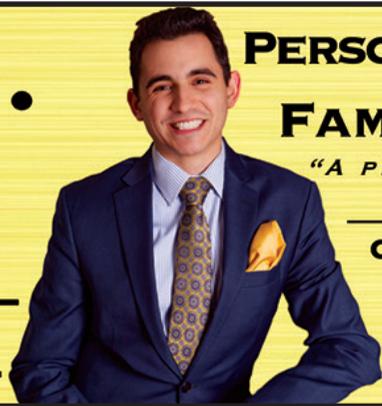


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## BACK TO SCHOOL

Niagara Falls submits plan to New York State that, if approved, would have kids in classrooms two days a week.



(Cont. on pg. 3)

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## Aquarium of Niagara, a Must See Attraction, Continues to Upgrade Despite Pandemic

By: Nicholas D. D'Angelo

Having completed \$10 million in renovations and exhibit upgrades in the past few years, the Aquarium of Niagara has transformed itself before our very eyes.

It seems as though new and exciting attractions are being added every year.

In the past three years alone, the Aquarium

(Cont. on pg. 2)

## Why is Maziarz Working for Company He Implied Fleeced City?

By: Frank Parlato

George Maziarz, 67, has landed on his feet. Once the most powerful Republican in Niagara County, he spent years in comparative obscurity after resigning from the NY State Senate amid a corruption probe in 2014.

The Republican senator from Newfane controlled scores of jobs and decided which candidates got to run for political office, or appointed to various boards on towns and villages, for nearly 17 years. He had over a million dollars

(Cont. on pg. 6)

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# NIAGARA FALLS

## Baby Penguins Join Aquatic Family at Aquarium Cont from Cover



One of many types of jellyfish from the "Aliens of the Sea" exhibit.

added a \$3.6 million Penguin Coast habitat for their Humboldt penguins, a state-of-the-art jellyfish exhibit called 'Aliens of the Sea,' and the forthcoming M&T Bank Shark and Ray Bay Touch Pool.

Opening for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic in July, the Aquarium has implemented measures to keep guests safe including video messaging, floor decals, and signs posted on every exhibit.

Aquarium Spokesperson Christine Streich said, "We've worked hard to ensure

that our COVID-19 related policies and procedures help visitors stay safe while not infringing on opportunities for discovery and inspiration. We've kept things simple, reminding visitors to wear a mask; follow one-way flow of traffic; and one group per exhibit."

While they were closed during the pandemic in April, two baby penguins, named Alpha and Beta, hatched.

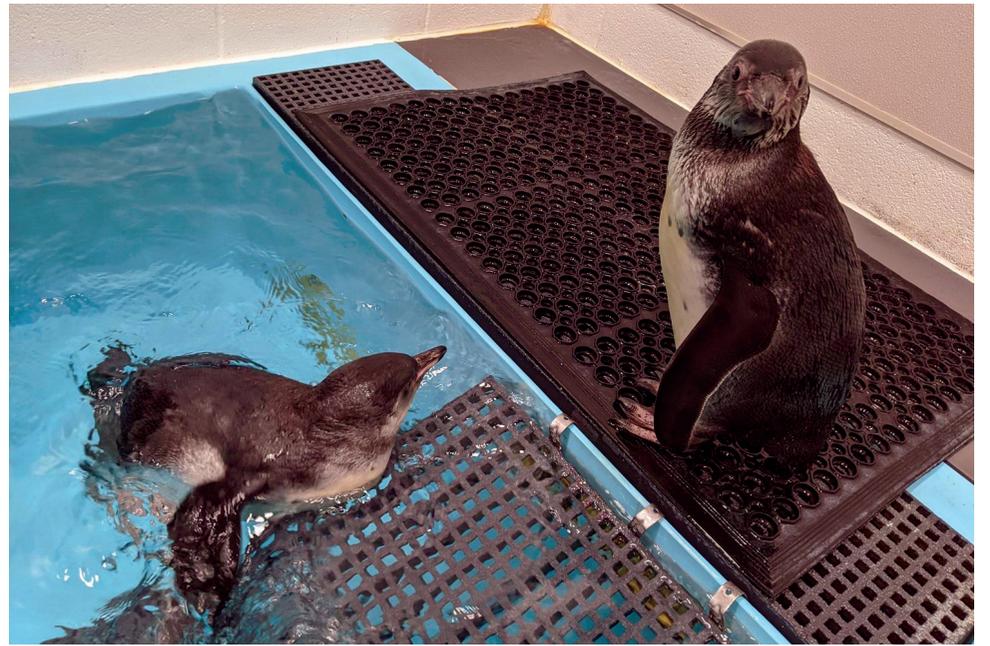
They have grown quickly since then. The babies were under 3 ounces when they hatched and now – at 3 ½ months, they weigh more than six pounds each. A full-grown Humboldt penguin weighs about 10 pounds.

