



# **2017 State of the City of North Tonawanda**

Delivered by Mayor Arthur G. Pappas

February 7, 2017

My fellow citizens, members of the Common Council, members of the press and guests. It is an honor and a privilege to come before you and report on the state of our City. This administration continues into a new year with great enthusiasm to begin work on what looks to be a very demanding 2017. The past year in office was a very busy, informative and exciting time as I worked with all department heads and many employees and citizens of our great City. In my time in office, month by month, this administration and all those in support of it, continue to look and have found ways, to gradually improve our City. With that said, I am very happy to report at this time, the City of North Tonawanda, is in good shape.

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This administration, now in its third year, was fortunate to have a former Mayor with a tremendous vision for his hometown. I wish to take a moment to acknowledge former Mayor and current New York State Senator Robert Ort and his staunch dedication to this City and his commitment in getting it pointed in the right direction. This administration has been a continuation of the dedication and commitment displayed by the former. This is certainly evident as new businesses continue to open up throughout the City along with decades-old, established, franchises expanding into our town as well. We see more and more job growth, business expansion and concentrated improvements to our infrastructure with roughly \$15,000,000 in construction and remodeling work performed in the past year alone. We are working to make this community a better place for our residents and visitors. Because of the growth of our business climate, the City has been more attractive to potential business opportunities and has grown in the number of inquiries of interest in both business, as well as residential need. With this last point, I would like to mention; in the near future, River Road will be the location of a planned 102 unit residential building now in the approval stage of development. Residential needs will be met, but we cannot forget the ever-growing numbers of visitors from outside the region coming into North Tonawanda to enjoy the events, recreational pursuits and shopping available. The investments made to improve our downtown have shown great promise with more to come.

During the past year, new businesses have opened up along Webster Street, Niagara Falls Blvd and Oliver Street. We continue to see new restaurant openings on Webster, as well as Oliver Street. I am also happy to announce the completion of the brand new 11,000 square foot headquarters for Ivy Lea Construction located on Walck Road. As we continue to strive for economic growth and encourage entities to invest in our community, we must remember that North Tonawanda must invest in itself. No part of the City will be neglected; every area must be cared for whether residential or commercial.

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Great strides have been made in new business and attractions, but we must look at infrastructure as well. Projects to repair or replace sidewalks throughout the City have and continue to be completed. This, in certain areas, has become urgent and will be addressed. An additional project, from this past year, saw measures taken to help alleviate flooding issues in various pockets of our City. This work has continued throughout 2016 as \$150,000 in funds were directed to storm water and sewer separation projects on Revere Avenue and Christiana Street. Two additional locations are slated for completion this year with an additional \$150,000 utilized for Porter and Riverview Avenues. The effort to drastically reduce the flooding in neighborhoods and the elimination of unnecessary treatment, of millions of gallons of storm water from sanitary sewer systems, equates to substantial water treatment cost savings. This saves the City and its residents tremendously over time.

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As we continue discussing infrastructure improvements within the City, we must speak of the roads. Roads in North Tonawanda are always a topic of discussion. I am happy to report that a record number of miles of roadway were paved this past season. Our Department of Public Works was able to take advantage of a beautiful summer to lay down roughly 13.5 miles of new road before the end of construction season. Just under \$1.1 million was spent on road repairs in North Tonawanda in 2016, with funding coming from two sources, including \$250,000, which was bonded and \$837,000 in funding the city received from New York States Consolidated Local

Street and Highway Improvement Program. We are not done! Roads will continue to be a priority of mine throughout the City. Next year, \$300,000 will be allocated for roadwork in addition to \$900,000 the city expects to receive from the same CHIPS program; that is a total of \$1.2 million for this coming construction season. The Department of Public Works deserves special recognition for taking advantage of the wonderful weather to work a tough job and for setting a record.

