

# Village of Lewiston: Conde, Gibson to seek reelection

Incumbent Village of Lewiston candidates Daniel Gibson and Nick Conde announced their intention to seek another term on the Board of Trustees. They earned the Republican line for the Sept. 15 election.

Gibson and Conde have served the Village of Lewiston as trust-

ees for the past seven years, and they said they remain committed to continue their work for the village and its residents.

A press release said the two men have worked closely with village stakeholders to ensure the developments in the municipality were being completed in

a safe and historically aesthetic manner; ensuring the sale of the Frontier House and securing government and private grants for parks and recreational bike trail; and leading the working group with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to restore the docks and prom-

enade area of the village waterfront.

"Conde and Gibson also bring their energy and experience to search for innovative and green ways to improve the efficiency of our village government without drastic cuts in services or onerous tax increases.

"The Gibson and Conde team promises to assure that the Village of Lewiston residents future is the same friendly, safe, green and financially stable village in which to raise their families," the press release noted.

## NT: Tylec takes issue with city officials' criticism of state audit

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Interim Tribune Editor

Last Tuesday, North Tonawanda Alderman-at-Large Austin Tylec issued a press release criticizing certain city officials for their response to a critical audit of the city's finances issued by the New York state comptroller's office. Since the audit's publication, some current and former officials have disputed some of the audit's findings and have elsewhere implied it had political motivations.

Among his more serious criticisms, Tylec took particular issue with a statement made to the Tribune by former city Clerk-Treasurer Matt Parish.

The audit said Parish (as clerk/treasurer) transferred \$1 million from the city's water fund, and \$550,000 from the capital projects fund, to the general fund, despite both of those amounts being designated for planned capital projects.

Last Thursday, Parish said a resolution dated Dec. 6, 2019, authorized the clerk-treasurer, "to make temporary loans whenever necessary from various city funds until revenues are received and these loans are repaid."

As evidence, Parish included a screenshot of a scanned copy of that meeting's minutes, which also showed the resolution was unanimously passed by the council.

"That, in itself, designates me,

and said that I'm allowed to make that transfer as necessary," Parish said. "Although the auditors came back and advised against doing that, there was nothing illegal and there was absolutely no impropriety on my behalf."

He went on to say the borrowed funds were repaid once the city's property tax revenues came in.

However, Tylec said the document provided by Parish wasn't what was passed.

In an attachment provided alongside the press release, Tylec included a copy of the resolution as it appeared on the agenda. It has slightly different phrasing: "Please authorize the city Clerk-Treasurer to make temporary loans whenever necessary from the General Fund until revenues are received and these loans are repaid."

In his press release, Tylec said, "The meeting minutes, a public record of any public meeting that is mandated by NYS Law, were falsified. ... The resolution, with an official time stamp, is being provided as an attachment as the city did not provide the agenda for public viewing on their website, making it impossible for a member of the public to identify the changes made."

In a statement last Wednesday, Parish responded to the claim.

"There was absolutely no falsification of documents or anything of that nature," he said. "The min-

utes are a reflection of what was said or voted on at the meeting. Meeting minutes will very often differ from what was on the proposed agenda, which acts as a guideline. If you watch the video of the meeting on Jan. 2, 2020, you will very clearly see that what was voted on, and passed unanimously was to allow the treasurer to transfer funds from 'various' city accounts.

"At the end of the day, all that matters is that the meeting minutes match what was verbally said and/or voted on and, in this case, they do. No falsified documents, no improprieties, no malfeasance."

Tylec disputed the notion. He said, "Procedurally and legally, this means nothing. The item was never properly changed. He changed the item on his own free will post-submission to the public record and presented it to the council for a vote. It is my opinion, after consulting independent experts, that these actions are fraudulent and manipulation of public documents. He was not granted the authority to do what he did, and that is clearly stated in the comptroller's audit."

Tylec went on to highlight quotes from pages 7 and 8 from the audit, which read, "To pay the February and March obligations, the Treasurer improperly used a total of \$2.5 million in restricted cash from reserve funds, which

depleted all of the general fund reserves," and, "The council did not approve this use of reserve funds."

"(Parish's) claim is that, because he read it that way, that's what (the council) voted on. That's not how it works. That item was never discussed or changed or submitted to the public record," Tylec said. "He changed it without permission or proper action."

Elsewhere in the press release, Tylec also voiced concerns over city Accountant Jeffrey Zellner's criticisms of the audit that he made on Aug. 13 before the Common Council. There, Zellner addressed findings in the audit, such as whether or not the recent budgets were balanced, whether or not the city is at risk of running out of money, and whether the city depleted the fund balance to "unsafe levels." Many of Zellner's answers were in opposition to the findings laid out by the comptroller's office.

Per the press release, Tylec said, "The audit speaks for itself in regards to all of these claims. ... To say that NT adopted balanced budgets is preposterous; they weren't balanced, they weren't rational, and that's why I voted 'no' on last year's budget after none of the concerns I raised were addressed."

Tylec also took issue with comments North Tonawanda Mayor

Arthur Pappas has made since the audit was made public.

A letter of response from Pappas is included with the audit wherein the mayor expresses appreciation for the auditor's "assistance during this process" as well as "constructive and informative discussion" during the exit interviews. In a press release from Aug. 8, the mayor said, "The audit contains many suggestions which have and will be implemented."

However, when asked by the Tribune on Aug. 13 if he, like Zellner and Alderman-at-Large Robert Pecoraro, believed the audit was in some way politically motivated, Pappas replied, "We have our suspicions."

"There's nothing political about an independent watchdog auditing a municipality," Tylec wrote. "It's only when the results come out this poorly that we reach for every excuse we can get our hands on - where's the accountability?"

This week, the Tribune reached out to the state comptroller's office for comment on North Tonawanda's city officials' criticisms. In a statement, Deputy Press Secretary Tania Lopez said, "The audit findings are clear and the public deserves answers. We urge the Common Council to act on the recommendations and design a plan to move forward to protect North Tonawanda taxpayers."



### New officers at LPD

The Lewiston Police Department officially swore in four of its newest officers Monday in a brief ceremony prior to the Lewiston Town Board meeting. Pictured, Chief Frank Previte, left, is shown with officers Varney, Sitek, DeFelice and Smith, who all joined LPD in 2020. Each was recently hired to fill department vacancies. (LPD photo)

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