



2019 State of the City Of North Tonawanda

Delivered by Mayor Arthur G. Pappas

February 5, 2019

My fellow citizens, members of the Common Council, members of the press and guests, it is an honor and a privilege to stand before you and report on the state of our City. This past year in office was a very busy, educational, and exciting time as I worked with all of our department heads, 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. I believe North Tonawanda is going in a very positive direction with the assistance of the Common Council, LCDC, and the great work of all city employees and the participation of our residents. With that said, North Tonawanda is moving forward.

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Many changes have taken place in the past year and there are many more projects in the works. Under the direction of the City Accountant, Amanda Reimer, new software is being implemented, and a grant-writing firm has been hired. We are working for more efficiencies and accountability in all city operations. Budget operations are slated to start earlier this year in order to move smoothly into the 2020 budget year.

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Deerwood Golf Course is a very popular venue for residents and non-residents alike. We are seeing that the golf course will be more available to the general public by restructuring golf league play to allow for increased course access. Course improvements include: Re-pavement of cart paths and ticket office area; renovation/repair of drainage and bunkers of the Fawn Course; installation of irrigation satellites and sprinkler heads (this is a lengthy process which will take us into 2020); and replacement of ash trees with new plantings. The Botanical Gardens along the Canal have been cleared of debris with new plants and flowers being planted by numerous volunteers who have devoted many days towards improvements. The newly formed Botanical Garden Organization will continue to beautify this park under the direction of Alex Domaradzki and his recreational crew. The Botanical Gardens will be ready for weddings and other events. The Parks and Recreation Department has been responsible for the improvements of all our parks in the city. A revamped Pinewoods Park Disc Golf Course layout will add 9 additional holes of play. There will be a new storage facility for Parks Equipment (cost saving by building in-house). Michelle Bernas will be taking over as the new Youth Program Supervisor. Memorial Pool will potentially see a renovation/new-swimming facility as the feasibility study is completed. We will continue to expand available recreation programs for youth, adults and seniors. Pam Hogan continues to supervise and plan programs for a large number of our senior citizens.

The completion of the Children's Memorial Garden was unveiled in October of 2018. It is located at Brauer Park, adjacent to City Hall. It is a place of reflection, displaying the names of the children of the city who have passed. This could not have been done without the help of our Engineering Department, as well as local contractors, donors and volunteers, along with grants from Senator Rob Ortt's office and Assemblyman Robin Schimminger's office. This was all accomplished without use of local taxpayer dollars.

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2018 was a year of progress in a number of key development areas for our city while also laying the groundwork for many developments we are looking forward to in 2019. Mike Zimmerman, our Director of Community Development, has had a major role in seeing these developments and projects come to fruition. New attention and investment is coming to Oliver Street as four new businesses opened on Oliver in 2018 and another long-time Oliver Street business, Matt's Music, began their expansion project. Imagine Community Gardens built and operated their community garden on Sommer Street with great success, adding a great asset to the Oliver community. The Niagara-Orleans land bank was established and is working to bring positive investment into the neighborhoods along Oliver Street, completing their first successful project on Miller Street. Rob DePaolo, North Tonawanda's representative on the NORLIC board of directors and City Code Enforcement Officer, stated that North Tonawanda is the first municipality in Niagara County to submit a property to the land bank. The River's Edge Apartments on River Road began construction in 2018, bringing new investment and vibrancy to our waterfront. 2019 looks to be a year of growth for North Tonawanda. At Gratwick Park, Thursdays on the Water will continue another year. This popular event takes place on Thursdays during the summer. It includes live music along with a car cruise and other family friendly events. In addition, the Thunder on the Niagara boat races will continue to host their annual event. A launch pass kiosk will be installed before the boating season this year at Gratwick Park. It will allow visitors to buy a day pass at any day, any hour. It will be similar to the boat launch kiosks you see in downtown Buffalo. Funding for this was donated by Bob Confer of Confer Plastics. The Woodcock Brothers Brewery project is under construction and scheduled to open early this year. This project will add to the exciting developments taking place at the historic Wurlitzer Building, which is quickly becoming a premier destination in the region. The Smart Growth Community funding awarded for downtown is in progress and we look forward to cutting the ribbon on significant improvements to Webster Street, Main Street, and Gateway Harbor later this year. New development projects are being proposed downtown at the historic Murphy's building and along River Road, adding to the growing development momentum in the area.