Along with paving of roads, we are also looking at improving the safety and ease of use of the City roadways. An amount of \$40,000 has been budgeted for our City Engineer to design a new intersection and improve signaling at Payne and Meadow. This project will line up 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue in a perpendicular fashion to Payne Avenue and flush with Meadow Drive, in order to both improve safety and simplify traffic flow through the intersection. This project is similar to what we accomplished on Nash and Meadow Drive recently as an estimated amount of \$120,000 went into traffic improvements. With project studies completed and pending public discussion, we here in City Hall hope to have the Payne and Meadow project completed sometime in the next couple of years. Roads are a priority; they will continue to be a priority, the plan is set and we will execute it.

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Continuing, I have spoken of the improvements to our roadways which facilitate movement of motorized vehicles throughout the City. North Tonawanda offers more now; this City has seen the completion of access ways for people to enjoy riding their bicycles and we have made it easier to enter the waterways surrounding the City. The Erie Canal bike path extension that runs along Sweeney Street from Payne Avenue to Mayor's Park was started in 2015 with help from a NYS Canal Corporation grant to help pay the \$300,000 project cost. We now see the fruits of our labor with its completion this past spring. Additionally, \$120,000 in NYS Department of State grant funds were utilized in the installation of kayak launches now in place at the Botanical Gardens and at the corner of Sweeney and Niagara Street. A final Kayak dock was installed adjacent to the Cities wonderful Gateway Harbor Park. All of these broad enhancements will provide additional quality of life activities for our community and those visiting our great City. We have

many to thank for their commitment in completing these projects long in planning.

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I have touched upon the myriad of road repurposing projects initiated and in the planning phase, but our engineering department is focused upon the surrounding waters of North Tonawanda as well. This City is fortunate to have such an expansive amount of waterways for recreational purposes. Our City Engineer, Dale Marshall, set out to complete a 1 million dollar project at Gratwick Riverside Marina. With the installation of brand new boat and Jet Ski docks, in addition to improved landscaping and lighting provided by a \$100,000 grant from New York State Senator Rob Ortt, the aesthetics of this site have improved substantially with the sole purpose of seeing more and more boaters utilizing this modernized City treasure.

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With such an emphasis on the water based City property, I now turn my attention to our land based properties. Much needed renovations for City owned properties continue to be made. In 2016 the City secured grant funding from a number of sources to make improvements to City facilities and programs for the upcoming year. These will include continued renovations to the historic Carnegie Art Center, necessary repairs to City Hall and a grant to assist the City in dealing with vacant and foreclosed 'zombie' properties. The issue with banks sitting on foreclosed properties only to see them fall into disarray, thus lowering surrounding home values, must be addressed. New tools are becoming available to combat this problem and this administration - working in conjunction with Lumber City Development Corporation - wishes to use these tools to see this problem reduced substantially and quite possibly brought to an end.

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Turning to a more positive and sweet note, we are fortunate to see the incredible expansion of Platter's Chocolates — a North Tonawanda staple since 1938 — with the grand opening of

their new factory and chocolate shop at the historic Wurlitzer building this past year. This project was a tremendous collaboration between Platter's, the City, Niagara County and New York State and has resulted in a beautiful new facility, the addition of dozens of new jobs in our community and has made North Tonawanda the best destination to rid yourself of those sponge candy cravings.

Elsewhere, Webster Street continues to develop into a beautiful, historic downtown. Small businesses continue to move in and existing businesses continue to grow, all anchored by the success of another historic North Tonawanda institution — the Riviera Theater. The City has partnered with the Riviera to assist them with their ambitious expansion project. The Riviera Theater expansion will be a signature development for downtown, bringing in thousands of new patrons and visitors every year and continuing to drive business growth in the area. The City was supportive of the various grants the Riviera Theater received this past year for the expansion. Once all funding is in place for this endeavor, the project will not only be a catalyst for the theater and the downtown area, but for the City as a whole. Additionally, we will also see new façade improvements in 2017 thanks to a grant secured by Lumber City Development Corporation. The City is also working to implement new, updated zoning codes for our downtown with assistance from our zoning board and Code Enforcement Department. These updates will improve the quality of development in the area and improve consistency with the overall community master plan. We look forward to continuing to work with these developments to bring new jobs, residents and investment into North Tonawanda in ways that will benefit and enhance our downtown core.

