



# WITH THE FLOW

Volume 1 No. 7  
Dec 5, 2017

## Monthly Message

One aspect of the events and activities that followed the discharge of July 29th that I have been contemplating more intently is that of the leadership of our organization. I have been doing this in the context of what I have come to regard as the "culture" of the NFWB. I'm not an institutional psychologist or researcher but I do know that building a strong institutional culture with a modern workforce is the key to success in managing our dual responsibilities of delivering safe drinking water and treating wastewater in the best interests of our ratepayers and the general public. I don't think there is any denying that the "culture" of the NFWB, forged as a department of the city of Niagara Falls well before the current legal framework of the organization was created, has, in many respects, carried over and persisted here for the 15 plus years since this Board was established. It is a far from perfect culture, in fact, each of the "Employee Profiles" that have been included since I inaugurated this newsletter has referred to that culture in far less than glowing terms. They describe a pervasive sense that politics governs many of the decisions made here and that individual members of the workforce often fear that political turmoil, infighting, or patronage considerations could result in their termination. Though this type of thinking may have no basis in fact, it still often contributes to a general workforce dissatisfaction that spreads quickly and results in what I perceive as a fairly large portion of the employee pool not performing their jobs in the manner that the board and I reasonably expect.

My goal is to upend and reconfigure that culture by creating an atmosphere that fosters teamwork and provides a supportive environment that encourages each of us to achieve our goals. Chairman O'Callaghan and the board have shown their support for these efforts by swiftly ending a long stalemate over new collective bargaining agreements, by their insistence on the establishment of comprehensive training of new hires and long-term employees covering the widest range of job categories, and, among other things, by approving the on-going leadership training program led by Shoshanna Cogan, an international trainer and consultant. As is described in the email from Ms. Cogan displayed later in this newsletter, she is impressed by the quality of our workforce and the commitment to those in her training class to reaching higher. Moreover, as board member Nick Forster recently pointed out in a presentation to the Niagara Falls City Council, a certain malaise had infected the organization over the last several years that resulted in a general failure to address the most basic operational needs; a situation the board and management are aggressively addressing in every respect on a day to day basis. Of course, even changes that are necessary can't happen overnight and it would be unrealistic to expect an immediate buying in by the various stakeholders to all it will take to get things right. But a good start has been made and hopefully we can continue to grow and change together.

Another way to describe the culture shift that I envision is set out in Jim Perry's excellent piece in this newsletter entitled "The Importance of Strategic Management." Jim's deep experience in the private sector gives him the insight to note certain differences in public sector employment that may require a variation in approach to accomplish our goals. But he makes clear that implementation of the right strategy can, if properly executed, bring about "buy-in", improve teamwork and make the organization better.

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## Contact

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# Review and Update

## JULY 29 INCIDENT

Although our busy workdays make it seem much more recent, we now are more than a third of a year out from the events of July 29. As an update on that incident, NFWB staff and consultants have been working to further NFWB's long-standing goals of meeting and exceeding our permit requirements for discharges. We have been able to identify some small but meaningful improvements of our procedures and equipment (including raising a key pump, and adding indicator rods to monitor the status of equipment on the bottom of the sedimentation basins). Our WWTP staff has been working with consultants to make other incremental improvements to achieve the most effective treatment possible and to maximize the capture of wet-weather flows – part of our continuing efforts toward improvement. A recent tweak increased water pressure supplied to the sludge dewatering equipment to increase its efficiency and production.

The continued support and leadership of the entire workforce gratefully is acknowledged. Together, all involved are performing important jobs that are vital to the wellbeing of our families, neighbors, community, and the environment.



## PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFE WATER



The Vanguard Group, LLC is continuing to study our operations and is developing recommendations for Board consideration. Areas of concentration include, security, safety, IT, plant optimization and other key operations involved in water distribution. Vanguard personnel are highly qualified individuals

with subject matter expertise in each of the areas within which recommendations will be made. So far I have seen quality work from them and expect more first rate work product to be forthcoming. I certainly look forward to sharing with the Board the fulfillment of Vanguard's mandate to scrutinize each area and provide unvarnished, frank assessments and sound recommendations regarding what they believe is needed for us to improve in those crucial areas.