Armstrong Pumps has been negotiating with City Attorney Luke Brown about an \$18 million expansion. The company makes high-tech pumps for heating and cooling equipment. Since 1969, they have operated on East Avenue that formerly housed Buffalo Bolt Company and later Roblin Steel Company. In 2019, we look forward to continued improvement to a number of properties on Oliver Street through the Oliver Street Façade Enhancement Program as well as a new Oliver Street public art program.

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Our city's infrastructure will continue to be a priority as well as the conditions of our roads and sidewalks. 1.2 million dollars was available in 2018 for road improvements and approximately the same amount will be made available this year. Under the direction of our new superintendent, Mark Zellner, the DPW has milled and paved 15.08 lane miles of city roads in 2018. They have also milled and hot patched 168,222.6 square feet of city roads. The DPW will continue to work diligently with the help of the new milling machine/Asphalt Zipper, which has tremendously aided with road repair. We are receiving a grant for sidewalk repair in the downtown area, which will gratefully help the local businesses there. Sidewalk repair throughout the city will begin in the spring as well. We will be doing the work in-house to save taxpayer dollars. Main City Hall entrances on Payne Avenue were repaired in 2018. There have been hundreds of trees taken down as well due to safety reasons and Ash Borer Disease.

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Under the direction of department head Bill Davignon, the Water/Wastewater department was busy in 2018 and has several new projects this year. In 2018, the Water Filtration Plant had their Annual Department of Health Water Quality inspection and the report showed that our drinking water had no violations (Lead & Copper below legal limits) and that our filtration plant is operating very well. All four settling basins were cleaned (no extra cost and done by plant personnel). Three new Chlorine Analyzers were installed at our Water Filtration Plant, Toellner Water Tank and Erie Avenue Water Tank. This allows for better regulation of our Drinking Water Chlorine disinfection. The Niagara River intake pipe was cleaned out (done by plant personnel with no extra cost). We replaced a 70-year-old 31-foot settled water line pipe. Arcadis Engineering started developing a Capital Improvement Plan. At the Wastewater Treatment Plant, the annual D.E.C. audit and inspection report showed that our wastewater treatment plant was in compliance with all regulatory requirements and the plant is operating very well. We received a \$1.47 million NY State Water Infrastructure Improvement Grant for Phase #1 of our Capital Improvement Plan, which will start in 2019.

We installed two new chlorine analyzers, replacing original 1980 analyzers (this will allow us to more quickly and accurately monitor our chlorine dosage, thereby lowering our chemical costs). A new Sludge Pump was purchased to replace the original 1380 pump. The new pump will operate more efficiently and use less power. Installation will be completed in early 2019. We cleaned and repaired the S.W. Sludge Digester. Wastewater Operators completely cleaned three Primary Clarifiers, two Rectangular Clarifiers and two Storm Retention basins. At Water Distribution, we replaced water lines on East Oliver and Geneva Streets with the cooperation of the City's Engineering Department at 2/3 less cost to the taxpayers (this work used to be done by private contractors. We plan on doing many more in the future saving thousands of taxpayer dollars and improving our drinking water system). We started an extensive water line/hydrant flushing program (this improves our water quality by cleaning out our water lines throughout the city). We also started a water valve replacement program by replacing broken valves as we find them during the water line/hydrant flushing.

