

BFLD NEWS
10/19/93

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METROPOLITAN NEWS

Tonawanda OKs permit for use of old refinery

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The charred smokestacks of the old Ashland Oil Refinery on River Road, fixtures on the Town of Tonawanda's waterfront for years, could come down within two years.

The improvement is one of several conditions for a use permit the Town Board approved Monday for United Refinery, Inc., which now owns the property.

"This is a major breakthrough for our waterfront," said Supervisor Carl Calabrese. He said developers considered the unsightly stacks the Tonawanda waterfront's biggest problem.

United Refinery, which is based in Warren, Pa., will use the old Ashland property to store and distribute petroleum products. No refining or processing of crude oil will be permitted at the site, said Councilman Ronald Moline.

"This puts the property back on the

tax rolls and it is still compatible with the waterfront master plan," Calabrese said.

The plan for United Refinery to pipe oil from Warren to a site in West Seneca and then on to Tonawanda has been on the table for two years.

At first Calabrese, who was then a councilman, objected to the pipeline. But now he says all of the town's environmental concerns have been satisfied. Calabrese said that once the town realized it could not stop the pipeline, which is under the purview of the state, the town tried to get a favorable use permit. Getting rid of the stacks was a major part of that, he said.

The company is near completion of a state environmental quality review necessary to get state permits required for operation, Calabrese said.

The town permit also requires the company to implement an extensive landscaping plan. The Town Board left the door open for any future alterations

to River Road, should traffic require it. The company has said that if needed, it would consider another access road to the site.

Moline said the new business will mean about 50 new jobs in the town. The tax impact has not yet been assessed.

In other business, the board approved a resolution that would help secure federal funding for a new road connecting Grand Island Boulevard and Two Mile Creek Road.

The two-way, four-lane road would cost \$6 million, according to town engineering department estimates. The town will ask the Erie County Environment and Planning Department to take the project to the Niagara Frontier Transportation Committee, which handles the federal funds.

"This just gets us in the pipeline for consideration," Calabrese said. The town would pay about 20 percent of the costs. If the project were to make the list of NFTA projects in 1994, the

funding would not be available until 1998.

Tonawanda will also join Amherst and Cheektowaga in a request for federal funds to hire new police officers. Calabrese said the town was requesting funds to fill one vacant patrol position and two upcoming retirements.

The grant program, which pays half the salary and fringe benefits for new officers, is part of President Clinton's pledge to put 50,000 new police officers on the streets. However, Calabrese said he was not sure that enough money had been appropriated to fulfill the president's pledge.

"We're not going to hire based on promises from the state or federal government," Moline added. "We hire based on our needs and available resources."

The board also set a preliminary budget hearing for Nov. 4 at 8 p.m. in the Senior Citizens Center on Ensminger Road.