



*2023 State of the City*  
*North Tonawanda*

*Mayor Austin J. Tylec*

*February 7, 2023*

## **2023 STATE OF THE CITY OF NORTH TONAWANDA**

To the residents, Common Council, and others in attendance today, it is an honor to report on the State of The City for 2023 and I would like to thank all of you for continuing to place your trust and confidence in me as your Mayor throughout my first year in office. When I started as Mayor, some of my main priorities were to create a positive work environment by supporting our departments, stabilize our city finances, find more opportunities for public and private growth, and put the people of our community first. This and providing our daily public services to residents would not be possible without the collaboration of our Department Heads, hundreds of city employees, elected officials, and many more that make our City of North Tonawanda the greatest place in Western New York.

While the nation, state, and local municipalities are experiencing some of the most challenging economic environments in recent history, with inflation reaching record levels, gas prices skyrocketing, and minimum wages increasing, North Tonawanda still experienced economic growth. And for the first time in over 5 years, because of all our hard work, we ended our 2022 fiscal year with a projected surplus of approximately \$1,000,000 which ultimately begins to replenish our dwindled reserves, and gets us on the right track moving forward. Parallel to this budgetary accomplishment, when we started the creation of the 2023 budget between the City Clerk-Treasurer, City Accountant Jeff Zellner, Department Heads, and myself, we were initially looking at a \$3million budget gap for our General Fund, and a combined \$700,000 deficit in our Water/Sewer Fund. However, after rigorous efforts by our team, and coordination with the Common Council, we developed a 2023 budget which removed those deficits, balanced the General Fund, created a surplus between our Water/Sewer Fund, and maintained our public services.

All of this wasn't easy, but we took actions to reduce costs, secure grants, and find ways to manage unforeseen circumstances. We initiated a gas policy to reduce our use by thousands of gallons, collaborated with the School District on various programs, implemented an over-time reduction policy, and negotiated competitive & fair healthcare plans for employees while still providing the coverage they need. We created committees to devise ways to improve our

financial procedures, began capital plans for city projects and equipment, and worked with the council, department heads, and New York State to bring in new revenue sources and initiatives for our city. Because of these collaborative efforts, North Tonawanda made incredible strides this past year.

\*\*\*

In 2022, Our Department of Public Works successfully paved a historic 31 lane miles of roads, removed 237 undesirable trees, hauled over 15,000 tons of garbage and 1800 tons of recyclables, repurposed 16,000 cubic yards of organic waste into free woodchips for residents, and found new methods to repair over 6,000sf of sidewalks which saved us \$100,000. In 2023, the department plans to maintain the historic amount of paving, and because we have allocated more funding for sidewalks than years prior, we will see a substantial increase in repairs. It's also important to note the things they do outside of providing these day-to-day services. Whether it's putting up our Downtown Christmas Tree & decorations, installing the Hometown Heroes Wall at our City Market, assisting with the new LED signage at City Hall, hanging banners for local merchant associations, and much more, they always go above and beyond what's expected, while maintaining the entire city. Our office and the members of our community are thankful for everything **Mark Zellner** and his employees do.

\*\*\*

In our Parks & Recreation Department we saw consistent use of our parks, boat docks, ballfields, golf course, park shelters, and many other public amenities. In 2022, the department served approximately 6,000 individuals through our Youth Center, Senior Center, and Recreational Programs. The department also completed a vast array of improvements and projects. A new pavilion and bathrooms were added to Gratwick Park thanks to Niagara River Greenway Funds. Renovations to our Pinewoods Park Pavilion and a new accessible bathroom were completed with DASNY funding, the Niagara St Fishing Pier was renovated through the East Hill Foundation, additional bike repair stations were installed along the canal, and with the PlaNT it Forward Initiative approximately 100 new trees were planted and added to our Forest Management Plan,

which is a part of our online mapping system that tracks every public tree planted or removed for future planning.

At Deerwood Golf Course we had 57,698 rounds of golf played, and the course brought in approximately \$1,000,000 of revenue. With our grounds crew, new maintenance equipment, pump station upgrades, and various drainage enhancements, Deerwood looks better than even before. We understand how disappointing it was to lose our long-standing concessionaire for the 2022 season, but after extensive improvements to the Concession building roof, plumbing, fencing, and entrance, we were able to secure a new concessionaire to manage the restaurant, named 1818 Sweeney Bar & Grill, starting this March.