Preliminarily, Vanguard has suggested we look at participating in the "Partnership for Safe Water", a voluntary program that includes over 200 water utilities throughout the United States. The goal of the Partnership is to provide a level of safety to our customers by implementing prevention programs that legislation or regulations may not fully address. Participation only requires that we provide filtered surface water and plan to optimize our water treatment plant to improve performance. Obviously, while a significant amount of time will be spent in the months ahead

on issues related to the Waste Water Treatment Plant, we can never let up on our mission of efficiently providing safe drinking water. While there would be a cost to the improvements that may be required, we would seek grant funds at the state and federal levels for funds designated for drinking water projects, possibly even including state legislative "member items."

The Safe Water programs we are eligible to join are separated into a treatment plant program or a distribution system program; we could join both programs. However, before making a firm decision to seek Board approval to move forward I want to be sure that there is an honest commitment at every level of the organization, top to bottom, to be fully engaged in the optimization process and other management initiatives. It is my hope that such a commitment will develop and reveal itself through our ongoing leadership training program, through strategic management as explained by Jim Perry and through all of us working together to change the culture of the organization and its focus from simply getting by to seriously evaluating deficiencies in processes and operations and correcting them as we constantly look for ways to improve.

More information on this initiative can be found at:  
[https://www.awwa.org/resources-tools/water-and-wastewater-utility-management/partnership-for-safe-water/gclid/eaiaiqobchmigpej2dvn1wivgqvтч124wdxeaayasaagjpyvd\\_bwe.aspx](https://www.awwa.org/resources-tools/water-and-wastewater-utility-management/partnership-for-safe-water/gclid/eaiaiqobchmigpej2dvn1wivgqvтч124wdxeaayasaagjpyvd_bwe.aspx).

# Review and Update

## VAC TRUCK DELIVERY

The new Vac Truck was delivered on November 16, see photos below.

This vehicle can effectively hydro excavate and clean out sewers. One key characteristic of the vehicle is that it is designed for use in cold weather operations. Having this combination sewer cleaning truck in service will allow outside crews to perform their work more efficiently, including preventative maintenance, sewer construction and clearing blockages in sewer collection systems. Significant use in the ongoing hydrant repair/replacement program is also contemplated.



L-R Crew members Brian LaBelle and Brandon Moll, Foreman Mike Eagler, Board Member Nick Forster, Crew Leader Specialist John Summerson





# Employee Profile: Sean W. Costello,

Niagara Falls Water Board General Counsel



When the board realigned our legal team and named Sean W. Costello as NFWB General Counsel as of October 1, they knew they weren't gambling on an untested neophyte. Not that Sean presents as a grizzled veteran, but he had been involved in many matters on behalf of this agency long enough to remove

any doubt over whether he would be up to the task of taking charge of the full plate of legal representation.