"These are the first penguin chicks to hatch at the Aquarium in 14 years, so it was a monumental occasion at the Aquarium and a ray of light during our COVID-related closure," said Streich.

The Niagara Falls tourism industry has suffered greatly as a result of the pandemic with visitors not permitted to enter the U.S. from many countries, the U.S. - Canada border being closed, and bans on intra-state travel into New York for more than half the state in America.

The Aquarium was no exception to feeling the impact of this.

Streich told the Reporter, "while we expect the COVID-19 crisis to have an



Baby penguins Alpha and Beta.

ongoing impact on tourism, we are optimistic about the rest of the summer and fall seasons. Niagara Falls is a wonderful spot for families looking for a vacation that is accessible by car. We've already seen an influx of visitors from other parts of New York State, Ohio and Pennsylvania."

Meantime, the Aquarium can boast of several projects that have recently been completed or are ongoing such as:

(i) renovating the event room to feature a stunning view overlooking the Niagara gorge - which was completed this past month,

(ii) the M&T Bank Shark & Ray Bay, a 4,000 gallon interactive touch pool featuring sharks, sting rays and various marine invertebrates and fish, which is expected to be completed this fall,

(iii) new digital programming such as

virtual penguin and sea lion painting classes, a virtual yoga at the Aquarium series, and a summer-camp-style virtual series called 'Animal Tales.'

(iv) renovating certain exhibits including a first-floor one that will feature the endangered Asian Arowana.

The Aquarium is not only for tourists, but for the local community.

"For the past several years we've hosted '716 Days,'" said Streich, referring to the area code and the special low price admission. "These are three-day events where local residents get admission to the Aquarium for \$7.16, more than half off the price of adult general admission. We also encourage local families to become Aquarium members and enjoy unlimited admission to the Aquarium for the year."

A one-year family membership is \$75.



# NIAGARA



# REPORTER

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Publisher & Editor in Chief

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# Niagara Falls School District Presents Plan to Re-Open; Two Days Per Week Per Student

## Staff Reporter

The Niagara Falls City School District has announced a plan for most of its 7,200 students to return to school this fall amid declining numbers of Covid 19 cases in the region.

According to the school district, their plan, a "hybrid model" would entail half of students going to school on Monday and Tuesday with the other half attending on Thursday and Friday.

This plan would allow the district to utilize Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday as sanitation days.

Students will be split up by last names.

The other part of the hybrid model will include virtual learning for students at home on days they are not physically in the school building.

Details have to be worked out on the district will handle online learning for children who do not have access to computers or internet in their home. In the spring, the accommodation

was to have printed materials ready for pickup at the schools.

During days children are in school, the plan is for some physical education which will take place outside and at 50% capacity. Students will no longer eat lunch in a cafeteria. Rather, they will eat lunch in classrooms to reduce exposure concerns.

Although students will only be in school two days per week, teachers will report each day.

