer where several teenagers reported to be eating gummies infused with cannabis that they had obtained through a friend. One child became sick from consumption, vomiting and requiring an ambulance to the scene.

Sally Yageric, who is the Director of Community Programs for Erie County Council for the Prevention of Alcohol & Substance Abuse, said that ever since New York state decided to legalize marijuana her job has been more complicated. For the last several years in this role, she has been working with school districts and communities to prevent students from using substances. Now that marijuana has been legalized, their efforts have turned towards educating students about cannabis use, especially when it comes to edibles. Edibles can be commercially made or homemade, with the homemade items containing unknown quantities of the drug inside.

"They look benign," Yageric said. "They look like they aren't going to hurt you because they are 'kids' things. But they are every bit as dangerous as eating poison. You just don't know. Sometimes they are made by a reliable manufacturer. Sometimes they are made in somebody's kitchen."

Yageric said that cannabis reacts in the body differently when it is ingested than when it is smoked. When smoking the substance, the effects are felt almost immediately. With edibles, it can take 60 to 90 minutes for the effects to begin. Minors and adults who don't realize

this might think that the substance is not working, so they eat more, and then they can get sick or have unwanted side effects.

"What kids will do is eat another one because they don't feel the effects and they actually overdose on them because they consumed too many and by the time they feel the effects of them, it's too late," she said. "You already have it in your body and they end up in the hospital."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that "while a fatal overdose caused solely by marijuana is unlikely, marijuana is not harmless. The signs of using too much marijuana are similar to the typical effects of using marijuana but more severe." Some of the side effects from overconsumption could include confusion, anxiety, paranoia, panic, fast heart rate, delusions or hallucinations, increased blood pressure and severe nausea or vomiting.

The CDC states that the side effects could then lead to "unintentional injury, such as a motor vehicle crash, fall, or poisoning."

Yageric said that addiction to edibles happens at a faster rate than smoking marijuana because edibles contain more THC.

"Because of the higher concentration of THC, addiction occurs much quicker," she said.

Within the CDC Marijuana FAQs website under addiction, it states that addiction is possible and that "3 in 10 people who use marijuana may have some form of marijuana use disorder, meaning they are unable to stop using marijuana even though it is causing health and social problems in their lives. For people who begin using marijuana before the age of 18 and who use marijuana often (daily/near-daily), the risk of developing marijuana use disorder is even greater."

"In addition, the concentration or strength of [THC] in marijuana products is increasing, and daily or near-daily use of marijuana is increasing, both of which could make addiction and other health consequences more likely."

Krieger said he wishes that society was not so casual when it comes to the dangers of marijuana. He said when adults are speaking about the product to minors, they need to do a better job of separating out medical marijuana from recreational marijuana.

"It's not medicine. It can be used for medicinal purposes but it is not aspirin,"

he said. "If we tell children that there is nothing to worry about with marijuana products, we are going to have more issues with it."

The timing of legalization has been tricky for other community organizations because it is happening during the pandemic when they have to be more creative with outreach and events.

Alli Pelletreau, ITAC's program director, (It Takes A Community Drug & Alcohol Prevention Coalition) said that they held four different sessions on Zoom to discuss edibles and marijuana legalization with area students. The youth involved shared with the group that marijuana edibles are easily marketed to young people on social media. They know that they can have an impact on physical health, but they are attractive because they are easy to disguise from adults.

"They are easy to hide, they are odor-free, it's easy for youth to convince themselves that they are safe," Pelletreau said.

Pelletreau says ITAC has partnered with Iroquois to purchase pedal karts and "fatal vision" goggles, a line of training tools for simulating the effects of alcohol and drug intoxication without actually using these substances. Health teachers, the school resource officer and Erie County Sheriff's Department are writing a curriculum to incorporate this equipment, which will allow students the opportunity to experience how alcohol and marijuana use can impair driving.

Krieger said that this area has seen an increase in people driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

"We are one of the few areas where the DWI arrests are not going down. It's just a snowball effect that legalization will create more issues," he said, adding that it can be harder to detect when people have consumed an edible because you cannot smell it the same way that you can detect marijuana smoke.

Pelletreau said ITAC is seeking input from parents for future education campaigns to get important information directly to families. Data from parents will guide the organization in directing their efforts to make local communities healthy and safe. Any parent willing to participate, or for more information about ITAC, visit www.itacemw.com. For more information about the Erie County Council for the Prevention of Alcohol & Substance Abuse, visit www.211wny.org.

State Health Commissioner Resigns

by Natalie Spink
Warsaw's County
Courier Editor

Howard Zucker has resigned as the commissioner of health for New York State.

Zucker resigned Thursday, Sept. 23 in a letter to Gov. Kathy Hochul. A replacement has not been named and he will stay on until Hochul does so to help with the transition.

Writing that it has been a true privilege to serve the state's residents, Zucker did not give his reasoning for resigning.

"There comes a time when the baton should be passed in this marathon journey that

we call public service in New York State," Zucker wrote to Hochul. "With a fierce dedication to the public's health, I have carried it through many a crisis in the last seven years and five months and placed the welfare of our residents at the forefront of all things, professional and personal."

Earlier this year, Zucker and former Gov. Andrew Cuomo came under fire after it was found that the state underrepresented the number of COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes throughout the state. Cuomo maintained that the Department of Health "always fully and

publicly reported all COVID deaths in nursing homes and hospitals."

A Jan. 28 report by New York Attorney General Letitia James stated that nursing home deaths may have been underreported by the Department of Health by as much as 50 percent. After assuming office, Hochul added thousands to the COVID-19 death toll that had not been part of the counting completed by the Cuomo administration.

In addition to COVID-19, Zucker also served as health commissioner during the Ebola, Legionella, Zika Virus and measles outbreaks. His

letter did not indicate what he would do after this post ended.

"I very much thank the people of New York State for letting me serve them in this capacity for many years, and undoubtedly during the greatest public health crisis in over a century... Therefore, I look forward to pursuing new opportunities that explore the hurdles and unknowns in medicine, policy and public health and voyage into my own imagination to work to overcoming them," Zucker wrote.



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