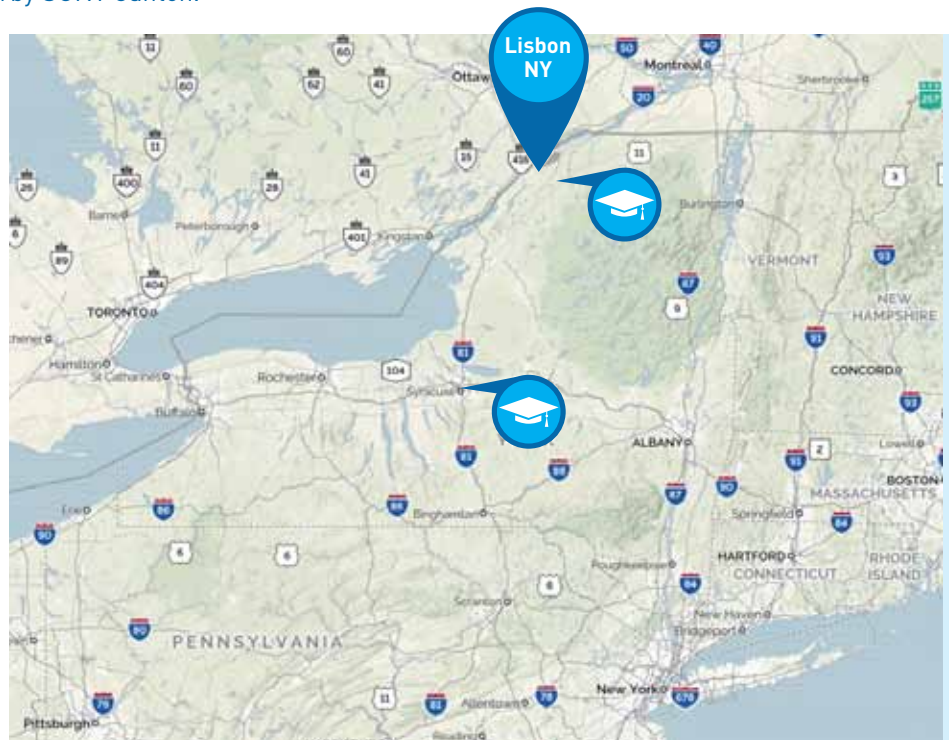
Sean grew up in Lisbon NY, (population 4,102 at the 2010 census, you can check it out on MapQuest, it's closer to Montreal and Ottawa than to Syracuse or Albany!) His parents owned a flower and vegetable nursery business there and Sean helped them out from the time he can first remember. He took advanced placement classes in high school and picked up some college level courses at nearby SUNY Canton.

After high school graduation, which consisted of a graduating class of fewer than 40 students, Sean went on to Syracuse University, where he completed an already accelerated 6-year program in 5 years. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in International Relations and, from the law school at Syracuse, a juris doctor degree. He then joined the Buffalo based law firm of Rupp Baase Pfalzgraf Cunningham, and was admitted to the New York bar. He remains

at Rupp Baase and calls upon the deep bench there for back-up as needed; for example, to address the myriad issues arising from the WWTP discharges of the summer of 2017, he utilized the services of environmental law expert and Niagara Falls native John Kolaga, ([http://www.ruppbaase.com/portfolio\\_page/john-kolaga/](http://www.ruppbaase.com/portfolio_page/john-kolaga/)).

Sean says he enjoys the interesting challenges and the scope of the legal issues that our operations present. For my part, I find his accessibility, promptness, and professionalism on all matters to be a perfect fit for the NFWB. He even admits at times that he doesn't know everything but that he will find an answer. And he finds the right one! While one's motto may not fully define a person, Sean's bywords, "do the right thing", seem apt. He's also partial to "fortune favors the bold", which, judging by the trajectory of his career to date, has served him well.

Sean lives in Williamsville with his wife Laura, also a Syracuse U. graduate and a Northwestern U. Doctor of Audiology (AuD), and 22 month old daughter Riley Heather.



Courtesy of MapQuest

# The Importance of Strategic Management

By Jim Perry



When I was called out of retirement to take my current position one objective I had coming in was to benchmark and strengthen the human resources department. From my perspective, aside from the chief executive, human resources is one of the more vital positions in determining what type of organization you have. Whether the organization is a vibrant, robust learning organization, or a traditional, mainstay type of organization has a lot to do with the human resources strategy and strategic management. So, knowing that I have already been retired and my time here will be relatively short, I wanted to find a professional human resources leader for the future of the organization who could work to build a bridge between the leadership of the organization and the workforce as a first step to identifying who we are as an organization. This is perhaps one of the more difficult tasks of human resources: to implement a vision of strategic management. Add to the complications of varying personalities, the political quagmire of working in a government position, and having to educate people exactly what the role of this department actually is (which is something that is rarely dealt with in the private sector), and you have a challenge that would make the average person throw up their hands and say – “just let me put my time in and go home.” Ah yes, but even as a young child, I was never accused of being average or rarely even normal!