Superintendent Mark Laurrie has maintained throughout the planning process that face coverings will be mandatory for students and teachers.

New York State has until August 7th to approve the plan submitted by the District.

The Reporter contacted School District Superintendent Mark Laurrie to get some more details on the proposed plan, which, as of press time, still requires Governor Andrew Cuomo's approval.

Reporter: Why did the district chose to submit a plan to bring children back to school in September?



Laurrie: We need to return our students back to school for many reasons. The most important reason is that it is, in my opinion, more damaging to keep kids totally out than it is starting to bring them back with their social, emotional needs, their child protective needs and their learning needs. So you've got to move to bring students back in a safe, slow way. Even if we had a vaccination, I would still be doing it the slow way.

So we're going to bring kids back two days a week to begin with and three days of online learning. Then we will take a look at that after a couple of weeks. And hopefully expand it to either three days, four days or five days a week. By starting with two days, it will give us a chance to reenter. It'll give us a chance to start beginning, using some new rituals, routines and practices. But we've got to make a move to safely bring kids back and we'll do it at 50% capacity with masks and social face coverings and social distancing.

Reporter: What's the difference between a face covering and a mask?

Laurrie: The mask goes around your ears and covers your nose and mouth. My face covering comes up over my neck and I pull it up. It's a cloth face covering.

Reporter: Is it easier to breathe?

Laurrie: I think it is more comfortable. It's going to be a cloth face covering and they're going to be provided to all our children. There will be opportunities to take a face covering break while socially distancing. And at lunch, children will not have to wear face coverings. We will make a slow, steady move to bring kids back to school.

Reporter: Why do kids need to get into a classroom?

Laurrie: They need to be able to socialize not only the adults in school but to work with each other even though it might be at more distance. We have to get back to what schools really are about-- teaching those ways of getting along with each other, of understanding each other, of interacting with each other, of debating each other, of other things -- like being in a routine with each other. We just can't be in a totally remote society. Having eyes and ears on kids is really important for the development of their growth and their protection.

There are a lot of things that kids come to us to share that they are not always able to share at home, not everyone, but there are times when kids need to talk to trusted, knowing, safe adults.

And by their not being in school, we lose a lot of good ability to guide and protect and serve kids beyond the academics. They need to get back to school for their social, emotional, mental well-being and health. It's just that now [because of the pandemic] they need to be in a different routine.

Reporter: How do the teachers feel about this?

Laurrie: You're never going to get 100% agreement on this. But I sense that most teachers want to make a move toward coming back. I think they want normalcy and routine and getting back to their craft. That's not 100%. There are some that prefer to teach remotely and there are some who are compromised with their own personal health. I respect that. We'll have to see what those cases look like and make accommodations or plans for them. We're trying to gather information about whose doctor is saying that their health could be compromised by this.

There are teachers and staff members out there like that. And we'll have to make accommodations to deal with it. But I think for the most part teachers want to get back to the routine of seeing their children.

Reporter: Will teachers work half time or will they be at school five days a week.

Laurrie: They'll work - their classroom will be their work spot - all five days. We are certainly going to cut back on the socialization

and when they're providing distance learning, they'll work out of their classroom. So all staff will work five days. They'll come in with a questionnaire filled out and temperature checks.

Reporter: Will the students have temperature checks?

Laurrie: The children will have their temperatures checked at home. We'll train teachers on looking at kids for signs of possible illness. If a child is exhibiting any signs of illness we will send the child to the nurse. The nurse will place the child in what we're calling an isolation room. So the child is in there alone, until we can contact a parent or guardian, as a child escorted out to them. So we're doing some protections on top of just saying "go to the clinic."

Reporter: Then classes will be half full?

Laurrie: Yes. There'll be a Monday and Tuesday group and a Thursday and Friday. It's my intention to do that for about three weeks and review it. Well, are there problems? Can we expand? What does the science say?

Reporter: Has this been approved?

