

North Tonawanda Common Council

# Braun appointed clerk/treasurer

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Interim Tribune Editor

On Tuesday, the North Tonawanda Common Council voted 3-1 to appoint current 2nd Ward Alderman Donna Braun as city clerk/treasurer. The position was vacated when then-city clerk/treasurer Matthew Parrish resigned on Aug. 9. Assistant City Clerk Lori Swartz has filled the position in the interim.

Following the meeting, the mayor's office released a statement announcing Braun's appointment. In it, Common Council President Eric Zadzilka said, "We had a good pool of applicants but believe Donna Braun was the standout candidate based on her work experience and her work on this council. ... We have some significant challenges in front of us and having a Clerk/Treasurer who understands the issues and can work collaboratively with us was of tremendous importance."

The statement also quotes 1st Ward Alderman Robert Schmigel, who said, "In these times of great uncertainty, Donna's common sense approach to government and her ability to bring people together to problem solve is exactly what we need."

"Clerk/Treasurer Braun will take the oath of office on Wednesday morning," the statement concluded.

Following the vote, Zadzilka commented that, compared to other candidates, Braun had useful skills in areas outside accounting.

"(Some) of the things we were looking for in these applications was customer service, management, and also dealing with amounts of money coming in and going out on a daily basis," Zadzilka said. "A lot of the resumes we got were accounting-based, and only accounting-based, which is

## World War II veteran Gosch named interim alderman

With Donna Braun set to vacate her seat on Wednesday, Alderman-at-Large Robert Pecoraro nominated 97-year-old William Gosch to serve as an interim replacement.

According to Pecoraro, Gosch is a lifelong NT resident, and served in the Marine Corps during World War II. He went on to mention that Gosch was a graduate of Niagara University class of 1950, served as general manager for the Richardson Boat Company, and elsewhere served on the North Tonawanda Housing Authority.

"I'll tell you, if you wanted to know anything about North Tonawanda. Mr. Gosch is the guy to talk to," Pecoraro said. "He's always been a friendly neighbor. Many of us have been to his neighborhood dessert parties to promote neighborliness in the community. He's a tremendous source of history, and has an eagerness for North Tonawanda to absolutely succeed. And we get to honor a man, who's a member of the greatest generation. ... He's truly a testament that age is only a number."

Prior to the vote, Tylec asked for

clarification on how long Gosch's interim period would last. Pecoraro replied that Gosch would be a temporary replacement until the council fills the position through the Common Council's interview process.

"I just want to make sure we're not jumping the gun on anything and that it just follow the same procedures that we did for clerk/treasurer. I don't know. I think we might get a little bit of backlash that we didn't make it fair for everyone," Tylec said.

Braun indicated that the temporary position would be a way to honor Gosch and his love for the city.

"I just think it might be a nice honor for him to sit up here while you guys do the interview and resume process," Braun said.

Tylec then asked what Gosch's role and duties would be and whether he would have voting capabilities.

"He is a full voting member of the Common Council, if we appoint him," Pecoraro replied.

Tylec then wanted to clarify that the interview process would still take place.

I just want to make sure that ... the discussion a month from now isn't, 'Well, he's already been here for a month, so he's the candidate, right?' I just want it to be fair for everyone in the city and I totally understand the honor piece of it," Tylec said.

Zadzilka reiterated that Gosch's appointment would allow the council to continue its duties while the application and interview process is conducted.

Pecoraro then said, "I already have a couple projects I've talked to him that I would like to work on him with in the 2nd Ward."

"In the next month?" Tylec asked. "What are some of those projects?"

Pecoraro replied, "Well, one is to - well, I'm not going to go into those details now. Let's get him approved and then I'll discuss it with you later on."

Gosch's appointment was brought to a vote and was approved unanimously.

Zadzilka later said the board would look to have the interview/application process completed by Sept. 1.

very qualifying. However, we want an all-encompassing situation when we're looking at this job."

Alderman-at-Large Austin Tylec was the lone nay vote. In his explanation, Tylec said, "Given the current financial state that the city is in ... I really do believe that we need to find a clerk treasurer that has a very strong financial background at this."

During her closing comments, Braun read a statement thanking the board for their decision.

"Thank you to everyone up here on the council for appointing me for the position of the clerk/treasurer," Braun said. "It has been an honor and a privilege to serve on this council for six and a half years as the 2nd Ward alder-

woman.

"I've always tried to address issues and concerns for the residents to the best of my ability, in a timely manner. When talking to residents they always have asked me, 'How do you find the time to do all the things that you do for the city and work a full-time job?' My response has always been to them: I love the city and I would love to do more for the city when the time presented itself.

"That time is now.

"With the opportunity to serve as the clerk/treasurer for the City of North Tonawanda, I will continue to represent not only just the 2nd Ward, but I will represent the whole entire city."

Braun also acknowledged some of the comments related to her

expertise to the position.

