

Letter to the Editor

RE: Country Executive Ryan McMahon's 2020 proposals

12.5.19

To the Editor:

County Executive Ryan McMahon recently outlined a list of proposed ideas for 2020. Among the concepts proposed is the feasibility of a regional sports complex. Indeed, Ryan and I are on the same page! Our Willis Carrier Park recreation facility in DeWitt is exactly the project he is proposing and we welcome his partnership so we can better serve the families of DeWitt, the county, and Central New York.

We met with Ryan and his staff this past June regarding the steady progress of the Carrier Park project and to offer to work closely with the county going forward. We welcome their involvement and participation; DeWitt's \$17 million dollar annual budget represents a little over 1% of the county's \$1.34 billion dollar annual budget, so the opportunity for consolidation - of data, manpower, resources, and facilities - is ideal; exactly the kind of consolidation and economic development partnership the Consensus Commission, co-chaired by former Congressman Jim Walsh, advocated for Onondaga County.

DeWitt's Carrier Park, adjacent to the Carrier Corporation campus, is an award-winning \$12.5 million state-of-the-art, all inclusive, multi-sport facility for children and adults, including those with special needs; Carrier Park is a fully integrated, fully accessible outdoor sports complex. A sports marketing professional recently characterized Carrier Park as "a world-class facility."

Though the facility is located in the Town of DeWitt, Carrier Park is also home of the Syracuse Challenger Baseball program. Challenger Executive Director Dom Cambareri and I grew up together in East Syracuse; we came together almost 10 years ago to build Carrier Park. A partnership with Onondaga County now would not only support economic development and quality of life throughout the region, but also the children and families of the Challenger program.

The completed design includes up to 9 championship tournament quality fields, including 2 dynamically designed super turf fields which can be utilized for baseball, softball, lacrosse, soccer, football, field hockey and other special events. A completely ADA compliant rehabilitation of the pavilion – a meeting and entertainment space – installation of turf playing fields, and a walking trail are also planned.

Spring 2020 we will rechristen Carrier Park upon completion of a brand new all-inclusive children's playground and three new basketball courts. The basketball courts, partially funded by the Jim & Juli Boeheim Foundation, will be lighted and feature fully adjustable backboards and rims so children and adults in wheelchairs can also play.

The playground, the only one of its kind in CNY, is specially designed for children of all ages and abilities, including those with special needs. In addition to special apparatus the playground features a soft, ground-level membrane safe for all to tumble on, but firm enough for wheelchairs, too.

There are a variety of ways we can partner with Onondaga County. To date, we proposed a hotel tax. Onondaga County collects \$6 to \$7 million dollars a year in room occupancy taxes from the whole of the county; the Town of DeWitt contributes \$3 to \$3.5 million of the total. That means the Town of DeWitt pays half of the total room occupancy taxes for the entire county! We have proposed a 2.75% town room occupancy tax to the NYS legislature; DeWitt would be among several towns in NYS with a hotel tax.

There's no question Central New York needs robust economic development projects that strengthen our economy. Carrier Park is just such a project. Recreational tourism can play a critical role in building a prosperous future for Onondaga County and the greater CNY region. DeWitt's 30+ hotels are integral to that vision. In DeWitt, hotels are our largest single industry, representing over \$100 million in property value assessments.

DeWitt's Willis Carrier Park is a regional project with regional benefits. Just 14 events per year are capable of generating over \$5 million dollars in economic activity for DeWitt, Onondaga County, and the CNY region. Nearly \$2 million dollars of that would be incremental hotel revenue. Carrier Park can be an economic driver while also enhancing our quality of life and supporting the children and families of the Syracuse Challenger Baseball program.

Though our political affiliations differ, over the years I have pro-actively sought to work with the County Executive to support our struggling CNY economy – Green Infrastructure, Carrier Park, and an Onondaga Lake Science Center with a freshwater aquarium at the Inner Harbor are among the projects I have proposed – in fact, former County Executive Joanie Mahoney was featured on the cover of our Fall 2019 town newsletter as a valued partner in the Carrier Park project; she and I had previous discussions about partnering with the county on Carrier Park.

I look forward to working with Ryan on the sports complex concept, sharing data and resources – consolidating our efforts – in service to the constituents of the town, county, and CNY.

Edward M. Michalenko, Ph.D, Supervisor, Town of DeWitt

For more information about Willis Carrier Park, go to: <http://carrierpark.org/>