My experience with the public sector thus far has been one of a bit shock and awe, a little dismay, and a whole lot of head scratching. For those who are wondering what the heck I am talking about, the term “*strategic management*” refers to the continuity of activity applying a philosophy to achieve a state of the organization over a period of time. This is something that a good human resources group and leadership team is dedicated to although it may not be obvious to all of those in the organization. Getting to that point is not always as

neat as setting objectives and goals to achieve because, as I previously eluded to, it is complicated by personalities, financial constraints, personnel changes and power struggles among other dynamics within the organization.

In a perfect world, people work together to identify problems and solve them for the betterment of the team. In the real world this is not always the case. For that reason, human resource professionals spend lots of time learning how to work on conflict resolution, or take years of psychology training along with sociology and law. These are disciplines we use almost daily. What’s the bottom line? It is all about getting people to work together. Not punishing people, not disciplining them, but pointing everyone in one direction, working toward shared objectives and goals. The process involves guiding managers and supervisors into making the right decisions and having employees understand why those decisions are made the way they are.

It is easy to order a person to do something and then punish them when they get out of line. But it certainly doesn’t create loyal employees nor does it foster joint problem solving or prompt workers to take the initiative and make a better mouse trap. It does not create employees who wants to put their heart and soul into doing the best they can. But, if a person understands why they are being asked to do something and if they understand the benefits or how their actions may impact the organization, themselves and others, they are more likely to “go along with the plan when no one is watching” or even come up with the idea that can save a sinking ship or create the better mouse trap.

...and this leads me into my topic for next month “Employee Engagement”

# Correspondence, Publications, etc.

## Happy Halloween at O'Laughlin



Left to right, Lisa Landers, Ashley Lasota, and Jessica Basher

## Progress Report on Leadership Training

**From:** Shoshanna Cogan  
**Sent:** Monday, October 23, 2017 5:21 PM  
**To:** Rolfe Porter  
**Subject:** NFWB Leadership Training Program: Impressions to date

Rolfe,

Now that we've completed the first two of 12 modules for the NFWB Leadership Training Program, I'd like to take this opportunity to offer my impressions thus far.

As an international leadership trainer for over 2 decades, I've been very impressed with the quality and commitment of your staff attending the classes.

Each participant in the program has demonstrated an understanding that effective leadership is a lifelong process of self-awareness, skill development, and practical application of the classroom learning into the daily work setting.

Thus far, the classes have included a variety of leadership and management self-assessments, various multi-rater assessment tools to gather others' input and perceptions, leadership skills practice, and concrete action planning. Each member of the NFWB Leadership Training Program has shown high level participation, accountability, and follow-through on the numerous follow-up assignments given at each module.

As we progress through the program, we will be covering many essential leadership topics including:

Leading with Emotional Intelligence, Adaptive Leadership, Communication and Critical Conversations, Navigating Conflict, Crucial Accountability, Problem Solving and Decision Making, Leading Change, Resilience and Stress Management, Coaching for High Performance, Cultural Inclusion, Strategic Planning, and 360 Degree Feedback.

It's a privilege to work with such a talented group of leaders; I look forward to being of continued service.

Highest Regards,

Shoshanna



# Correspondence, Publications, etc. *(cont.)*

## SPDES Inspection



NIAGARA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION  
5467 Upper Mountain Road, Suite 100  
Lockport, New York 14094-1894

October 26, 2017

Rolfe Porter-Executive Director  
Niagara Falls Water Board  
5815 Buffalo Avenue  
Niagara Falls, NY 14304

RE: Annual SPDES Inspection  
Michael C. O'Laughlin  
Water Treatment Plant  
Buffalo Ave, Niagara Falls  
SPDES Permit NY 0243281

Dear Mr. Porter:

This Department on September 29, 2017 conducted an inspection of the above referenced facility. The inspection was conducted in the presence of Robert Rowe, to determine compliance by the facility with the SPDES Permit governing its operation. The inspection included a review of sampling and monitoring records and reports, completion of NYS DEC Compliance Inspection form BWCP-1- 1, and a tour of the facility including SPDES permitted outfalls.