Starting in 2019, the Water Filtration Plant will be replacing a broken back-up generator and installation of new electrical. This will be completed in late 2019 or early 2020. The Toellner tank is in need of approximately \$3 million dollars in repairs, which will be performed in 2020 or 2021. Replacing the Toellner Tank is also an option, but would take place in 2022 or later. We will start the development of a comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan to make scheduled improvements that will bring our facility up to date. This will enable us to continue providing high quality drinking water to our residents in a fiscally responsible manner for the next 20-30 years and beyond. This implementation will be performed in phases starting in 2020. A new Aluminum Sulfate Chemical feed system will be installed. This will allow us to better calibrate our chemical usage thereby providing more efficient chemical dosing. Using less Aluminum Sulfate will save money. We anticipate "pay-back" on this to be two years. New Turbidity Meters will also be installed. This will allow us to provide improved solids removal and lower our chemical feed costs. At the Wastewater Treatment Plant, installation of the West Storm Water Mechanical Bar Screen will begin. Estimated completion date is October 2019. This is the second of three total Storm Water Mechanical bar screens that need to be replaced. The purchase and installation of a new ZAPPS (Zero Angle Photo-Spectrometry) Analyzer will be done. This will provide real time in-line analytical results for E-coli Bacteria, Total Suspended Solids, and Biochemical Oxygen Demand and Chlorine. This will allow for faster and more accurate analysis of our Final Effluent (water going back into the Niagara River).

This will then allow us to adjust our chemical feeds faster and more accurately. This will save us thousands of dollars. We anticipate the simple “pay-back” on this to be approximately two years. As part of the Wastewater Treatment Plant’s Capital Improvement Plan, the following improvements will take place starting in 2019 and 2020: A Grit removal system; Four High Head pumps; Four Low Head pumps; Lighting Upgrades throughout the plant; Two Primary Sludge pumps. In addition, Raw Sewage pump and Sludge pump Motor Control upgrades- including Programmable Logic Controllers and electrical panel upgrades. We will be getting Chlorine System upgrades (changing from pressurized to a vacuum system for safety reasons). This will help protect our employees and citizens in case of a chlorine cylinder leak. The total cost for these upgrades is \$6 million dollars.

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The Engineering Department, led by City Engineer Dale Marshall, has several projects upcoming in 2019. The 5th Avenue Storm Sewer Separation Project will start construction in the spring. Gateway Park improvements are currently under construction. Restroom facilities with showers and a Harbormaster office are being installed. There will also be more seating areas, as well as electrical upgrades and extended docking space. This will be completed in June of this year. The Sweeney Street Canal Wall Dock Extension will also be completed in June. There are a few projects that are currently under design and will commence construction in the fall: The Main Street Reconstruction Green Infrastructure Improvements (Island to Thompson Street); The Public Safety Action Plan (PSAP) Pedestrian Improvements; The Niagara Riverwalk Landscaping and Signage Improvements (Greenway Trail); The Connection Niagara Riverwalk to Empire State Trail (Wardell/Foot of Sweeney); and the Botanical Gardens Living Shoreline.

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Coz Capozzi and the Building Department have been actively engaged in 2018 and going forward in 2019. On River Road, a \$20 million project consisting of six buildings with 100 new apartments and a commercial building are being constructed. Partial occupancy is expected by middle of March. Also on River Road is a remodel of an existing empty building into a new Dollar Tree Store. A conversion of the former Grant school into 52-unit apartment building is underway. As mentioned earlier, the Woodcock Brewery project in the Wurlitzer building is in the remodeling stage. Webster Street has and will continue to thrive. The former Murphy’s and North Tonawanda History Museum is presently being remodeled. The proposed use is a retail, commercial and residential use, including a SPoT Coffee. Prosper microbrewery remodeling is complete. They will be open shortly. The new business known as “The Board Room” opened in November of 2018.

On Webster Street, a new bakery and food service establishment is expected to be opening by the middle of February. Also on Main Street, the remodeling of an existing building will be taking place to become the architectural firm, Enterprise Lumber and Solo. A proposed new winery and food service establishment will be opening on Erie Ave. Remodeling has been ongoing and expected opening to be within a couple of months. On Zimmerman Street, a proposed new 24-unit storage facility is in the planning stages and is being reviewed by the Planning Board. Construction is expected to start later this year. In addition, a new building is under construction for a trucking company, which will be completed within two or three months. The former Dunkin' Donuts on Meadow Drive will finally be remodeled and reopened soon. On Mead Street, the remodeling of a new banquet facility is expected to be completed by April 2019. The well-known Matt's Music is in the process of constructing a 2,600 square foot addition. The multimillion-dollar emergency room expansion has been completed at DeGraff Hospital. In the spring of 2018, the new Save-A-Lot opened and brings a low cost grocery store to the Value plaza on Nash Road. All in all, a total of \$24 million dollars in new buildings, dwellings, remodeling, and/or construction costs was accomplished in 2018 and we see no slowing down in 2019.

