

Solon T I M E S

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Expansion of transit line will benefit Solon riders

By SUE REID

Workers are getting closer to jobs in the latest transportation change in Solon.

Beginning Sunday (March 20), those using public transit to get to Solon's central retail district along SOM Center Road will get

a much-needed reprieve.

The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority will expand the #41 route, which originates at the Windermere Rapid Transit Station in East Cleveland, to service Bainbridge and SOM Center roads, in the city's central retail district.

"The expansion of #41 will significantly reduce walking distances for those who use the RTA bus to get to our core shopping centers and surrounding small businesses," Angee Shaker, Solon's director of economic development, explained.

The improved bus routes and

expanded service will also help reduce 90-minute bus rides to work in some cases and assist those who walk to work.

"Solon is a big job hub for the region," Mrs. Shaker said, and SOM Center Road is considered the city's

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Purim fun



Photo by Michael Steinberg

Students at the Solon Chabad Hebrew School get in the spirit of the Jewish holiday Purim, which began last night and concludes at sundown tonight (March 17). The annual holiday, which consists of feasting, rejoicing, family and fun, commemorates Jews being saved from persecution in the ancient Persian empire. Here, students (from left) Graham Neate, 6, Nate Bancheck, 10, Ethan Hall, 6, all of Solon, and Benny Danzig, 10, of Twinsburg, work on building King Ahasuerus's "palace" from the Purim story.

City leaders against idea of 'urban archery' to cull deer

By SUE REID

The news is not so good for hunters in the City of Solon.

The community has been asked by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Division to consider an urban archery program – but some officials have given it a thumbs down.

Public Works Director William Drsek reported last week to City Council's Safety and Public Properties Committee that, as they have in past years, the ODNR wants Solon to engage in special conditions for hunting throughout the city.

Nearby communities who have similar urban archery programs include Chagrin Falls, Hunting Valley, Moreland Hills, Pepper

Pike, and Twinsburg, among others.

This would be separate from Solon's annual deer culling program, which they contract with the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Wildlife Services. Sharpshooters cull deer from about 25 public and private sites throughout the city.

As part of the discussion at safety, Solon Police Chief Richard A. Tonelli advised against the proposal.

"After discussion with the command staff of the police department, we are in agreement that the City of Solon should not go forward with this program," Chief Tonelli said. "We feel safety to be the most prevalent issue and not in the best

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Solon, Moreland Hills officers receive specialized training

By SUE REID

Area firefighters see the benefit of "sensory bags" in ambulances. They include dry erase boards and noise canceling headphones, among other supplies, all aimed at instilling a sense of calm in patients with autism.

Responding police officers have learned to use caution so as not to cause sensory overload from their sirens and lights, known to cause further anxiety or increase a negative reaction from a child or adult with autism.

These are among the many ways that area first responders are adapting to individuals with special needs on their varieties of calls for service.

Personnel from both Solon police and fire and Moreland Hills Police Department received training

recently on the topic through the Autism Awareness Training Acceptance Programs. The organization teamed up with Heroes Helping Those With Special Needs, which provided the sensory bags.

Police and firefighters heard testimonials from parents of individuals with special needs, who shared real-life scenarios and issues they can expect when on a call.

Solon served as host for the first time of a training session.

"A lot of our training deals with how to recognize and then how to help treat those individuals," Lt. Brian DiRocco, of the Solon Fire Department, explained.

Firefighters may come across these individuals as a patient or they may be

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busiest thoroughfare, and home to two core shopping centers.

"It makes sense for the route to extend a little farther to serve more of our central retail district area," Mrs. Shaker said.

The modification of the #41 routes the bus closer to the retail center of Solon, thus providing RTA passengers boarding and alighting locations closer to those jobs, Maribeth Feke, Director of Programming and Planning for the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Agency, added.

Last year, the RTA added four additional bus shelters in the city's industrial area, and up until then, there was only one in the entire community.

Ms. Feke said the modification of the #41, along with the additional shelters, "provides employees with more shelter and thus a more pleasant waiting environment before their trip."

"It also revises bus stops locations on the #41 with more options near the retail area without sacrificing bus connections with other routes in the RTA network," she said.

This change also helps address labor shortage issues and improves workforce mobility, Mrs. Shaker noted.

"The expanded route will now reach SOM Center Road and provide better access to jobs within the central retail district," she said. "It's all about connecting workers to jobs. This is what makes our community thrive and grow."

In addition to the extension, the bus stops on Station Street at Melbury Avenue and the stop on Melbury Avenue at Aurora Road will no longer be served.

Instead, new stops will be available on Solon Road east of Station Street; on Bainbridge Road at SOM Center Road.; on SOM Center Road north of Station Street; on SOM Center Road north of Aurora Road and on Aurora Road just east Melbury Avenue.

