



2025 State of the City

North Tonawanda

Mayor Austin J. Tylec

February 4, 2025

2025 STATE OF THE CITY OF NORTH TONAWANDA

To the Residents, Elected Officials, and City Employees here today, it is both an honor and a privilege to stand before you as Mayor of our thriving city. Over the past year, North Tonawanda has made significant progress—overcoming challenges, embracing new opportunities, and solidifying its reputation as a leading destination in Western New York.

This year has been defined by progress and perseverance. We have tackled obstacles, strengthened our city's foundation, and paved the way for a future filled with opportunity for all. From securing historic investments in development to improving the efficiency and transparency of city operations, every step forward has been driven by our commitment to progress and the best interests of our residents.

But progress isn't just about policies or projects—it's about people. It's about the dedicated department heads and city employees who keep everything running, the elected officials who serve with integrity, and the residents and business owners who invest their time, energy, and passion into making North Tonawanda a stronger, more vibrant community.

Over the past few years, North Tonawanda has faced some of the toughest economic challenges in recent history, further impacted by prior financial shortcomings—concerns that were highlighted by both the NYS Comptroller's Office and the City's independent auditors. From day one, my administration has prioritized financial stability to ensure long-term economic growth and the sustainability of our City.

With the 2025 budget set at \$45.3 million, I am proud to share the significant progress we've made. At the end of 2024, we have an estimated reserve of over \$3 million. We continue to balance our operating budget using honest, accurate, and transparent figures. Our once declining Moody's rating (credit score) has been stabilized and we foresee this rating to improve in 2025. We no longer borrow short-term notes just to cover our monthly bills, and again saw a 5% increase in sales tax revenue thanks to our growing economy. While there is still work to be done, this is an incredible accomplishment that we should all be proud of. Thank you to City Accountant Jeff Zellner for his efforts and working with my office to improve our financial standing.

Maintaining financial stability isn't just about balancing numbers—it directly impacts our ability to serve the community. Strong finances mean well-equipped city departments, updated technology, improved internal controls, and long-term capital planning, all of which allow us to deliver better services to our residents and businesses. By staying fiscally responsible, we are ensuring a stronger, more resilient North Tonawanda for years to come, and the following departments reflect this.

In 2024, under the continued leadership of Superintendent Mark Zellner, the Department of Public Works achieved significant milestones while responding to over 11,000 calls from residents. Their efforts included the removal of 220 trees and 325 stumps, the collection of nearly 14,907 tons of garbage and 1,913 tons of recyclables. The department also made great strides in sewer maintenance, cleaning over 532 receivers, and doubled previous sidewalk repair efforts—replacing 1,500 blocks and fixing 242 trip hazards—marking a historic year for sidewalk improvements, with even more planned for 2025.

Road and traffic infrastructure also saw major upgrades. In 2024, the department paved 21 miles of roads, installed four state-of-the-art intersections, and repainted city street markings. Beyond infrastructure, the team played a crucial role in snow removal, city events, and downtown decorations, all contributing to North Tonawanda's safety and vibrancy.

Looking ahead to 2025, the department will build on these achievements while securing key funding for future improvements. This includes a \$190,000 grant for Municipal Solid Waste & Recycling and a \$1.6 million grant through the Federal Highway Administration to modernize 19 traffic signals and intersections, some with components over 50 years old. These upgrades will reduce congestion, improve pedestrian safety, enhance traffic flow, and lower emissions, making travel throughout the city more efficient and environmentally friendly.

Thanks to Mark Zellner and the entire DPW team for their dedication to maintaining and improving North Tonawanda—ensuring our city remains safe, efficient, and welcoming for all.

Under the leadership of Parks & Recreation Director Alex Domaradzki, 2024 was a productive and exciting year for the Parks & Recreation Department.

Our municipal golf course saw a record-breaking year, with 69,000 rounds played, generating over \$1.5 million in gross revenue. Continued investments in new equipment have significantly improved the condition of the greens, fairways, rough, and tee boxes, enhancing the overall golfing experience.

Our parks remained bustling hubs of activity in 2024, with over 200 facility rentals across our pavilions and parks, which hosted a variety of well-attended events. Gateway Harbor continued to be a hotspot for entertainment, welcoming over 1,700 boats, many from out of state, and solidifying North Tonawanda as a growing tourist destination. In addition, through NYS Assemblyman Conrad's Office, the gateway concert stage will be replaced with new state of the art equipment.