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In 2016, the City and Lumber City Development Corporation were awarded a grant to assist small business development called the Microenterprise grant program launching in 2017. This program, totaling \$200,000, will be able to help new entrepreneurs and growing small businesses expand their operations and create new jobs. This can help lay the groundwork for future grant funds, investment and redevelopment in once neglected areas of our City. Additionally, the City continues to support efforts by local organizations and businesses to revitalize the historic Oliver

Street corridor. The presence of the new Oliver Street Merchants Association will be a tremendous help, especially with the involvement of Alderwoman Donna Braun. We have already seen a coordinated effort to bring attention to the area through events which foster additional support for the established and fledgling businesses in the area. Their work has been incredible and we thank them for their efforts.

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Much discussion has been made of many areas of the City so far, but a very important segment has gone unmentioned until now. Water is essential for life as they say. The maintenance of our Water/Wastewater facilities is critical for compliance with various governmental agencies and for efficient operation, all in order to provide the residents of North Tonawanda with the most basic necessity. Much needed infrastructure repairs were made in 2016 at our Water and Wastewater plants which will be continued in the subsequent years ahead, all under the leadership of Bill Davignon.

One such project — budgeted carefully in anticipation — is the much needed renovation of a 4 million gallon water storage tank, which of course is vital in keeping our City well supplied with water. This overhaul will begin in 2018 or 2019 and will cost \$3 million to complete. Additionally, the coming year will see the full cleaning of the Water Treatment Plant's Niagara River intake line at a cost of \$61,000 in a move to improve efficiency of plant operations. More importantly, an additional \$22,000 will be spent on new sand filter backwash pumps. These new pumps will be important as they only power when needed. They also automatically increase or decrease their speed when required. The automated feature of these pumps will lower electricity consumption and ultimately reduce operational costs to the City.

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As much as we are completing in the Water Treatment facility, work is required at our Wastewater Treatment plant as well. This year will see additional improvements to aging areas of the facility. The first project is a \$600,000 allocation for a "Bar Screen" replacement for

incoming storm water. The "Bar Screen" will filter out large items during heavy storm flow.

A new "Fine Screen" filter process will require installation as well. At a cost of \$400,000, the fine screen is required to more efficiently clean the raw sewage entering the plant. Both of these projects are vital as they save unnecessary wear and tear on system pumps and pipes which staves off future repair costs.

Again, these improvements are needed for efficient and effective operation of both Water and Wastewater Treatment plants. As important as maintaining our facilities has been, the most important aspect of our Water Department is of course the treatment of water for safe consumption by our residents. Municipalities far and wide have been cited for excessive levels of lead or other contaminants. This is unacceptable and I am proud to say your Water Department is doing its job at the utmost and I can report zero operational, regulatory or water quality issues at both Water and Wastewater Treatment plants. Finally, I wish to mention the relocation of the City "Tree Farm" from the Botanical Gardens, to the Wastewater Treatment plant located on River Road. This allows us more freedom to expand the size of the "Tree Farm," meaning more trees planted. It also allows watering of the nursery to be carried out much easier. An abundant number of trees have and still need to be removed from around the City, whether due to age or infestation, this nursery will allow us the ability to account for the trees removed and have a replacement available for immediate replantation. This is a hallmark of a "Tree City," of which this City has been designated six consecutive years.