Laurrie: It hasn't been approved yet by the governor. There may be some changes.

I hear that he may mandate random Covid tests for kids. In our original proposal we followed every piece of guidance that was put out by the Department of Health and the State Department. We followed it to a tee in writing our plan. It is possible that Governor Cuomo might make the decision not to allow schools to return. We think we've got a workable plan for our community at this time for keeping kids safe and protected. It's our best thinking. It may not happen.

Reporter: Supposing a parent doesn't want their child to attend school. Do you have a provision where a child could just do the remote learning from home?

Laurrie: The answer is, yes. I know some kids have medically fragile conditions and we'll ask them to get a doctor's note. But the answer to your question directly is yes. We don't want kids missing instruction. But that plan would be through technology and remote learning. We wouldn't be able to do that by sending a teacher to the house. We'd have to set up a remote learning platform for them.

I'm trying to encourage kids to come back because we think we need them in school for the very reasons I stated at the beginning of this conversation.

## Restaino's Proposed Short-Term Rental Ordinance Subjected to Intense Debate in Niagara Falls



A Niagara Falls resident, and owner of short-term rentals, speaks during a Planning Board meeting on Wednesday, July 22nd, 2020.

## Staff Reporter

A large crowd attended the Niagara Falls planning board meeting of July 22, to participate in an open forum concerning Mayor Robert Restaino's proposed amendment of the city's short-term rental ordinance [STR].

Restaino wants to change the way the city regulates short-term rentals of houses, establish licensing regulations and limiting the use of STR properties to the downtown area of the city.

Short term rentals permit homeowners to rent properties similarly to the way a hotel does. Visitors can rent for a day, or days or a week or longer, as opposed to normal residential tenancies which are month to month.

STRs often represent a fundamental change in neighborhoods from residential, with long-term residents to one where there is a constant influx of strangers. In this economically depressed city, with nearly the highest property tax rates in the USA, many homeowners seek to make additional income.

Restaino's plan has garnered controversy primarily because he seeks to limit what was once a city wide opportunity to one where new STRs can only be offered downtown, in proximity to the Niagara Falls State Park and the traditional tourist area.

Previously existing short-term rentals are grandfathered in. Restaino's proposal still has to pass the council.

Restaino argues that limiting STRs to downtown "will limit the spread of STRs into more remote parts of the City and hopefully create a 'critical mass' in the lodging

and hospitality industry in our downtown tourist zone."

A new feature in the proposed amendment is the creation of an annual licensing requirement of \$250 for single unit dwellings and \$400 for two-unit dwellings.

Under the proposed amendment, owners will be required to register with Airbnb, the online platform that connects hosts renting out space in their homes with guests seeking lodging. The owner will pay Airbnb all required taxes and fees, including Occupancy Taxes. Thus, STRs will now be required to pay sales taxes and bed taxes like hotels do for providing lodging services.

Critics of the proposal argue that mandating all homeowners to use Airbnb is unconstitutional and wrong. There are other online companies that compete with Airbnb such as 9Flats, Booking, Casamundo, Flipkey, HomeAway, HouseTrip, Kid & Coe and One Fine Stay. The idea that only one commercial company is mandated may not stand legal muster since other companies might be able to provide as good or better services and opportunities for better, more lucrative rentals.

Part of Restaino's proposal mandates that owners of STRs will be held responsible for nuisance violations at their property and must ensure that occupants refrain from making disturbing, offensive or excessive noise between the hours of 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. The owner must designate a local contact who shall be available 24 hours per day, seven days per week with the ability to respond to any complaints.

At the July 22 planning board meeting

(Cont. on pg. 5)



Niagara Falls School District Superintendent Mark Laurrie.