"I have somewhat of a background (handling finances), if anybody wanted to see my resume. I've worked in two different jobs where I've had to handle money - reconcile money coming in, and reconcile the money going out," Braun said.

"Is there a learning curve here at the city level? Absolutely. It's a brand-new job and with any job there's a learning curve. But part of the clerk/treasurer's job is working with people; it's working with the clerk's office ... and I have those skills. I've already handled residents' concerns with the constituents with the residents in the 2nd Ward. So I think I am pretty well versed and all-around qualified for the job."

In his closing comments, Zadzilka said that, with Braun at the helm of the clerk/treasurer position, city officials would be looking to hit the ground running" when it comes to correcting the city's financial issues.

## Democratic Chair takes issue with patronage handouts during fiscal crisis in NT

In a press release sent out Wednesday morning, Niagara County Democratic Chairman Jason Zona chastised North Tonawanda officials for what he called "a string of patronage-polituted events in the City of North Tonawanda."

The press release continues, "City Clerk/Treasurer, Matt Parrish, the Chief Fiscal Officer of the city, resigned the week of the state's release of a scathing audit that lambasted the city's fiscal mishandlings. In leaving, a vacancy was created for city Clerk/Treasurer, which has since been filled with Second Ward Alderwoman Donna Braun who recently lost her job at the Western Regional OTB where the GOP controls a majority of employment.

"As we predicted a week ago, the NT GOP, which has dominated the city for almost two decades, and now has the lumber city on the brink of bankruptcy, put the friends and family plan in motion again. Donna Braun has jumped from one patronage job to the next. After losing her job at the OTB, she immediately receives a handout from the city. Just like the rest of the GOP run council, she is just as responsible for the fiscal crisis in North Tonawanda as anyone else - now the GOP is putting her in charge of fixing it. They stopped trying to hide it a long time ago."

## Artist recognition 'pretty amazing'

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creative director from Manila, Sukeknik's accomplishment is still incredibly impressive as she was the only college student among the finalists. In an interview for Buffalo State's website, Diaz said, "Typically, the finalists and winners are employees at agencies or freelance graphic artists. ... When reviewing this year's submissions, I was quite surprised and pleased that Crista, as a student, made it into the final round. It's a pretty remarkable feat."

Sukeknik said it was humbling just to be considered.

"It's pretty amazing. I feel so honored that they chose my design and that it was judged as a competitor among some of the top professionals around the world," she said. "For someone just starting out, you know, that gives a lot of credibility and it validates your abilities. These people are already with big agencies and they're already so established, so it's amazing to be alongside them.

Ad Age reps weren't the only ones to praise Sukeknik's abilities. Buffalo State associate professor of graphic design Stan Friesen called Sukeknik's work "top shelf" and said that she was possibly in the top 5% of all the students he's taught. To add more weight to that statement, in addition to teaching at Buff State since 2000, Friesen had spent several years previously teaching art in Pakistan to missionary and expat chil-

dren, as well as a five-year stint at a liberal arts college in Kansas where he's originally from.

Describing her as infinitely talented, yet humble and quiet, Friesen went on to highlight one of the points the Ad Age judges had mentioned.

"She's all about concept. ... If you can get a solid concept then what that enables you to do is to produce a broad range of work," Friesen said. "If you just have single, narrow thoughts you might be able to come up with one good drawing, or one good advertisement or ad campaign ... but if you're overall concept is strong, then that takes on a life of its own and then you get a whole bunch of good stuff related to the same theme.

"I think that's where one of (Sukeknik's) major strengths is. She can think well and look at a problem from a lot of different directions and

then, when she gets started, she's got several, avenues she can pursue. That's what's exciting to see."

Speaking of her recent achievement, Friesen said, "I think it shows the level that she can jump in at. I think the fact that her work easily can stand with other professionals' work, I think that'll really help her in the job search and in the job market and it's really kind of up to her where she takes it.

"I think she's got the skills and the hutzpah or a personality to be able to present herself. Her work will lead her and then I think once she gets in (the industry) I think she'll go far. It will be exciting."

Fortunately, as Friesen noted, Sukeknik has a great support system to help foster her abilities.

Sukeknik said she's been blessed with an encouraging family who has been instrumental in urging her to

follow her childhood dreams to become an artist.

"I know they're very proud of this accomplishment. My dad actually used to be in advertising back in the day so he kind of has an idea of this industry that I'm going into so he's been very helpful with that just to give me some insight," she said.

"Just to know that he's got my back is really wonderful. My whole family is really supportive."

Sukeknik graduated from Buff State summa cum laude in May with a bachelor of fine arts degree. In addition, Sukeknik was part of the Muriel A. Howard Honors Program, won the portfolio review and two silver awards from AAF Buffalo in 2020, and designed the winning designs for the honors program's T-shirts in 2017 and 2019.

To see more of Sukeknik's art, visit [www.cristasukennik.com](http://www.cristasukennik.com).

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