In 2023, the Department will continue to play an active part in providing residents and visitors of our community with friendly, enjoyable, and satisfying recreational experiences. We can also look forward to public Wifi at Gateway Harbor, going out to bid on The Sweeney St bike path extension, and the most exciting news is the City beginning design for a new outdoor aquatic facility at Payne Park this year! Thank you to **Alex Domaradzki** and his entire staff for all their dedication and hard work.

\*\*\*

The City Market, the gem of our city, underwent major improvements the last year under the leadership of Market Manager Chris DelPrince and in coordination with Clerk Treasurer Donna Braun. With sponsorships by David Chevrolet & Others, grants through former Assemblyman Robin Schimminger and Senator Robert Ortt, and assistance by our DPW, we were able to invest nearly \$200,000 into our market. We repaved and reconfigured roads & sidewalks to create a more walkable environment with accessible parking, added new lighting for the early rising farmers, installed a captivating mural, and enhanced our Hometown Heroes Wall giving honor to those who served. As many have seen, Storm Elliott took a toll on the Hometown Heroes Wall, but we are working with SignTech to replace and restore these panels. With more vendors and events at the Market in 2022, we exceeded revenues, brought in new visitors to our city, and supported local farmers more than ever before. The City Market will continue to grow thanks to **Chris DelPrince's** business experience, ability to bring people together, and his fantastic team.

\*\*\*

One department that I've always considered the nucleus of our City is the Clerk-Treasurer's Office. They interact with almost every department, manage our Common Council agendas, organize our City Committees, communicate and interact with thousands of our residents, process bills, issue licenses, and much more to keep City Hall functioning. For 2023, the department will be initiating new ways to get information out to the public with bulletins on the new signage at City Hall and updates to our city website, along with assisting in a new automatic meter program. Thank you to Clerk-Treasurer **Donna Braun** and your entire department for keeping us moving forward.

\*\*\*

Within City Hall this past year, the Assessor's Office & Building Department processed a landmark amount of residential and commercial property improvements throughout the city, totaling over \$34m. This was by far the busiest year in development for these departments. Assisting with projects such as the 120-unit luxury apartments along River Road's waterfront, Coffee & Stone on Webster St, Taco Bell and KFC on the Niagara Falls Blvd, and new subdivisions throughout the city. With the building department issuing over 2,200 building permits and our assessor's office processing approximately 700 property sales, our residential and commercial market is healthy in North Tonawanda, with more on the way for 2023. Thank you to **Rob DePaolo, Barbara Klenke**, and all your staff for furthering growth in our city and continuing to stimulate our tax base.

\*\*\*

Following the millions of dollars in private developments, our Engineering Department also had a busy year. Overseeing improvements at Pinewoods Park, The City Market, and City Hall. As well as managing the paving Downtown, construction of the River Road Bike Path, coordinating a Tonawanda Island infrastructure study, and moving the Sweeney St Bike path extension along. This work won't stop in 2023 with the \$1.4m waterline replacement project on Zimmerman St for future developments, the \$600,000 Meadow and Payne Intersection replacement, the \$86,000 GIS implementation project to update our city infrastructure maps for future maintenance, and one of the biggest initiatives, is starting a \$500,000 city-wide water & sewer

infrastructure study which will help us invest appropriately into replacing our aging infrastructure. Thank you to **Chelsea Spahr, Travis Sikora**, and their staff for managing millions of dollars in improvements throughout our city.

\*\*\*

As many of us know, North Tonawanda prides ourselves in having a safe community thanks to our Police Department. Under the new leadership of Police Chief Keith Glass in 2022, the department processed over 50,000 calls for service which resulted in 453 arrests. While keeping up with New York State's police reform laws, new less-lethal & defensive tactics training was initiated to keep our law enforcement officers and the public safe. Several officers are even taking part in a nation-wide program called "Every Cop A Blue Belt" where officers train in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu with the goal of becoming a blue belt. In addition to new initiatives, Chief Glass implemented new ways to maintain our female matron prison watch staff, after we experienced a shortage. Fortunately, these changes led to an annual savings of \$100,000 a year. In 2023 we will be making necessary upgrades to our shooting range for training, acquire a new Lie Detection kit to accelerate investigations, and new workout mats for training purposes thanks to funding through Assemblyman Conrad's office. The department also made public outreach a priority with programs like "National Night Out", "Child Safety Seat Checks", "Trunk or Treat", "Shop With A Cop", AND "Boxes of Hope".