A review of monthly discharge monitoring reports (DMR's) since the last inspection through September, 2017 indicates compliance with permit limits.

No SPDES related violations were noted at the time of the inspection. The cooperation extended by your staff is appreciated by this department.

Based upon the inspection, your facility is in substantial compliance with the terms and conditions of its SPDES Permit.

Please feel free to call this office at 439-7452 if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Gwozdek".

Ronald Gwozdek, P.E.  
Principal Public Health Engineer

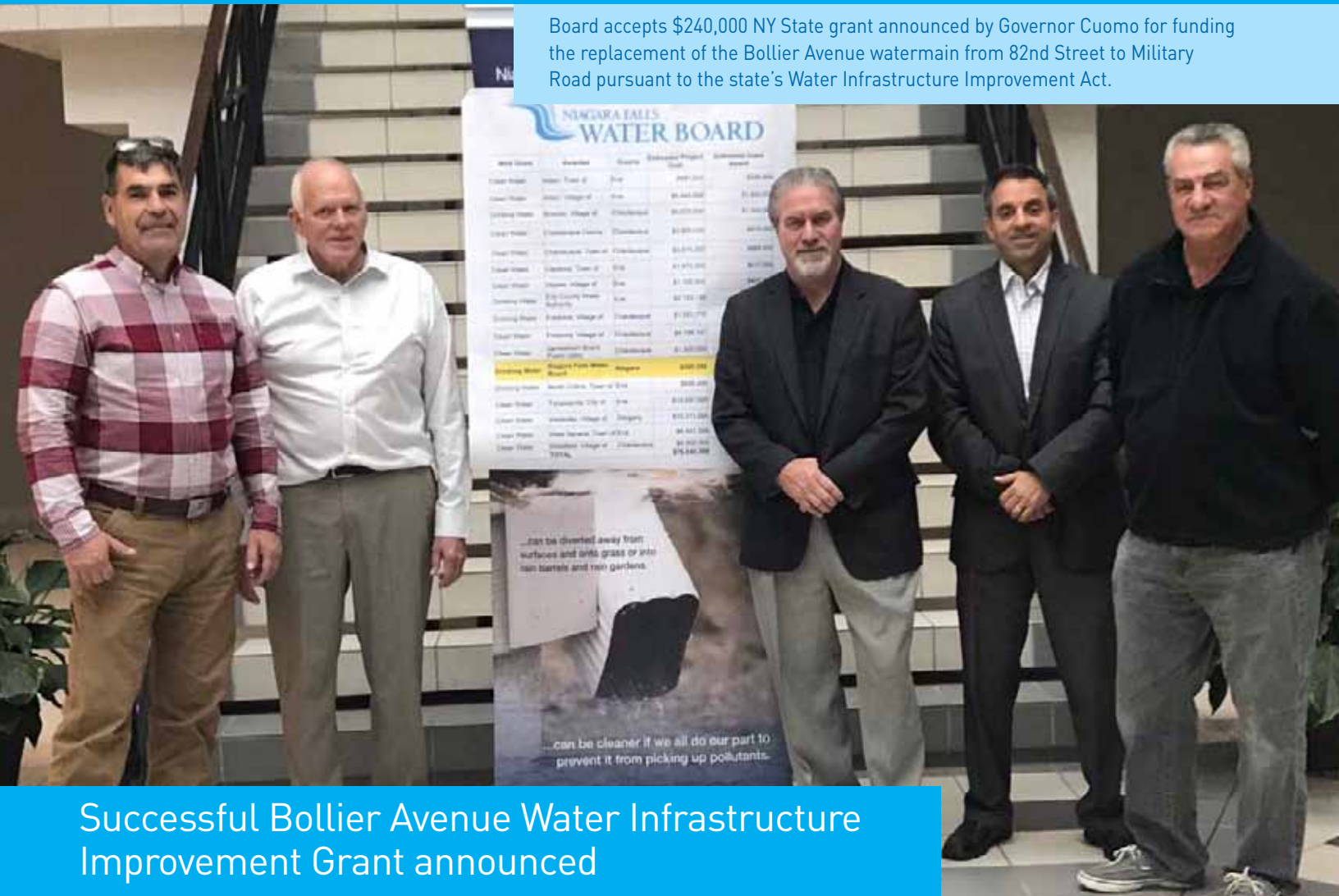
Cc: Jeff Konsella, PE-DEC/R90  
Cc: electronic  
Robert Rowe-NFWB  
Pat Fama-NFWB

PUBLIC HEALTH: PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.