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The Riviera Theater and Carnegie Art Center are two long known staples of North Tonawanda that continue to thrive and shine. The Riviera is a catalyst for the downtown area. The increasing number of shows and movies played not only brings people to the theater, but also to surrounding businesses. Through a gift from Andrew Carnegie, the Carnegie Art Center has been in North Tonawanda for more than 100 years. It served as a library for over 70 years. It now houses fine art, and through the presentation of exhibitions, concerts, performances, and classes, it provides educational and cultural enrichment to the Western New York region. The Herschel Carrousel Museum continues to attract visitors locally and from across the county providing a great experience for historians and those interested in amusement rides and fascinating displays. The museum has been expanding its facilities and is becoming an educational center providing programs for schools.

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Public Safety is, and will continue to be a priority in North Tonawanda. The Bullying Law that was implemented last year has served its purpose greatly. A School Resource Officer program was established and implemented in cooperation with the North Tonawanda School District. The program began with the start of the 2018-2019 school year. This program puts a uniformed Police Officer in the High School every day throughout the school year.

The North Tonawanda Police Department SWAT team received a \$100,000 federal grant for the purchase of specialized equipment and training. The Police Department was also the recipient of a \$24,000 grant from the Federal Railroad Administration for stepped up patrols for enforcement activities and security along the railway right of way throughout the city. Under Chief Roger Zgolak, the police department has maintained a very noticeable and positive presence for our city. In 2018, North Tonawanda was ranked as one of the safest cities in New York State by the National Council for Home Safety and Security.

In 2018, The Fire Department responded to 3,439 total alarms, an increase of 147 over 2017, resulting in the busiest year in NTFD history. Total fire loss for the year was \$524,000. Total training hours for the Fire Department in 2018 were 8,580 (7,767 for Career Firefighters and 813 for Volunteer Firefighters). The NTFD continues to participate in the Niagara County Mutual aid agreement. We have members on the Technical Rescue and Haz Mat teams. In an effort to keep our vehicles updated, we took delivery of two Command vehicles and a new Rescue vehicle. In December, a contract for a new Class A Pumper was agreed to and will replace a 1989 Pumper. Half the Pumper and half the Rescue was funded through grants.

In addition, in 2019 a new Investigation vehicle, funded entirely through a grant, will be purchased. Chief Joe Sikora and his staff have done a fine job with the uptick in calls and response times.

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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. As we move forward, this administration will look for ways to operate City government in cost efficient ways, and will look for new ways to provide needed services. We are currently in the midst of negotiating two contracts. We want to be fair to our employees who work hard for us; however, we also need to be fair to those who pay the bills –the taxpayers. My goal is to keep expenses in line while minimizing the impact on taxpayers.

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As we move ahead, this administration will continue to explore ways to encourage new businesses to occupy vacant buildings and to improve neighborhoods in need of enhancements. We want to increase quality of life projects moving to keep NT a great place to live. Bike path extensions and other recreational facilities are important for this as well as the beautification of our existing facilities such as the Botanical Gardens (possibly Christmas lighting) and waterfront areas.

In addition, a drive-up mailbox designation is being explored with the Post Master where mail can be deposited without leaving your vehicle. The city Engineer and the Traffic Safety Committee are exploring possible locations for resident convenience.

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It has been an honor and privilege to serve as your Mayor, and I look forward to continuing moving this City forward. 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 with making our City stronger. Most importantly, I would like to thank the residents for their comments, suggestions and for their support over the past year. There is no doubt that working together means progress.