Adding to public outreach, we renewed our School Resource Officers contract with the NT School District and will continue to provide two (2) Officers between the High School & Middle School. Moving into 2023, we are in discussions about expanding security with three (3) more Officers stationed between all existing schools within the city. This would not only enhance security, but also foster positive relationships with students & staff. I would like to commend **Police Chief Keith Glass** for your proactive leadership and thank the entire Police Department for everything you do. I am confident our law enforcement will continue to keep our city one of the safest in New York State.

\*\*\*

Parallel to public safety, our Fire Department responded to 3800 incidents in 2022. They saw \$1.1m in fire loss damages, which was an increase of \$300,000 from 2021, but fortunately no fire related lives were lost this past year. Along with fire inspections related to new businesses, daycares, mobile food permits, and events, the department investigated 34 fires in 2022. Our Firefighters maintained training with on and off duty drills, medical education, professional development, and have all completed the First Line Supervisor program.

The department continues to be an asset to our City. They don't just keep us safe from fires, natural disasters, water related rescues, or when we need medical attention, they also collaborate with our Police Department, Volunteer Firefighters, and Police Auxiliary whenever we need them in action. Thank you to **Fire Chief Joe Sikora** and our entire fire department for stepping up when emergencies come our way.

\*\*\*

Our Water Department is more than half-way through the engineering our Phase 1 Capital Improvement Plan and our plant backup generator construction will be completed this spring, along with the start of Phase 2 which includes updating and relocating various electrical services. The department also started updating out lead sampling program and addressed numerous outstanding violations. For 2023 we will be starting construction of the Phase 1 Capital Project, continue the engineering of our Phase 2 Capital Project, and develop a waste removal system for our Alum.

This past year, Water Distribution handled approximately 45 water main breaks, began our lead and copper rules and regulation program, and completed major valve replacements at Wheatfield St & River Road, which supplies half of our city with water. Starting this year, we will be initiating a city-wide automatic meter replacement plan for residents and business owners. Similar to surrounding municipalities, these automatic meters will no longer require people to send in meter cards, instead the city will be able to collect readings through cellular signal, which will save time and money for us all. It is our intention to start replacements a few months from now and the replacement of approximately 11,500 meters will be completed within 5-years.

In our Wastewater Treatment plant we are continuing to work on The Phase 1 Capital Improvement Project, update all chlorine regulatory documents, start preventative maintenance programs for all high voltage electrical equipment and substations, and install a new ferric chloride secondary containment system. If everyone recalls many months ago we called on NYS, with the assistance of Assemblyman William Conrad, to provide much needed funding for our Wastewater Treatment Plant. With our efforts we were able to secure \$5m in funding to replace our deteriorating Carbon Pipes and upgrade our failing digester. Since then, Superintendent Koepsell is happy to report that these two projects are steadily underway. Inspections, engineering reports, and drawings are all moving forward in a timely manner with construction projected to begin early 2024. These are two essential features of our plant that prevent wastewater from backing up into basements and stop raw sewage from discharging into the Niagara River. Although we need more than \$20m over the next decade to keep maintaining our plants, we are in a much better place after this last year and have more plans to come. Thank you to **Superintendent Jason Koepsell** and your entire staff for everything they do.

\*\*\*

While we continue to maintain various aspects of our city, we must also be working to bring in new development, strengthen and expand businesses, while preserving neighborhoods to increase our tax base. Through Lumber City Development and the leadership of Community Development Director **Laura Wilson**, we have seen an incredible influx of State Funding and economic growth in 2022, with much more to come this year. Many of the projects and grants mentioned have transpired from Miss Wilson's coordinated efforts between LCDC, my office, The Common Council, City departments, Local Businesses, and New York State agencies. With more than \$15m in grants awarded to the city over the last 18 months, we can look forward to an array of projects starting this year. Some of these include a \$45m redevelopment of the former Lowry Middle school into affordable senior housing, a city-wide update to our comprehensive plan from 2008 to understand long term goals, a Local Water Revitalization Program to guide development on our waterfronts, new technology upgrades at Gateway Harbor, and of course the start of our Downtown Revitalization Initiative (Known as the "DRI"). The City was awarded \$10m through the DRI from Governor Kathy Hochul's Office and The Department of State. This becomes a



comprehensive approach to boosting local economies by transforming communities into vibrant neighborhoods where the next generation of New Yorkers will want to live, work, and raise a family.