To ensure our parks remain vibrant and accessible, new playground amenities were installed at Carruthers Park and Raymond Klimek Veterans Park, replacing outdated equipment and providing children with safe and exciting play options. At Gratwick Park, thanks to funding from the Niagara River Greenway Commission, main access roads were repaved and widened, with additional parking spaces scheduled for completion in spring 2025.

Youth programs continue to be a standout feature, serving over 2,000 participants through camps, sports, educational programs, and special events. Adult recreation programs saw significant engagement as well, with over 1,500 individuals participating in activities such as exercise classes, kickball, softball, volleyball, and pickleball leagues.

The Senior Center experienced tremendous growth, serving over 1,000 individuals through an expanded array of programs, including cards, bingo, dinner dances, exercise classes, and more. A \$20,000 grant from the New York State Office for Aging allowed us to create a computer lab, purchase a new bingo machine, and offer free educational classes such as baking, self-defense, line dancing, and candle making.

As we look to 2025, several major projects are on the horizon:

- **Payne Park Aquatic Facility:** With secured grant funding of \$8.4m and completed designs, construction of the new aquatic facility will begin this spring. The facility will feature a bathhouse, concessions, a zero-entry pool with water features, slides, and a lap pool.
- **New Community Center:** Design plans are underway to transform the Norman Keller Building into a \$5m central hub for Recreation Offices, the Youth Center, and the Senior Center at 500 Wheatfield St-with completed construction projected at the end of 2026.
- **Mayor's Park Enhancements:** A new kayak launch and fishing pier will be installed in late spring, funded by Canal Corp, and another way to connect public spaces along the canal.
- **Parks and Playgrounds:** In 2025 we will invest over \$200,000 in various improvements at Payne Park's playground equipment, Pinewoods Park, and resurfacing the Wurlitzer Park courts. In addition, an interactive video kiosk will be installed at the Seabee's monument at Raymond Klimek Veterans Park.

The department is incredibly grateful for the continued support of our community partners. Groups like CHANT (Community Health Alliance of North Tonawanda), NT Botanical Gardens Organization (NTBGO), Project Pride, and Tonawandas Gateway Harbor Inc. have played critical roles in beautifying our city, promoting recreational and educational opportunities, and hosting events that draw residents and visitors alike.

Lastly, the Parks & Recreation Department is proud to play a key role in the Erie Canal Bicentennial (1825–2025) this year, and is organizing events that honor its legacy and impact on our community.

Thank you to Director Alex Domaradzki and the entire Parks & Recreation team for their dedication and hard work in making 2024 a truly remarkable year.

Under the leadership of Chris DelPrince, our City Market has proudly maintained its title as the #1 Market in the Nation. As vendors and farmers continue to see increasing sales, we recognize

this as an opportunity for growth. To support this growth, the city has applied for a \$750,000 grant through NYS Agriculture & Markets to renovate the existing market building.

If awarded, these renovations will transform the space by adding new bathrooms, indoor seating, additional vendor stalls, kitchen facilities, and an incubator space for start-up businesses. Additionally, we plan to redesign and repave the vendor parking lot, improving accessibility and creating a better experience for both vendors and visitors.

We remain committed to strengthening our City Market as a community hub, fostering local businesses, and bringing people together. A heartfelt thank you to Chris DelPrince, our dedicated vendors, and our community members for making our market a pillar of Western New York and a nationally recognized destination.

One department at the heart of our City's operations is the Clerk-Treasurer's Office. This team touches nearly every corner of City Hall, managing Common Council agendas, coordinating City Committees, assisting residents with licenses and permits, processing bills, and much more to keep things running smoothly. In 2024, they continued their dedication to service with significant updates to the city website, making it more user-friendly and accessible, while also utilizing the new signage at City Hall to share timely information with residents. Lastly, Donna Braun is overseeing a household income study we recently began that will help the city with zero interest loans for capital projects at our water and wastewater facilities. A heartfelt thank you to Clerk-Treasurer Donna Braun and her incredible team for ensuring our city remains organized, connected, and moving forward.

Over the past year, City Hall has seen significant activity, with the Assessor's Office and Building Department facilitating substantial residential and commercial property improvements across North Tonawanda—totaling an impressive \$34 million in 2024. These departments played a key role in several major developments, including Bush Meadow's 30 new residential homes, the Riviera Theatre's multi-million-dollar expansion, the mixed-use development at 110 Sweeney

Street featuring 15 apartments and District 37, the completion of 100 new market-rate apartments at 624 River Road, the addition of Pizza Hut at Mid-City Place, and numerous other business buildouts.