Benefiting from this change are people who do not have a car or who prefer to use public transit as well as the many businesses in Solon that have jobs to fill, Mrs. Shaker said.

"This is about helping our businesses retain and attract good workers and to make using public transit easier and more comfortable for riders," she said.

This move stemmed from the work of the Solon Mobility Task Force, a group established in early 2020 aimed at identifying gaps in service. The group is comprised of representatives of major companies in Solon, including Swagelok, Nestle and Cleveland Clinic, among others, as well as the Solon Chamber of Commerce, the RTA and other agencies.

"Its goal was to assist with transportation issues relating to workforce development and recruitment to the City of Solon employers," Ms. Feke, who is a member, explained.

The task force reviewed statistics and research documents, among other tasks, and made the recommendations for the extension and the new shelters.

Ms. Feke said RTA reviews its routes regularly and implements four service changes per year. In June of 2021 RTA implemented its largest service change in decades, NEXT GEN RTA. That revision of service substantially changed RTA's bus network focusing on increasing mobility to job centers, educational institutions and medical facilities, she said.

Mrs. Shaker noted that altering bus schedules and expanding bus routes have ripple effect and not something RTA takes lightly.

"It takes a lot of exploration and analysis," she said.

"The entire program of improvements demonstrates the successful partnership of transit and a local community in meeting the public transportation needs of the community," Ms. Feke added.

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interest of the city."

The committee members concurred with the police chief.

"Even though I know people who hunt, and areas that do it, they are not as densely populated like Solon," Councilman William I. Russo said. "This is not something I would personally feel comfortable with. I know they have asked continuously."

"I stand behind the chief's recommendation," Councilman Robert N. Pelunis added. "He's the expert on safety on this."

Mr. Russo said that the sharpshooting through the USDA has gone "exceptionally well."

"We have had no issues," he said. "We should not invite opportunities for things to go wrong."

"We don't want any dangers to residents," Mr. Pelunis added.

Geoffrey Westerfield, assistant wildlife management supervisor with the ODNR's Division of Wildlife who made the proposal but was not in attendance at the meeting, cited its benefits for communities.

"It allows residents the ability to manage deer on their own properties to the level they desire," Mr. Westerfield said.

Secondly, it can be done at essentially no cost to the city and also in the case of Solon, it can help reduce the overall cost of the deer culling program by allowing hunters to remove deer that would have otherwise had to be removed by sharpshooters.

Last year's, Solon paid about \$59,000 to cull deer.

Citing another benefit, Mr. Westerfield said that an urban archery program provides a larger window of deer management.

Hunting season runs from the last Saturday in September to the first Sunday in February.

Mr. Westerfield also said the program can be done safely in a community like Solon.

That is because, as part of the process, a hunter would fill out an application to hunt in the city. The hunter lists on the application the properties they have gotten written permission to hunt and submits a map of those properties, Mr. Westerfield explained.

"The city assesses on a case-by-case basis if hunting on the properties in the application can be done safely," he said. "In the end, if hunting can be done safely as described in the application, then it is permitted."

"If not, no permit is issued," Mr. Westerfield

said. "It is premature to say it cannot be done safely when no applications have been allowed to be submitted and evaluated."

Statewide, Mr. Westerfield said about 80 communities have an urban archery program, with at least 35 of them having higher human population densities than Solon.

He views as compatible to Solon the areas of North Royalton and Mentor, who have comparable land uses to Solon and that have successful urban archery programs. Both have higher human densities than Solon.

In surveys the ODNR have conducted through the past few decades, there have been no citizens or vehicle's shot, although there have been a couple cats and dogs and houses shot.

"Urban archery hunting is very safe at .02 incidents per year," he said. "In other words, the likelihood of a safety issue (pet or house shot) is once every 50 years."

He reiterated that Solon still retains the ability to revoke permits and hunters as part of this proposal and the police retain the option to deny any hunter they feel is unsafe and further to revoke a permit at any time if a safety issue with a hunter should arise.

"If major safety issues arose from urban archery programs, we would see cities abandoning urban archery," Mr. Westerfield said. "In contrast, we continue to see more cities adopt urban archery programs."

It costs on average about \$722 annually to run a program, based on a survey conducted a few years ago with all the urban archery programs in Ohio. That cost is whatever administrative costs are needed to facilitate the program. Mr. Westerfield recommended to Solon a \$25 application fee to the hunter to cover those costs.

Mr. Westerfield also said that this type of program complements the deer culling already in place in the city.

"Culling is a targeted removal of deer done within as short of a timeframe as possible with the primary intent of population reduction typically using firearms and the use of highly trained shooters," Mr. Westerfield explained. Urban archery hunting is used as a localized management or maintenance tool to keep a local deer population at a desired level for that property owner done over a longer period of time, he said.

