

Milton H'way Superintendent FOIL's the Town Supervisor

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By CHARLES HOGAN

An oversight by Town of Milton Engineer Gary Robertson has caused a stir in the Town of Milton. Before matters were hashed out at a sometimes contentious Town Board meeting on Monday night, Milton witnessed the unusual sight of one elected official using the Freedom of Information Act to obtain documents from another elected official.

Milton Highway Superintendent David Forbes used the FOIL process to obtain information on a federal/state grant for building sidewalks from the office of Town Supervisor Frank Thompson and Town Engineer Gary Robertson. "Why did I need to FOIL that," he asked the Town Board.

Forbes said that he did not learn exactly how much matching money his department was obligated to find, in order for the Town to obtain a grant for building sidewalks, until he got the information through the FOIL process last week.

It appears that the amount of money that Milton needs to contribute to the project increased, without Forbes knowing about it. When the grant was first announced, in 2004,

Milton was to contribute \$300,000 towards a \$1.7 million project that would see sidewalks connecting the Town Center to the city line of Saratoga Springs, along Geyser Rd. When the grant was finalized, in March of last year, the state changed the terms of the federal grant. They would now give only \$1 million, and the Town would be obligated to come up with \$700,000.

When the state grant announcement came into Supervisor Thompson's office, the packet of information was forwarded to Town Engineer Robertson, who failed to notice the change in the terms of the grant.

Town Councilman Joseph Miranda, upon learning about the mistake at Monday's Board meeting, said "I am not going to pass the buck...but I don't think that it is up to the Town Board to follow through on grant proposals."

Robinson admitted that he did not realize that the terms of the grant had been changed until he was discussing the details of the contracts with members of DOT. "It took quite some time to realize we were not getting \$1.4 million," he said. He said that Milton was

near the bottom of the list of towns to get grants, and there was only \$1 million left of the federal block grant. The state decided to change the terms of the grant, rather than returning the \$1 million to the federal treasury.

Forbes said that Robinson asked him to go out and start buying street lights for the project two weeks ago, and also revealed the new terms of the project and that Forbes' department would be asked to find the extra money in its budget.

That conversation raised Forbes concern. "I can't spend, responsibly, tax payers' money when we don't have a plan," he said in an interview on Tuesday. "We don't even have the engineering work done," he added. Forbes said that "everything we use has tripled since 2004," saying that he doubted that the project could be completed for the \$1.7 million figure arrived at in 2004. "I wouldn't be surprised to see it cost \$2.4 million" said Forbes.