With over 1,600 building permits issued and approximately 600 property sales processed, our city's residential and commercial markets continue to thrive, with even more growth on the horizon for 2025. Looking ahead, the Building Department will be launching a new *Rental Property Compliance Program* aimed at reducing blight, ensuring tenant safety, and holding absentee landlords accountable by requiring local management for rental properties. This initiative will be a critical step in strengthening our neighborhoods and enhancing the quality of life for residents.

A sincere thank you to Rob DePaolo, Barbara Klenke, and their teams for their dedication and hard work in driving growth and progress in North Tonawanda.

Under the leadership of City Engineer Chelsea Spahr and Assistant City Engineer Travis Sikora, our Engineering Department had another impactful year, managing key projects that enhance the quality of life in North Tonawanda. In 2024, they oversaw millions of dollars in public improvement projects, including the design of our new aquatic facility, the design of our new community center, upgrades at city hall, various streetscape enhancements, the Farnsworth Avenue extension to support future residential development, structural repairs at Live Hose, a city-wide infrastructure study, and many more critical initiatives.

Looking ahead to 2025, Chelsea, Travis, and their team are preparing for an ambitious slate of projects. One of the most anticipated is the Sweeney Bike Path Extension, a \$2 million project that will connect Mayor's Park to the Botanical Garden. Originally designed in 2021, this project will finally break ground this spring after securing additional funding through a NYSDOT TAP Grant. This funding will allow the path to be completed in one phase and enhance the sweeney street neighborhood along the route.

Major infrastructure upgrades are also planned, including the \$1.4 million Zimmerman and Cramer Street waterline replacement, as well as the \$610,000 Meadow/Payne intersection realignment. The department is also leading a \$625,000 study on reconnecting the community along Twin City Memorial Highway, laying the groundwork for a potential \$30 million federal grant to help reconstruct and revitalize this critical corridor in our city.

Thanks to the dedication and expertise of Chelsea, Travis, and their team, these projects will strengthen our city's infrastructure, enhance daily life for residents, and position North Tonawanda for a bright and thriving future.

North Tonawanda remains a safe and thriving community thanks to the dedication of our Police Department under the leadership of Chief Keith Glass. In 2024, the department responded to approximately 50,000 calls for service, addressing everything from serious crimes like robberies and assaults to quality-of-life concerns. Their increased presence on our roadways has led to a 28% decrease in DWI arrests and a 7% reduction in accidents, reflecting a strong focus on traffic safety and enforcement. Following last year's incident where a school traffic guard was struck by a vehicle, the city recently launched a pilot program using a third-party traffic camera system to analyze patterns and develop solutions for safer streets.

This past year, we also welcomed our new K9, Sasha, who replaced the retired K9 Stella. Sasha and her handler, Officer Jeff Kam, have already made a significant impact, ensuring the continued success of our K9 operations. Additionally, the department introduced two new drones, operated by a trained team of officers. These drones were instrumental in solving major crimes, including the apprehension of suspects in a large multi-county RV and camper theft ring.

Long-overdue upgrades to the department's gun range will begin this year, modernizing equipment for essential firearms training—a facility that has remained largely unchanged since the 1980s.

Community engagement remains a top priority. Officers continue to strengthen relationships with residents through events like the NT senior class picnic, youth basketball tournaments, and

holiday programs such as “Boxes of Hope” and “Shop With A Cop,” which provided over 120 children with toys and clothing. Additional outreach efforts, including Trunk or Treat events and child safety seat checks, further highlight the department’s commitment to public service beyond law enforcement.

Looking ahead to 2025, the department will participate in critical training programs, including emergency vehicle operation and active shooter response, with a focus on ensuring the safety of students and staff in our schools. Plans are also in place to replace outdated surveillance cameras in high-risk areas, providing detectives with modern tools to investigate crimes such as robberies and assaults. Additionally, with the growing number of annual events in our downtown area, new safety measures will be implemented to prevent vehicular incidents along closed streets, ensuring a secure environment for large gatherings and celebrations.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Chief Keith Glass and the entire Police Department for their dedication to keeping North Tonawanda one of the safest cities in New York State. Your commitment and innovative efforts make all the difference for our community.