"When you have to reduce populations fast you use culling/sharpshooting," Mr. Westerfield continued. "When you want to maintain a deer population, you use hunting."

"They complement each other ,and each has its role in deer management," he said.

Solon is considered in the maintenance phase of its deer population. Last year, they aimed for 100 tags and the year prior, had a permit to remove 75 deer. The city averages

about 245 deer over the past few years. That is compared to the 600 that were taken when the city began its first phase of culling in 2005.

"It is evident that Solon's deer population is at a maintenance level and has been for several years," Mr. Westerfield said. That is why he made the suggestion that Solon incorporate hunting as a primary management tool and in areas of the city where hunting isn't being effective, they utilize culling to address the deer in that localized part.

Mr. Westerfield used as an example the City of Mentor with this type of balance.

"They allow hunting to occur by application permit where they feel it can be done safely and let the hunters remove deer at virtually zero cost to the city, and then in areas where they don't have hunters and feel the deer population needs reduced, they utilize culling."

While culling initially accounted for the majority of deer removed when Mentor first started deer management in 2012, the hunters now account for about 50 percent of the deer removed annually.

"Because hunting can be utilized more efficiently than culling over a longer period of time, it allows for flexibility in management due to deer movements which can be dictated by time of the year, weather, food availability both natural and artificial and deer movement impacts due to management efforts."

Mr. Drsek told the committee he would bring their comments back to the ODNR.

Mr. Westerfield said it is unfortunate the city did not request him to attend the meeting. He said the process he has outlined for Solon allows for many checks and balances.

Mr. Westerfield also noted that no hunter wants to put him or her self in an unsafe situation whether that be harm to themselves or others.

"There really is no reason to not allow a hunter to apply for the ability to hunt," he said. "If every application is deemed 'unsafe' then there is nothing lost."

"However, I'm fully confident that the majority of applications received would be deemed 'safe to hunt.'"

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a bystander, Lt. DiRocco continued, and many may be non-verbal.

"It's important that officers understand the characteristics displayed by individuals with autism," Police Chief Richard A. Tonelli continued.

Moreland Hills patrolman Scott Bennett, who represented his department at the program, agreed. It is vital to be educated in this area, he said, adding that those with autism represent such a broad range of individuals and issues.

"It is important to be aware of the different types of individuals in the community, what their needs are, and the way they function," Mr. Bennett said.

"It's so broad," Mr. Bennett continued. "When talking to the parents you realize there are certain levels and different personalities. They tell the real story [of their children].

"That's the biggest thing I took away from the program," he added. "It's not a one-size-fits-all."

For example, when a person displays unusual behavior in a setting where they do not know, these behaviors may be interpreted by others as suspicious, threatening, criminal in nature, or as someone high on drugs or other substances, Chief Tonelli explained.

"When citizens witness an individual displaying escalated behavior in the community, at school, or at home, they will call the police," he said.

That is why it is important for officers responding to these types of calls to be aware that an individual with autism may exhibit multiple

reactions, Chief Tonelli added.

They also may be sensitive to sights and sounds, Lt. DiRocco said.

In addition to dry erase boards, sensory bags include sunglasses and small fidget devices to help create a sense of calm and to be able to better communicate, Lt. DiRocco added.

"The bag gives us a head start and some items that will help us address any situation," he said.

They will be utilized in each of the department's ambulances, as well as in the Moreland Hills patrol vehicles.

Mr. Bennett said the lessons are especially important as Moreland Hills police regularly patrol the two elementary schools in their village – Moreland Hills Elementary School and Brady Middle School – both in the Orange School District.

These lessons are also especially important since "time is very relevant for us" when on a call, Lt. DiRocco continued.

"It might takes us a minute to realize they have different needs than our normal patients," he said, "and we need to be able to adjust and learn that."

"With autism, every patient is different," Lt. DiRocco said of lessons learned in training. They are taught what to expect or what they may see to trigger officers that something is different than what they are used to.

Chief Tonelli said officers are trained in knowing that, when they attempt to stop certain behaviors of individuals with autism who may have a negative reaction to lights or sirens or increased anxiety, it may result in the person's

escalated self-protective actions such as a "fight or flight" response.

"While interviewing someone with autism, they may have difficulty processing your questions," Chief Tonelli said. They may be unable to give a name, address, phone number, or to present identification when asked, he said.

"Officers need to expect that interviewing a person with autism may take a long time," Chief Tonelli added. "The person may have the information requested but they may have difficulty understanding questions."

Officers said the training was extremely advantageous.

"We treat and respond to all types of people, and anytime we can learn something that can help us with the different areas," Lt. DiRocco said. "It's very helpful."

"I thought it was awesome," Mr. Bennett added of the program. "I've taken several, and this was the best by far."