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An important part of any municipality is public safety. This past year saw capital funding allocated in the amount of \$135,000 for Nomex gear essential to the safety of our firefighters. The same year saw the delivery of a brand new fire pumper for the Fire Department. This addition replaces a pumper that is over 23 years old. The Fire Department also took delivery of new hydraulic rescue tools made possible by a grant attained through the East Hill Foundation located here in North Tonawanda. Additionally, two multi-gas detectors used for the detection



of deadly carbon monoxide gas were purchased. Funding for the detectors was a donation from the Niagara County Legislature, so we thank County Legislator Randy Bradt for this very important contribution. The City is continuously applying for a FEMA grant in the amount of \$350,000 for Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus equipment upgrades. Replacing our aged equipment for the safety of our firefighter's and subsequently our resident's, is very important and we will continue to provide our public safety personnel with the necessary equipment, to safeguard our City. As important as providing new and updated equipment to our emergency personnel, a secondary way this City is supporting emergency response is by upgrading water mains located on South Avenue and Christiana Street. These upgrades, totaling over \$50,000, will allow for more efficient water flow which is crucial for proper firefighting ability. An additional project completed last year was the installation of four back-up gas generators at dedicated pump stations in the City. These generators will be used during an emergency if there is a loss of power, alleviating flooding in the City if needed. Last year, we welcomed a new Fire Chief — Joseph Sikora. With many years of service to the City, Chief Sikora has shown a strong commitment to a fast and efficient emergency response so vital for appropriate public safety.

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Continuing on the topic of public safety with the likeliest of subjects — our Police. The North Tonawanda Police Department is integral in keeping the peace throughout the community. Like our Fire Department, the police require the latest equipment as they patrol the streets of our City to keep us safe, but it is important to keep them safe as well. This past year, our Police Department received a generous grant from the NYS Department of Criminal Justice Services totaling \$18,520.00 for the procurement of helmets, vests and patrol rifles. Additionally, the Police Department was fortunate in receiving a Stone Garden Grant provided through the U.S. Border Patrol. This grant, totaling \$17,972.00 will allow the purchase of license plate readers to be affixed upon police vehicles. This technology will simplify the process of finding stolen cars, missing persons and will help in tracking down dangerous persons before they can cause harm to innocent citizens. With that said, I also wish to mention the Auxiliary Police — a much-needed supplement to our traditional Police. The Auxiliary Police unit is composed of 18 residents volunteering their time to serve their community in crowd control and other roles. This past year,

the Common Council and I approved the allocation of \$75,000 to purchase three vehicles for their use. Between the North Tonawanda Police, the Auxiliary Police and the North Tonawanda Fire Department and the 46 members of their volunteer unit, this administration is clear in its objective in getting the best equipment to our emergency responders, all in the name of effective public safety.

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This City continues to improve upon the quality of life aspects of our community with new projects, events, and recreational pursuits. This past year was exceptional for those wishing to head out to the fairways. Blessed with such beautiful weather in 2016, Deerwood Golf Course saw over 62,000 rounds of golf played with revenue exceeding 1 million dollars for the season. North Tonawanda provides an excellent golf course for adult recreational pursuits, but we also provide for the many children of the City as well. The Youth Center — under the leadership of Alex Domaradzki — continues to meet or exceed its goal of providing an outlet for children to socialize, or possibly find a love for a sport they may pursue for many years to come. During 2016, the Youth Center averaged approximately 100 kids per day, up from 76 in 2015. The Youth Center is a great opportunity for children to learn and grow outside of school and we are all fortunate to have such a positive asset within the community. As we provide for the youth of North Tonawanda, we must not forget our seniors. The North Tonawanda Senior Center, under the direction of Pam Hogan, attends to well over 15,000 visitors yearly for purposes as simple as socialization, but also more important necessities such as educational pursuits, service programming and of course nutritional needs. For both the young, the old and all ages in-between, I am happy to see the City of North Tonawanda providing an outlet of activity and assistance to such a wide range of citizens.

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The Botanical Gardens, located on Sweeney Street — once a prominent, thriving green space enjoyed by residents — has seen many years of neglect in subsequent years. Recently however,

a coordinated effort by multiple department heads has seen new life and new amenities come forth with the quick installation of a new gazebo to be rented extensively during the summer. Parks and Recreation crews have also removed dead trees and shrubs and built new decking on the bridge to further enhance The Gardens. A special thanks to Common Council President Eric Zadzilka for coordinating volunteers to the cause and additionally, Patty Brosius of Parks and Recreation and Brad Rowles of the Department of Public Works in their commitment to this project to help bring the Botanical Gardens back to its former beauty and splendor.

