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## **City of Olean's North Union Street wins a \$6.5 million federal transportation grant**

OLEAN - Olean Mayor Linda Witte said Friday she will push all or most of a \$6.5 million federal transportation grant toward water, sewer, lighting and pedestrian-safety upgrades for North Union Street.

She received word Thursday of the grant award and said next week she will begin planning a series of community meetings to ask the public's help to come up with a final design for the project.

"I am absolutely energized that our small city was able to compete at this level and continue the work of modernizing and improving our services," said Mayor Witte Friday. "I'd like to thank the Olean Common Council members for their unanimous approval last May of the application. We were surprised at the news because we have all been focused on the summer's reconstruction of East State Street that is just finished and it's good to know the new grant funding will keep up the momentum into 2014."

The Common Council decided to apply for the grant following a series of "Complete Streets" meetings in which North Union Street stakeholders brainstormed a variety of project options that might attract business development and pedestrians, improve the downtown image and provide a facelift for the Route 16 gateway. The project is mentioned in the Olean Five Year Capital Improvement Plan. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Charles Schumer both supported the application.

The result was a winning application for a share in the \$474 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, or TIGER Discretionary Grant program. Olean was one of only three communities in New

York State and one of 52 proposals in 37 different states that met USDOT criteria for potential to make the community more livable and sustainable, while generating a significant regional or national impact.

“I know there is a wide range of opinion – and some of them are strong opinions -- in how North Union’s very wide pavement should be presented, but everyone should stop and share the pride that we were selected for this chance to determine our own destiny. We began the conversation and now we need to be realistic. I encourage everyone to begin thinking about how we want our commercial district to look in the next generation because this will allow us to modernize the infrastructure to support new commerce and residents,” said Mayor Witte.

Among the possibilities on the table she listed the aging sewer and water lines that were located long ago beneath North Union Street, and noted a portion of the city sewer plant’s discharge violations could be repaired using the TIGER grant. Also long overdue for replacement are the rusted bases of long boulevard’s street lights, so unstable that it is no longer safe to hang holiday season garland and lighting from them.

“This is an opportunity for everyone to sit down together and really begin planning. Other TIGER grant recipients are creating streetcar lines, extending their trails, connecting intermodal facilities and adding rail freight service. We have a trail that could use a new connector loop. Should we look toward the upcoming generation’s car-free outlook? Will we decide whether we will remove our parking meters to attract shoppers, add bicycle lanes, narrow the traffic lanes?” said Mayor Witte.

The city’s 14 percent share of the grant equals \$1.2 million, which includes budgeted municipal funds and in-kind services, in addition to the \$600,000 (7 percent) leveraged from the Governor’s recent award for downtown development surrounding the former Manufacturer’s Hanover Trust building. Other agencies will contribute 5 percent (\$400,000) and private interests will ante up \$100,000 (1 percent). Altogether more than \$8 million will be devoted to North Union Street.

Mayor Witte said there is much work to be done at the start of the funding process. The community must finalize the design, based on public input, and the city will follow up with engineering work and public bids that should be well underway by the end of summer 2014. The Common Council must approve the final project. Construction is not likely to begin until late 2014 or early 2015.

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