# THE CRIME

## WEEKLY HEADLINES

- New York State Police attempted to stop a vehicle on the 2200 block of Centre Avenue in the morning hours of Monday, July 20th, 2020, after the vehicle refused to stop. The vehicle, a white Jeep Cherokee, continued in its attempt to flee on Centre Avenue blowing through traffic signals and stops signs until it crashed into a red Toyota Camry at which time two individuals were transported to the hospital with injuries. It was reported that the male suspect fled from the vehicle but he was apprehended shortly thereafter.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 1700 block of Pierce and Whitney Avenue in the evening hours of Tuesday, July 21st, 2020, after reports of shots fired. According to reports, two individuals sustained gunshot wounds and were transported for treatment. One was taken to Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center by personal vehicle and the other was taken to ECMC by ambulance. 22-year-old Jonathan Joseph was shot several times and died from his injuries. The individual taken to ECMC suffered injuries to his lower body and is in stable condition.

Police are continuing to investigate the incident.

-Niagara Falls Police and medical responded to the intersection of Niagara Falls Blvd. and Connecting Road on Tuesday, July 21st, 2020, after reports of a pedestrian struck by a vehicle.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to Main Street in front of the Public Library on Tuesday, July 21st, 2020, after reports of a three-vehicle crash.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 1100 block of Ferry Avenue in the late afternoon hours of Tuesday, July 21st, after reports of a fatal shooting.

On July 27th, 2020, NFPD detectives charged 18-year-old Geoffrey O. Sandiford of Cleveland Ave., Niagara Falls, New York, for the murder of Nathan Craft who was pronounced dead at the scene. Sandiford was located in Avoca, New York, and arrested without incident by NFPD officers and the US Marshal's Fugitive Task-Force. He is charged with Murder 2nd, an A felony, in addition to Criminal Possession of a Weapon 2nd, a C felony.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to Crackers Tavern on July 21st, 2020, after reports of a burglary for the second time in a seven-day period. According to police, the burglar stole an electronic dart machine and attempted to steal the money out of it. A passerby just so happened to drive by as the suspect was loading the machine into a stolen vehicle and followed him. The suspect ended up ditching the machine and vehicle he was driving on the 300 block of Portage Road and fled on foot. The dart machine was recovered and returned to Cracker's Tavern. Niagara Falls Police are continuing to investigate the incident.

Niagara Falls Police, Fire and Medical responded to the 2400 block of Independence Avenue on Wednesday, July 22nd, after reports of a multi-vehicle hit and run incident with airbag deployment, a rollover, and reports of shots fired after the fact. Police are continuing to investigate the incident.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to Old Falls Street and Prospect Street in the late hours of Friday, July 24th, 2020, after reports of a robbery. According to reports, six African American males robbed two people who were walking. Niagara Falls Police are continuing to investigate the incident.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the McDonald's on Pine Avenue on Saturday, July 25th, 2020, after reports of disorderly conduct and property damage. According to police, there was an angry customer who was not "Loving It" and became wild inside of the restaurant. Employees told police that the individual was fighting with them and ultimately threw a glass display where cookies are put at workers which shattered on the floor. Niagara Falls Police are continuing to investigate the incident.

-Niagara Falls Police Crash Management Unit responded to the intersection of 24th Street and Mackenna Avenue in the afternoon hours of Saturday, July 25th, 2020, to investigate a crash between a vehicle and an ATV that occurred at approximately 4:00 p.m. A 19-year-old Niagara Falls man

was operating a Yamaha ATV westbound on Mackenna Avenue, which is a one-way eastbound street, when he passed through the intersection with 24th Street and collided with a northbound 2000 Ford F150 pickup truck. The driver of the ATV was ejected and struck the windshield of the truck. He was transported to Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center where he succumbed to serious head and neck injuries. The driver of the truck and his two minor passengers were not injured. At this time, it does not appear he will be facing any charges. "ATV or UTV use is not permitted on a New York highway unless said highway has been designated and posted for ATV use by the state or local authority. For the most part, designated highways are limited to only the part of the highway between two off-highway ATV trails.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 400 block of Fifth Street in the early morning hours of Sunday, July 26th, 2020, after reports of shots fired. According to police, two armed men fired several shots into an apartment. Police believe that the men were attempting to hit a woman who was inside. No injuries were reported.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 5600 block of Stephenson Avenue on Monday, July 27th, after reports of an overdose. According to reports, the individual was unresponsive on scene and transported to receive medical treatment at a hospital.