*In 2022, New York State initiated DRI efforts with the establishment of a Local Planning Committee (LPC) in North Tonawanda, which was comprised of local stakeholders, to oversee the development of a strategic plan for revitalization of our Downtown, Waterfront, and Oliver St corridor. The committee received support and technical assistance from a team of planners selected by the State, along with C&S Engineering.*

*Our Local Planning Committee was instrumental in developing a vision with the consulting team and community that targeted strategic goals which directed the selection of DRI projects.*

*Some of these strategic goals for the DRI region were:*

- 1. Support density necessary to create excitement throughout the day with a mix of shopping, dining, and entertainment,*
- 2. Enhance downtown as NT's residential, hospitality, economic and employment center, by attracting visitors through an array of living, working and recreational opportunities.*
- 3. Focus on high quality, efficient, and climate resilient development benefitting the downtown's abundant historic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources and its delightful public realm.*
- 4. Leverage Downtown's unique location, culture, and history at the confluence of two historic waterways to develop exceptional urban waterfront experiences.*

*Throughout the entire DRI process, public engagement sessions were held in the form of surveys, public engagement events, walking tours, a venue crawl, and community chalkboards.*

*After the LPC developed goals and strategies, an open "Call for Projects" began. Public & Non-Profit projects had an opportunity for 100% funding if selected, while private projects could receive no more than 50% of their total project cost. Once submitted, the projects were ranked based on a variety of factors and submitted to NYS in the Summer of 2022.*

Projects submitted included 23 public, private and non-profit projects, totaling approximately \$13 million dollars. Ultimately the final slate of projects were awarded by New York State in December 2022, and are as follows:

**Awarded Projects that will Enhance our Waterfront Access & Public Spaces include:**

- \$156,000 to extend a 300-foot public riverwalk along the Niagara River at 624 River Road.
- \$750,000 to the creation of a public benefit area on the waterfront of 78 Bridge Street, located on Tonawanda Island, and a crucial piece for future plans to develop an adjacent multi-million dollar mixed-use property there.
- And \$1,000,000 to the implementation of various Downtown placemaking improvements and Fleischman Park enhancements.

**Projects that Improve Streetscape & Walkability include:**

- \$1.5m towards streetscape enhancements along the Oliver Street corridor, adding green space, lighting, and crosswalk improvements.

**Projects that Expand Arts & Cultural Opportunities include:**

- \$1.2m to modernize and expand the Riviera Theatre with ADA restrooms, a new concession & merchandise area, a lounge, and more.
- \$470,000 to the Railroad Museum for site improvements and enhancing the connection between downtown and Oliver St.
- And \$210,000 to The Allan Herschell Carousel Museum expansion and future programing.

**Projects that Increase Housing & Business Opportunities include:**

- \$1,360,000 for the development of a mixed-use residential/commercial building at 122 Webster Street.
- \$1,000,000 for the renovation of the former Ridge Furniture at 27 Main Street into a seasonal ice cream shop, multiple retail spaces, and commercial prep kitchen.
- \$600,000 for a Commercial Property Improvement Program that will be administered by LCDC to address small-scale projects and underutilized buildings.
- \$549,000 for redevelopment of 211 Main Street into a professional incubator space for landscape, engineering, and construction related businesses.
- \$525,000 towards the construction of a new apartment complex at 10 Goundry Street.
- \$250,000 to rehabilitate 230 Oliver Street into mixed-use commercial/residential units.
- And \$100,000 for upgrades to low-income apartment units at 235/239 Oliver Street.

The 14 transformative projects selected by NYS accumulate to over \$22.5m in development, with \$12.5m of this leveraged by private funds. It's great when grant dollars contribute to our growth, but it's even more important to recognize the millions of private dollars that are being invested into our city with the DRI.

Led by Laura Wilson, these projects will be significantly underway by late 2023. Upon completion of these key projects, they will expand our ongoing efforts to continue the momentum in North Tonawanda and usher new growth throughout our downtown and waterfront areas. Congratulations to those awarded.

\*\*\*

Over the last year North Tonawanda has truly prospered & unified thanks to our City Departments, Local Businesses, Elected Officials, and with the support of New York State. I have truly enjoyed my first year as your Mayor, and in 2023 I will continue to work tirelessly to keep taxes low, increase services and safety, expand new development, unify our city, and provide a proactive approach to government. North Tonawanda is a destination that Western New York has begun to recognize, and we should be proud to live here. Thank you again to everyone in attendance today and for your commitment to our city. There is an immense amount of potential in our community, and I am truly honored to serve the wonderful citizens of North Tonawanda.

*Austin J. Tylec*  
**Honorable Austin J. Tylec**  
**Mayor, City of North Tonawanda**