The North Tonawanda Fire Department had a busy and impactful year in 2024, responding to 3,800 requests for assistance—a 1.7% increase from 2023. These included 3,070 emergency medical service calls, 350 fire alarms, 112 motor vehicle accidents, and 244 miscellaneous calls for service. Unfortunately, the year saw \$720,470 in fire-related losses, primarily due to two significant incidents: a large commercial fire and a fire in a vacant building, which together accounted for over \$300,000 of the total losses. Thankfully, there were no fire-related deaths in 2024.

The Training Division oversaw an impressive 3,500 hours of training in 2024, and expanded its training efforts with local mutual aid companies, strengthening our collaborative response capabilities. Four members are currently completing the Emergency Medical Technician Critical Care to Paramedic bridge program, enhancing our advanced life support services for the community. Additionally, three members received specialized training through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, focusing on mental health for first responders, which will help

process critical incidents and prioritize the well-being of our members. The department also welcomed two new firefighters who recently graduated from the Buffalo Fire Academy and are now completing their on-the-job training, filling positions left by two retirements in 2024.

Several large-scale projects came to fruition this year as well, including the consolidation of city mechanics. Thanks to the support of the DPW, Police, and Parks Department mechanics, vehicle repairs for the fire department are now handled more efficiently, and their assistance has been invaluable. Another major milestone was the purchase of a new Rosenbauer Fire Engine, set to replace a 22-year-old apparatus. The new fire engine, currently in production and expected to be delivered in late 2025, will enhance both firefighter and public safety with upgrades such as a 750-gallon water tank, a 360-degree camera system, and additional modern features.

Finally, 2024 marked the end of an era as we bid farewell to Fire Chief Joseph D. Sikora, who retired in January after nearly 35 years of dedicated service to the city, including nine years as Chief. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for his exceptional leadership and wish him a long, healthy, and happy retirement. At the same time, we welcome our new Fire Chief, Douglas Orlowski, whose dedication and vision will continue to lead the department in serving our city with pride and excellence.

Over the past year, significant progress has been made in both our Water Distribution and Wastewater Treatment systems, ensuring continued improvements in service, efficiency, and infrastructure for our city.

Water Distribution & Water

In the past year, Water Distribution repaired 37 water main breaks and completed multiple hydrant repairs, reinforcing the reliability of our system. Through careful budget management, we internally moved funds to purchase a used box truck utility vehicle with a built-in generator and compressor for \$40,000—an incredible cost-saving measure, as a new setup would have cost nearly \$200,000. This vehicle will greatly enhance our department's ability to perform critical water main repairs efficiently.

Additional progress includes completing our valve maintenance and flushing program to maintain chlorine residuals throughout the water system and successfully undergoing a comprehensive EPA inspection of our water plant and distribution system. The City of North Tonawanda remains fully compliant, with no critical violations.

Major steps have also been taken toward modernizing our metering system. We have selected Pro Meters Inc. to install a new remote-read meter system and have already purchased all residential meters with installations underway.

Infrastructure upgrades remain a priority. We have completed Phase 1 of the water plant generator project, ensuring the generator is fully functional and capable of providing uninterrupted service to residents. Phase 2, which will upgrade the plant's electrical infrastructure, is set to go out for bid by the end of February. Additionally, work is underway on a comprehensive water model and GIS inventory infrastructure study of the City's entire water & sewer system, expected to be completed by the end of 2025. This will provide valuable insights into areas of concern that need to be addressed in future projects.

Wastewater

The Wastewater Treatment Plant has also made major strides in efficiency, cost savings, and infrastructure upgrades. Our internal team completed multiple energy-efficient projects in-house, including rehabilitating pumps, installing new compressors with drives, and implementing a piping modification. These improvements not only enhance performance but have also resulted in numerous energy rebates from National Grid, and long-term savings.

The Carbon Building pipe project is now out to bid and will open at the end of February. This critical project is being funded by a \$5 million state grant, along with an additional \$1.5 million Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA) grant. Meanwhile, we are working closely with Hazen and Sawyer Engineering on a \$3.5 million WIIA-funded sludge handling project, which is expected to go to bid at the start of 2026.

Operational improvements have also led to increased efficiency and cost savings. The creation of a Job Group 10 Mechanic Trainee position and restructuring of maintenance staff supervision

following retirements have allowed us to better allocate resources and save money. Additionally, by collaborating with other municipalities to lower chemical costs, we reduced chlorine prices from \$2,718 per cylinder to \$1,840 per cylinder, resulting in an estimated annual savings of \$170,000.