# Correspondence, Publications, etc. *(cont.)*

Board accepts \$240,000 NY State grant announced by Governor Cuomo for funding the replacement of the Bollier Avenue watermain from 82nd Street to Military Road pursuant to the state's Water Infrastructure Improvement Act.



## Successful Bollier Avenue Water Infrastructure Improvement Grant announced

NF City Engineer John Gerlach, Ex. Dir. Rolfe Porter, Niagara County Legislator Mark Grozio, Niagara Falls City Councilman Andy Touma and NFWB Chair Dan O'Callaghan

October 24, 2017

At its regular board meeting of October 23 the Niagara Falls Water Board voted to accept a grant from the NY State Facilities Development Corporation for funding the replacement of the watermain along Bollier Avenue in the city from 82nd Street to Military Road pursuant to the NYS Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA). Governor Andrew Cuomo's recent announcement of the grant is at: <http://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-20-million-grants-vital-water-infrastructure-improvements-western-new>.

The Governor's announcement indicates that the state has approved the NFWB request of \$240,000, the maximum state contribution of 60% of the \$400,000 total project cost. Of the 17 Western New York projects listed in the Governor's announcement the NFWB grant is the only grant made to a Niagara County water system.

"This unprecedented investment continues New York's commitment to helping municipalities develop necessary infrastructure to protect our water resources," Cuomo said, adding: "These investments are crucial to supporting the health and safety of our communities, and help lay the foundation for future growth and prosperity in every corner of this great state."

NFWB Chairman Dan O'Callaghan acknowledged with thanks the support for the grant application of Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster, Niagara County 3rd District Legislator Mark Grozio and the Niagara Falls City Council, especially Councilwoman Grandinetti and Councilman Andrew Touma.



# Correspondence, Publications, etc. *(cont.)*

## Letter to Mayor Dyster



Hon. Paul A. Dyster  
Mayor, City of Niagara Falls  
745 Main Street  
Niagara Falls, NY 14301

November 14, 2017

Re: Water Infrastructure Improvement Act Grant

Dear Mayor Dyster,

As you know, last month the Niagara Falls Water Board received word from Governor Andrew Cuomo that our grant application for a waterline replacement project at Bollier Avenue had been approved in the amount of \$240,000, representing 60% of the total project cost of \$400,000. We recently notified the Facilities Development Corporation of the acceptance of the award and provided a time line for project completion.

This is to express the appreciation of the NFWB for your support of the grant through your personal endorsement and for the significant contribution made by your city Engineering Department in providing needed technical and other information required by the funding source to be included in the grant application. John Gerlach and the department's staff were cooperative in every respect and truly operated in a spirit of mutual cooperation.

As we move forward in the months ahead and address certain obvious, necessary, and capital intensive infrastructure needs, we trust that that spirit of cooperation will continue to prevail and that we can again work together in the best interests of the residents of the city of Niagara Falls.

Thank you again for your assistance.

Very truly yours,

A stylized blue ink signature of Rolfe S. Porter.

Rolfe S. Porter, Executive Director

A stylized blue ink signature of Dan O'Callaghan.

Dan O'Callaghan, Chairman

cc: John Gerlach



## Feedback

As always, your comments or suggestions on the subjects in this newsletter or other areas of interest are welcome and encouraged. Please contact me via email, phone or stop in to my office, if I'm not there say hello to Erika and make an appointment to come back and see me.

Thank you and best regards,

A stylized blue ink signature of RP.

RP

