



## **2022 State of the City**

### **North Tonawanda**

*Mayor Austin J. Tylec*

*February 1, 2022*

## **2022 STATE OF THE CITY of NORTH TONAWANDA**

To the residents, Common Council, and others listening, it is an honor to report on the State of The City for 2022. I would first like to thank the citizens of North Tonawanda for putting your trust and confidence in me as your newly elected Mayor. During my term as your Alderman, I advocated for a more open and proactive government, focused on the needs of all residents and business owners. This and our daily services to residents would not be possible without our dedicated department heads, hundreds of city employees, the Common Council, and many more that make our City of North Tonawanda the greatest in Western New York.

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To start, we must recognize the momentous award we received for \$10m through the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) from Governor Kathy Hochul's Office and The Department of State. This economic development program will help us continue our downtown transformation, stimulate growth along our waterfront, and provide new opportunities on Tonawanda Island. Our downtown neighborhoods will thrive into vibrant centers that offer a high quality of life and become magnets for redevelopment, business, job creation, and economic and housing diversity. Selection of projects to fund will be determined by a local planning committee as well as through a series of robust and public engagement events we will be asking all to participate in. Once a list of projects has been refined and identified, NYS will select which opportunity or public and private development projects they want to fund.

North Tonawanda was awarded \$2.5m through the Smart Growth Community Fund, which helped a variety of downtown projects. This includes enhancements to Gateway Harbor with downtown placemaking and walkability initiatives, green infrastructure upgrades, and improvements at the YWCA which will open this spring.

In 2021 we saw new businesses such as Frankie Primos, Barr(tend) on the Water, Wickedly Handcrafted, Fattey Beer Co., Little Black House Coffee, Irusu Noodles & Sushi, Aunt Eno's, and more. Many will also be able to experience El Gringo Mexican Cantina, Lumber & Silo at 211

Main Street, Taco Bell, Kentucky Fried Chicken, a new office and storage facility for Huron Sprinklers, and an expansion of our Historic Riviera Theater to include a bar area and restrooms.

We cannot forget about Tonawanda Island, and how we were recently awarded \$92k for an Infrastructure Study through the NYS Department of State Brownfield Program. This will allow us to understand what we need for our Island to thrive with growth. A project already on the horizon is Timbershore at 78 Bridge Street, which will be a 70-unit affordable housing complex built on the former fire training site, approximately \$20m in construction and a catalyst for future development.

Public projects forecasted in our downtown area include lighting of the CSX Train Bridge through Reimagine the Canals and NYPA, rehabilitation of our Manhattan St rain gardens, an extensive mural along Project Pride Way, and additional art installations throughout the area.

The Erie Canal Recreation Hub pilot program will also help implement a variety of recreational amenities along the Erie Canal such as Wi-Fi, phone charging stations, technology enhancements to the Visitors Center and a mobile walking tour application. Under the direction of our Community Development/LCDC Director, **Laura Wilson**, we are pleased with the continuous growth, and we are excited about the new development coming into our city.

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In North Tonawanda, we pride ourselves with having a safe community thanks to our Police Department under the leadership of **Chief Tom Krantz**. In 2021 the North Tonawanda Police Department handled over 48,000 calls for service which resulted in 477 arrests. With the recently passed State policies related to Police Reform, our department has initiated more ways to keep our law enforcement and residents safe. This includes internal programs for de-escalation training, crisis services, less lethal training, and other law enforcement related topics. The city continued to work with our school district to add a School Resource Officer (SRO) at the Intermediate School in addition to the SRO already assigned to the High School/Middle School complex. Our department also maintained community outreach with programs such as Child Safety Seat Checks, Coffee with a Cop, the 9pm Routine, National Night Out, and engaging the

public through social media. I'm confident our law enforcement will continue to keep our community one of the "safest" cities in New York State.

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In our Wastewater Treatment plant, we have the capital improvement plan with nine new vacuum chlorine systems, the SCADA system to analyze data, updates to our electrical equipment, LED lighting throughout the plant, new storm and primary sludge pumps, a new grit removal system, and much more to ensure our residents water stays safe and clean. Future projects include a primary digester replacement and co-generator to assist with our sludge treatment and reduce operational costs.

For Water & Distribution, we are near completion of a new backup generator which will give the plant the ability to run continuously off electric for 100 hours in an emergency. In addition, we are working on a capital improvement plan to address new high service pumps and new pump drives. While these improvements and many more continue to occur, our Water & Wastewater department continues to address repairs and updates to our aging infrastructure to keep our water one of the cleanest in WNY. Many thanks to **Jason Koepsell** and his entire department for all they do and especially during the subzero temperatures.

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With our recent State of Emergency and Travel Ban due to severe weather, it is important to recognize our Department of Public Works which continues to help us keep our city safe and maintained. In 2021, maintenance included the repaving of 21.30 lane miles, removal of 162 city trees, the collection of 18,000 tons of waste and recyclables, along with assisting other departments with over 1,500 hours of labor. In 2021, the Department of Public Works administered and was reimbursed for a \$100k grant through DASNY for the purchase of a MiniPaver. Through the office of former Assemblyman Robin Schimminger, DASNY also assisted with obtaining a \$150k grant for the purchase of a Brush Chipper and a Sewer Inspection Camera which should be delivered this year. Over the years, this department has always found ways to do more with less, operating with seven less employees than they had five years ago, but continuing to

maintain the entire city for our residents. Our office and the members of our community are thankful for **Mark Zellner** and his employees for tirelessly working day in and day out.