Additionally, beautification efforts continue on Webster Street where Parks and Recreation maintenance crews coordinated the assembly and planting of new planter boxes to aesthetically improve the downtown area.

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Our City parks including Gratwick Riverside, Gateway Harbor and Veterans are popular areas enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. Events at Gratwick Riverside Park continue with the new Brews and Wine Festival held this past August and possibly beyond. Revelers were treated to the wares of wineries and breweries from a wide range of locales for an afternoon.

On another note, soon after, we saw the transformation of this beautiful waterfront park into a sea of red, white and blue with volunteers far and wide contributing to the installation of over 3,000 American flags, including the suspension of an 1,800 square foot flag by the North Tonawanda and City of Tonawanda Fire Departments; all in commemoration of the lives lost in the attacks perpetrated on 9/11, upon the people of America. The largest such commemoration in New York State; the Healing Field saw random motorists stop along River Road to take in the awesome sight of all the flags. Special recognition must go to the members of Erie-Niagara Sunrise Exchange Club and the Exchange Club of the Tonawandas, as well as Alderman-at-Large Robert Pecararo, in bringing life to this beautiful Healing Field and raising roughly \$20,000 for area charities. In addition, a special thank you for the proposed installation of a 4' x 8' foot sign for Gratwick Riverside Park, donated by the organizations, to the City. We look forward to delivery of this wonderful, heartfelt gift.

I also wish to speak of Brauer Park, located adjacent to City Hall as it will soon see a new addition honoring past lives cut far too short. The planned Children's Remembrance Gardenwalk continues to find funding with a \$50,000 contribution from New York Senator Rob Ortt, a \$42,000 contribution from Assemblyman Robin Schimminger, as well as a much-appreciated \$7,500 from the Rotary Club of the Tonawandas. This organization, a century old, unfortunately is no more, but their contribution to the Gardenwalk will forever be cherished in all our hearts and to the memories of the children honored with this memorial. A most gracious thank you must go out to all organizations and legislators for their contribution to such a worthy cause. Of course, most importantly, a most gracious and heartfelt extension of gratitude must go out, to those members of the public, who have personally donated in memory of a lost loved one. Thank you!

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In closing, the City of North Tonawanda has been fiscally sound over the past several years and I will work to that same philosophy of maintaining a fiscally responsible budget. I reiterate, as we move forward, this administration has and will look for new ways to operate City government in cost efficient ways and to provide much needed services efficiently as well. Last year saw the City in the midst of contract negotiations with four unions. All were completed with fairness in mind for our City employees who work hard for us; of course, we also need to be fair to the taxpayers. It is of great importance to note, this City's 2017 budget was passed with \$28,200 less spending than the 2016 budget, this despite completing the aforementioned City union contracts. The attained surplus was described as a "minor miracle" as there will be no layoffs once again and no loss of services. We are in good financial shape right now; my goal is to keep expenses in line while minimizing the impact on taxpayers. We have done this, 5 years in a row, at or under the State tax cap and we will continue all efforts to maintain this trend of fiscal conservative practice.

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It is an honor and privilege to serve as your Mayor. I look forward in continuing to move this

City in the right direction. I want to thank the department heads for their cooperation and effort during the past year, along with all our City employees. I would also like to thank the members of the Common Council for their support in making our City stronger as well as all department heads not mentioned specifically. I also wish to bid farewell to outgoing Common Council President Russ Rizzo and Alderwoman-at-Large Cathy Schwandt for their many years of dedicated service and contribution to the City of North Tonawanda. Lastly, I wish a final thank you to the residents of North Tonawanda for their support of the continuous effort from this Mayoral office. I will continue to work for a stronger, fiscally healthy and vibrant North Tonawanda. Thank you all, so very much.