Our team also completed critical electrical maintenance on plant substations, funded through income from utility payments made by our onsite tenant, Calgon Carbon. Lastly, we have tirelessly worked for years to renegotiate a long term lease agreement past administrations created with Calgon Carbon next to our Wastewater Treatment Plant. Costing the city millions of dollars in lost revenue over the years, but we are hopeful that negotiations this year will get the revenue we deserve back into our Sewer Fund.

These achievements reflect our continued commitment to maintaining and improving our water and wastewater infrastructure. While there is still much work to be done, we are in a stronger position than ever, thanks to the dedication of Superintendent Jason Koepsell and his team. Their hard work ensures that North Tonawanda's water and wastewater systems remain reliable, efficient, and well-prepared for the future.

As we continue working to enhance and care for our city, our focus remains on fostering new development, supporting businesses, and strengthening neighborhoods to build a resilient tax base. Thanks to the efforts of Lumber City Development and the leadership of Community Development Director Laura Wilson, North Tonawanda has made remarkable progress on transformative projects.

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), which awarded our city \$10 million through Governor Kathy Hochul's Office and the Department of State, has generated substantial private and public investments. Several private DRI projects are already completed, including the Railroad Museum of the Niagara Frontier, renovations at the Riviera Theatre, and the redevelopment of 211 Main Street. Meanwhile, the Dockside Expansion at 27 Main Street is well underway, creating space for an ice cream shop, prep kitchen, and leasable commercial units. Design work is in progress for the mixed-use project at 122 Main Street, and the transformation

of 230 Oliver Street is expected to be finished by this spring. Additionally, the public waterfront access project at 624 River Road has been successfully completed, further enhancing our city's connectivity to the waterfront.

On the public front, several major projects are moving forward this year. The \$3 million Oliver Street Walkability Project—which includes new sidewalks, bump-outs, lighting, green infrastructure, and more—is currently in the design phase, with construction set to begin in the spring. Additionally, \$1 million in downtown enhancements will soon begin at Charles Fleishmann Park, featuring new pathways, a clock installation, trees, shading, and EV chargers at Manhattan Street.

Our efforts to improve North Tonawanda extend beyond commercial and public projects. After three rounds of funding applications, we were recently awarded a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant to support residential revitalization. These funds will provide much-needed assistance to low-income property owners, helping them rehabilitate their homes and combat blight in our aging neighborhoods.

Looking ahead, 2025 promises even more growth and revitalization. Major redevelopment projects such as the \$33 million 235 River Road Apartments set to break ground this year, and the \$35 million 78 Bridge Street development on Tonawanda Island with anticipated design completion by end of 2025. It's important to highlight that 78 Bridge Street will be the island's first major mixed-use residential development, serving as a catalyst for what we anticipate will be over \$200 million in future developments throughout the island. Meanwhile, our citywide planning efforts continue with updates to the Local Waterfront Revitalization and Comprehensive Plans, both expected to be completed this year.

Over the last few years, we have secured more than \$35 million in various grants, leveraging over \$100 million in private investment—all dedicated to revitalizing North Tonawanda. This momentum has also attracted new businesses. In 2024 alone, we welcomed District 37, Anastasia's Artisan Bread, My Lil' Pawdise, Satisfied Mind, Aster and Lillies, Ascend Physical Therapy, EVS Pet Urgent Care, and many others. More openings are also anticipated in 2025, including IronNTon Café and Mystical Emporium on Oliver Street.

Through the dedication of Laura Wilson and the ongoing efforts of Lumber City Development, North Tonawanda is embracing a future filled with opportunity and progress. These initiatives, backed by state and private investments, will continue transforming our city—attracting new residents, businesses, and visitors to experience all that North Tonawanda has to offer.

Over the past year, North Tonawanda has truly thrived, thanks to the hard work of our city departments, local businesses, elected officials, and the support of New York State. Under this administration, we remain committed to keeping taxes low, enhancing services and safety, expanding new developments, and, most importantly, unifying our community. North Tonawanda has become a recognized destination across New York State, and we should all take pride in living and working here.

Thank you to everyone in attendance today for your commitment to our city. North Tonawanda's potential is immense, and I am truly honored to serve this incredible community.

Austin J. Tylec

Honorable Austin J. Tylec
Mayor, City of North Tonawanda