*\*Amended February 2, 2022*

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With the Covid restrictions lifting, it was a busy and interesting year in the Parks & Recreation department. Overall, we saw a significant increase in usage of our parks and public spaces. People continued to find value in the great outdoors as recreational and alternative meeting spaces served as a haven against indoor gatherings during this ongoing pandemic. In 2021 we saw reservations increase for our ball fields, band shell, Botanical gazebo rentals and park shelter rentals more than doubling the amount for 2020. Residents also took advantage of boat launch permits with over 1,000 boats docked at Gateway Harbor during the 2021 season.

At Deerwood Golf Course we had 58,612 rounds of golf played, the highest since 2016, and the course had a gross revenue of \$1.3 million with a net of approximately \$502,000.

Our Parks Department also underwent many improvements at many locations. Gratwick Riverside Park added a new pavilion; Raymond Klimek Veteran's Park added 22 new parking spaces and new signage; we resurfaced the Taber Tennis Courts; and a new mural was painted near the Main Street bridge at Gateway Harbor, to name a few.

Parks also received an Urban Forestry Grant for \$50k from the DEC for removal of hazardous trees as well as new plantings. The Erie-Niagara Sunrise Exchange Club hosted the 9-11 Healing Field Ceremony at Gratwick Park that brought in visitors throughout New York State. New events were established through the Recreation department including Grub in the Gardens; concerts were back at Gateway Harbor, pool attendance was nearly 9,800 at Memorial Pool and the Adult, Senior & Youth programs are bursting with excitement from local citizens.

I can assure the families of North Tonawanda that we will continue to increase our recreational services and utilize every available revenue source to increase programs. My deepest gratitude to **Alex Domaradzki** and his entire staff for all their dedication and hard work.

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Our Engineering department has continued to work with the Empire State Development Grant and DASNY grant projects totaling \$1.4m. These improvements include bump outs at crosswalks for better walkability in the downtown corridor, expansion of the Charles Fleishman Park along with new signage and lighting.

The projects for 2022 include the Bike Path connection to the Empire State Trail, Pine Woods Park Pavilion and ADA Restroom improvements; Sweeney Bike Path Extension (Mayor's Park to Botanical Garden); City Hall LED Signage; and at the "Gem of our City", improvements at our City Market funded through former Assemblyman Schimminger and Senator Ortt. This includes repaving Market Street to improve drainage, installation of additional handicap accessible parking and pedestrian crossing improvements on Robinson Street. City Engineer, **Chelsea Spahr** and her department will certainly be busy throughout this year with all these projects and many more.

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Even with the Pandemic, our Building Department hasn't slowed down under the new leadership of **Rob DePaolo**. In 2021 the department processed over \$7.8m in new builds and property improvements throughout the city, including two major expansions at the Wurlitzer Building with Woodcock Brothers Brewing Company and next door, the opening of The Tattered Tulip. The Colonel Payne school conversion into 37 apartments is nearing completion and new residents have already moved in. Presently under construction at 624 River Road is another mixed-use building with two commercial spaces and nine apartments with another 111 apartments to follow. Another example of how we are continuing to support development along our waterfront. This department presently has several hundred open building permits as the residents of NT continue to maintain and improve their properties, further stimulating our tax base and continued growth.

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In 2021, the Fire Department responded to 3,819 total alarms making it the busiest year in the Fire Department history, an increase of 561 alarms from 2020. Those responses include fires, EMS, still alarms, MVA's and water related incidents. Total fire loss was over \$800,000 for

2021. We took delivery of a new state-of-the-art fire hose and nozzles, which enables us to receive increased water flow from hydrants as well as flow more gallons per minute during fire suppression. Five members completed the NYS advanced Emergency Medical Technician class, and the total number of Firefighters able to offer advanced life saving measures increased to 26, or 68% of the department. Through the cooperative efforts of the City of North Tonawanda, Niagara County, and Enbridge, the fire department was able to purchase a 21-foot RIB rescue boat. This boat will replace our 14-foot inflatable boat currently in use. With the popularity of recreational boating, continued development of our city's waterfront and downtown, the department responded to a record number of water incidents in 2021 which we expect to continue. The new boat will allow firefighters to keep themselves and our waters safe. Many thanks to **Chief Joe Sikora** and every firefighter.

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I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the nucleus of our city, the Clerk/Treasurer's office. This department interacts with all sectors of our city handling everything from the Common Council agendas, communications with the public, our city website, processing bills, working with the city market and much more that keeps us organized. Thank you to **Donna Braun** and the departments' staff.

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In this first year as your Mayor, my goal is to expand business growth, work with our state officials to bring in additional funding for services, support our first responders to keep our city safe, address financial concerns the NYS Comptroller's audit exposed, and market North Tonawanda as a destination for visitors, families, and businesses. Overall, I want to bring a new energy and perspective to how our city government functions.

In the first month, our office is already moving on new initiatives for 2022. This includes weekly meetings with department heads to build communication throughout the city, working with the Clerk's Office to improve our city website, creating a Citizens Financial Advisory Committee to improve our budget process and support the Accounting Department, meeting with a new internet provider to give residents more options, creating solar zoning laws with our Climate

Smart Task Force, organizing numerous city committees to keep us on track, capital planning for future vehicle purchases, establishing a Covid Policy for employees, continuing our weekly email newsletter, and building communication between The Mayor's Office and Common Council.

I will work tirelessly to bring everyone in city hall and our community together for the betterment of North Tonawanda while expanding beyond our city boundaries and look to other communities for new ideas and collaboration. We will work to keep taxes low, provide services and safety while expanding our development, population, and tax base. North Tonawanda is a destination that Western New York has begun to recognize. There is an immense amount of potential for our community, and I am truly honored to serve the wonderful citizens of North Tonawanda. Thank you.