

December 13, 2009

2010 Niagara County Legislature
Attn: William Ross, current chair
Peter Smolinski
Paul Wojtaszek
Phillip Russell Rizzo

Honorable Legislators:

The representatives of the 22 member organizations of the Cultural Alliance of the Tonawandas are pleased that a County-wide trolley is being studied. However, we wish to officially state our objections to the three routes being from Niagara Falls to Lewiston and Youngstown, one from Niagara Falls to Lockport, and one along the Niagara Wine Trail. A fourth route needs to be included.

North Tonawanda is a cultural destination, along with our sister City of Tonawanda on the other side of the Erie Canal, with two historic and eclectic downtowns on either side of the Canal. We have the best and most utilized waterfront in Western New York, on both the Erie Canal and the Niagara River.

We have music (Buffalo Suzuki Strings Musical Arts Center, Historic Riviera Theatre & Performing Arts Center, the national championship American Legion Post 264 Band, free concerts on the Erie Canal on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays during the summer months.

We have art (Carnegie Art Center, Partners in Art Studios & Gallery).

We have theatre (Starry Night Theatre/Ghostlight Theatre; Historic Riviera Theatre & Performing Arts Center).

We have history (North Tonawanda History Museum, Herschell Carrousel Factory Museum, Railroad Museum of the Niagara Frontier. And in our sister city, we have the Historical Society of the Tonawandas Museum and the Benjamin Long Homestead and Vietnam Veterans Museum. While your trolley won't go across the County line to Tonawanda, those taking your trolley would be able to quickly cross a short bridge and walk to those locations.

We have military monuments: Marine Corps and Seabees in Ray Klimek Veterans Park on the shore of the Niagara River; a World War II and a Vietnam Veterans memorial in Brauer Park near our City Hall and historic Sweeney Cemetery; and a joint memorial on the Renaissance Bridge between the two cities.

We have canal boat rides and other recreational activities on the water. We have Canal Fest of the Tonawandas, the largest canal festival in New York State, which runs for eight days each

July. We have the Taste of the Tonawandas and many other events for tourists to enjoy. We have a farmer's market which is open year round on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. We have wonderful city parks along the canal, the river, and in the midst of the city and Deerwood Golf Course.

We have a unique mix of small shops and restaurants in our historic downtown area which draw people who appreciate the character of these two shopping districts. There are antiques, unusual gift items, art and historic gifts and books, and good food. We have waterfront restaurants (Dockside on the Erie Canal and Shore's Waterfront Restaurant on Tonawanda Island on the Niagara River overlooking Grand Island, the City of Tonawanda, and a wonderful view of the river. The Grand Lady on Grand Island can accommodate groups wishing to dock in the Tonawandas. We have an assortment of quality restaurants in the downtown shopping area in both shopping areas. Throughout our two cities, we have many quality restaurants.

Our two little cities have much to offer to tourists--and to residents of Niagara Falls, Lockport, Lewiston, Youngstown, etc. who have not yet found their way here. Those who have return often.

The North Tonawanda History Museum will be developing part of our building into a visitors center, the Gateway Cities Welcome Center, to promote ALL of Niagara County as well as our two Canal/River cities. The History Museum Board began six years ago with the goal of changing the existing status of North Tonawanda in Niagara County--at the time sort of considered a cast off out in the boondocks part of Niagara County or even perhaps part of Erie County instead because our name relates us to our two Erie County neighbors to the south.

We, the History Museum, offer our facility as a trolley ticket sale or reservation site. We have a municipal parking lot across from the rear entrance to our building. Trolleys depositing tourists at our location also will be able to park and wait while the tourists walk to dozens of things within walking distance of our building.

The History Museum has presented walking tours of North Tonawanda since before we had even a temporary building under us. In our first year we began putting together a tour guide of North Tonawanda for self-guided walking history tours. We released it in 2005 and it continues to be a popular item in our gift shop. We also in 2008 coordinated with the municipal historians and representatives of several historical organizations and edited the Niagara Historic Trail guide. Niagara County gave us a \$5,000 grant for the printing of this guidebook. Sales of the book are enabling us to establish a reserve for regular updating and reprinting of this guidebook to twelve towns, three cities, and five villages in Niagara County and their rich history.

The Cultural Alliance of the Tonawandas began in June 2009. We grew from 16 participating organizations in June to 22 now, including the two merchant organizations on either side of the canal and their members.

We have already met with Heather Peck of Lockport Main Street and Frank Brzezinski, Economic Development Coordinator for the Main Street Business & Professional Association in Niagara Falls (Main Street Niagara) is working with both Lockport Main Street and the Cultural Alliance of the Tonawandas. A number of our Alliance members are also part of the Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas Tourism Committee, which was recently renamed the Twin Cities Promotion Committee. A number of members of the History Museum's Advisory Committee are also members of this Chamber Committee.

ALL of our elected officials on the Niagara County side are kept aware of the Cultural Alliance efforts and we would expect that they would, individually and collectively, support our request for North Tonawanda to be included in the planning for trolleys. The Cultural Alliance of the Tonawandas continues to be grateful for the \$2,500 grant made by the Legislature for our marketing and promotion efforts as a new alliance. We do, however, request that we, the North Tonawanda portion of Niagara County, not be forgotten in future plans for promoting tourism in Niagara County such as the much needed trolley!

Donna Zellner Neal, Secretary
Cultural Alliance of the Tonawandas
c/o
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