

NT: Dyngus Day parade, police reform approved

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Tribune Editor

Plans for North Tonawanda's April 5 Dyngus Day celebration are full-speed ahead.

On Tuesday, Common Council members approved a proposal submitted on behalf of the NT Neighborhood Watch that includes a parade down Oliver Street, from 11th Avenue to 1st Avenue, ending at Dom Polski's.

In a statement posted to the North Tonawanda Neighborhood Watch Facebook page, Joseph Maranca, the group's chairman, thanked the council for its support and explained the prevailing notion behind the celebration was to help support businesses along Oliver Street.

"I'd like to thank the North Tonawanda Common Council for voting in favor of our Dyngus Day celebration. We are confident in this event being a huge success and will proudly showcase our city's rich heritage and culture," he said. "We hope that this event also showcases the wonderful and unique businesses our city has to offer and to help them during this challenging time of COVID-19. We are going to do everything in our power to ensure that this event is safe for our residents and participants. In the coming days, we will be launching our sign-up sheet for those who wish to participate in the parade, so please stay tuned."

The group can be found at www.facebook.com/groups/northtonawandaneighborhoodwatch.

Mayor Arthur Pappas and 2nd Ward Alderman Frank DiBernardo reminded residents plans still hinge on COVID-19 numbers. They said that, in a worst-case scenario, the council is looking to create a backup plan.

"We still are under a declaration of emergency with the state and we still have our, every five days, reporting to put in with emergency orders. We're going to try our best, as city officials to make sure something with this parade works out and works out successfully," Pappas said. "We all want it to happen and we're certainly going to try to abide by any restrictions or the there might be involved via the state or the health department. But we're looking forward to this. It's something that's a real good start to the opening of spring."

DiBernardo said, "We are continuing to have meetings on it. We are coming up with, we'll say the COVID-19 version of it, too. But right now, everybody involved is positive (minded) and there's nobody that's talking about canceling this. So, if it's canceled, it will not be our (the council's) choice."

NT Police Adopt Reform Implementation Plan

The council voted to adopt the police department's implementation plan per Gov. Andrew Cuomo's executive order 203, "New York State Police Reform And Reinvention." The purpose of the collaborative is "to foster trust, fairness and legitimacy" within communities throughout the state and "to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color."

The governor called for state-wide, municipality-led reforms during the nationwide protests against police brutality and racial injustice that took place last summer follow-

ing the death of George Floyd.

The committee, composed of city and police officials along with members of the community, met several times over the past few months to address resident's concerns. Many topics were covered, including officer accountability, deescalation training and crisis intervention, recruitment and selection of officers, and community outreach.

In the report's conclusions, the department said it has met the standards mandated by the governor, and "reviewed the department's current policies and practices with particular attention paid to mental health calls, domestic violence and overdose calls."

The report continued:

"We now have a team comprised of Detective Lieutenant Day, who is a certified Mental Health Counselor and/or a Detective from the Special Victims/Youth Services Bureau following up with each mental health crisis, drug overdose and domestic violence incidents. The purpose is to follow up after a crisis and be able to put services in place after the situation has calmed down."

"The committee also found that there should be additional support for mental health once an individual has become involved in the criminal Justice system due to their mental health. One way to implement this is with the starting of Mental Health Court in the City of North Tonawanda. This would be similar to Drug Court which is already in place in North Tonawanda and the Mental Health Court would mimic the Mental Health Courts that are already in place in other municipalities."

The plan also says officers will receive additional training in crisis intervention and be "provided with additional resources to link community members with these

services."

A therapy dog program was also added for victims and officers to be utilized during and after traumatic events.

The report indicated an increased effort on community outreach. Officers will be encouraged to continue volunteer efforts in the communities they patrol. Efforts are being made to make them a more familiar, positive presence in schools to help foster relationships with students.

"We had a number of people from the community who are involved in this and, again, I would just like to thank them for their time, their effort; everything they did to help get this done it was quite an endeavor, throughout the entire county and I'm sure the state," Police Chief Thomas Krantz said. He urged residents to reach out if they have any lingering concerns. "Just because the reform is done, I would like to say to everybody in the community: If you do still have concerns, please reach out and contact me. You can always go to our website, you can call me, you can email me and I will get back to you and we will address your concerns."

Krantz can be reached at 692-4325 or tkrantz@ntpolice.com.

Elsewhere at the meeting:

- The board approved The Flower City Sportsman to hold a fishing tournament at Gratwick Riverside Park on Saturday, Sept. 25.

- Council President Robert Pecoraro asked residents who wished to comment during the council's virtual meetings (due to COVID-19) to email Clerk Treasurer Donna Braun at dbraun@northtonawanda.org prior to the meeting with one's name and phone number. The resident will be called during the meeting and have a chance to have their question/concerned addressed.

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- Aug. 2 - NEW - History of Country Music Show - Walters Ranch/Lunch
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