

Monday, June 5, 2017

Grand Island Begins Looking at the Possibility of a Community Center

By Alex Haight - Saturday, June 3, 2017 at 02:35 PM EDT

GRAND ISLAND, N.Y. -- Grand Island officials are taking a hard look at how the town will look long term.

Town Supervisor Nate McMurray secured funding from Empire State Development and an Erie County Community Block Grant earlier this year to put together a Master Plan.

"There's no other issue I hear about more often than the fact that people are afraid of over-development," McMurray said. "They don't want Grand Island to be a combination of Olive Gardens and Home Depots, and those things are fine, they're good places, but we want to keep the unique character of Grand Island and we also want to keep the green nature of Grand Island."

Following an RFP process, architecture firm Clark Patterson Lee was hired to develop the Master Plan. The firm recently agreed to also do a feasibility study for a community center, something that McMurray says the town has a lot of interest in, and could be a central figure in the town's future.

"We need to go through the process of evaluating what most of us want, so that we can put the project on a referendum, and make sure we have full buy-in," McMurray said. "Without full buy-in, we'll either make something we don't want or we'll make nothing. It won't go forward."

Clark Patterson Lee Senior Associate, and Village of Williamsville Mayor, Brian Kulpa is spearheading the project. He says monthly meetings with a steering committee started in February to help gauge Grand Island's needs.

Over the next few months, he says there will also be community outreach, public forums, surveys and social media work asking several questions.

"What do you want out of a community center? What should it be located near? What type of facilities complement it? Are people driving to it? Are they walking to it? All of those questions have to be blended in," Kulpa said.

Kulpa points to West Seneca's upcoming community center as a model for what Grand Island's could be.

The new facility will have a coffee shop and cafe, gym, offices, chamber of commerce, business incubator, classroom space and a library.

"That's what West Seneca needed, and that was a lot less in terms of recreation and more in terms of business incubation and maker's space. So, it remains to be seen what Grand Island wants out of its town center, but it will be fun to explore that."

The full Grand Island Master Plan will be complete by next February.

At the earliest, McMurray says a referendum could be on the ballot for the Community Center this November.