

Stabilizing county's parks – and finances

If someone gave you enough money to build a wall in your backyard, would you also apply for a credit card to pay for the same project?

No, of course not. You know it is foolish to have extra credit cards that negatively impact your personal credit rating, making it harder and more expensive to borrow money when you actually need it. Government is no different.

Then why do Monroe County Republicans want to authorize debt for a project that is being fully funded by New York state?

Their answer: "Because that's the way we've always done it."

The practice of requesting bond authorizations for the full amount of every capital project — regardless of how much it costs and how much is funded by other sources — is standard operating procedure in Monroe County. Not coincidentally, so is a declining bond rating.

Monroe County's bond rating was recently downgraded to the lowest in New York state. This is a barometer of our fiscal health, and it continues to head in the wrong direction. It is important because it di-

VINCENT ESPOSITO AND PAUL HANEY

Democrat Vincent Esposito represents Monroe County's 16th Legislative District, which includes the northern part of Irondequoit. Democrat Paul Haney represents District 23, which covers parts of Rochester and Brighton. He is also the ranking Democratic member of the County Legislature's Ways and Means Committee.

rectly affects the cost of borrowing money, just like your personal credit rating affects your interest rate when you take out a mortgage. In short, Monroe County taxpayers are paying more because of poor financial decisions like routinely authorizing unnecessary borrowing.

In June, the County Legislature unanimously approved a project to stabilize Irondequoit Creek in Ellison Park and Powder Mills Park, where erosion has washed away the creek banks for years. In the same bipartisan vote, we accepted a \$250,500 grant from the state Department of Environmental Conservation to pay for 100 percent of the project.

Rather than approve costly, unnecessary borrowing, Democrats

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proposed a simple amendment to the county's operating budget. This is how capital projects are financed in almost every county, including Erie, Onondaga, Westchester, Suffolk and even the city of Rochester. In fact, this is how it was done in Monroe County a few years ago, when the turf at Frontier Field was replaced and funded 50-50 by the state and the Red Wings.

Still, Republicans insist a bond authorization is the only way to do the project. A few weeks ago, you may have seen the county executive and members of the current Republican majority at a news conference,

claiming they were forced to fence off portions of our parks because Democrats refused to support borrowing. You may have even received an unidentified, misleading, automated phone call accusing Democrats of harming the environment.

That Republicans would kill this project and resort to concocting a public safety crisis in a transparent attempt to scare park users and shame fellow lawmakers is deplorable. It is time for leaders to rise above the partisan posturing that poisons our public policy debates. And it is time to break away from the old borrow-and-spend habits that have ruined our county's finances.

Doing business the way we have always done it is not good enough for taxpayers. And it is inexplicable when a more responsible alternative exists.

This is a fully funded public works project with terrific benefits. It should be completed as soon as possible. All that needs to be done is a simple budget amendment.

We can and should fix the shores of Irondequoit Creek — in a financially responsible manner.