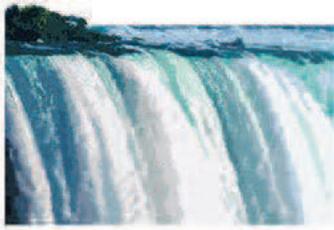
-Niagara Falls Police responded to the LaSalle Yacht Club in the early morning hours of Tuesday, July 28th, after reports that a vehicle drove into multiple boats. Nineteen year old Neysia McCarthy of Niagara Falls had driven her 2017 Chevrolet through the parking lot, through the curbing and into two boats and a dock in the Niagara River. She alleges she panicked and was unable to stop when a spider fell on her while she was operating her vehicle. Ms. McCarthy and her 21 year old female passenger were uninjured in the crash. Each of the boats, a 1987 SunRunner and a 2020 Godfrey pontoon boat, sustained extensive damage. The dock and an electrical box owned by the LaSalle Yacht Club were also damaged. A heavy duty tow truck was required to remove the vehicle from its final resting place. Ms. McCarthy was issued appearance tickets for Reckless Driving and Failure to Reduce Speed. She is due in court on August 21, 2020. Despite the images, no injuries were reported. However, there was tens of thousands of dollars worth of property damage.

-On July 29, 2020, at approximately 10:23 p.m., Niagara Falls Police Officers responded to an accident heading westbound involving a vehicle and bicycle collision at the intersection of 28th and Pine Avenue. Eighteen year old Niagara Falls woman driving a 2012 Chevrolet struck a bicyclist who was coming out of the 7-Eleven parking lot to cross the street. The bicyclist was taken to ECMC with serious leg and head injuries. The bicyclist was identified as 58 year old Edward Cusatis. He remains in ECMC with multiple broken bones and lacerations.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the Kay Bank Building on Main Street in the afternoon hours of Thursday, July 30th, 2020, after reports of an individual dancing in the street with a gun.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 1500 block of Whitney Avenue in the evening hours of Thursday, July 30th, 2020, after reports of shots fired. According to police, the back window of a vehicle was shot at. Police recovered about seven 9mm bullet casings. There were no injuries reported. Reports further indicate that shortly after a female called and reported that she had left her keys in her vehicle and that it had been stolen from the 1500 block of Whitney Avenue. Police believed that the alleged stolen vehicle was involved in the shooting incident. While police were investigating those two incidents a call came in of a male walking down the street with what appeared to be an assault rifle. Officers quickly responded to the area at which time the suspect took off and discarded the rifle in the alley.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to 7-Eleven on Pine Avenue in the morning hours of Sunday, August 2nd, 2020, after reports of an armed robbery. According to police, an individual demanded money from the cashier under threat of using a knife. In total, the individual got away with \$150.



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### Short-Term Cont. from Page Three

some 20 speakers offered their viewpoint. All but one was against the proposal as written.

Restaino told the Reporter that he recognized that the amendment may need to be tweaked and was open to positive and constructive suggestions.

Some concerns expressed by residents are listed:

- How the boundaries were chosen for the STR rental zone downtown.
- What will happen to some 40 applications for STR permits submitted outside the boundaries?
- Why the administration would want to subject visitors to Niagara Falls exclusively to downtown, which some say is one of the most run-down and dangerous areas of the city?
- Why there is not a process for people outside of the downtown zone to get their property approved.
- How this ordinance inspires people to stay in Niagara Falls rather than leaving and operating a business somewhere else.
- Why the present ordinance regarding STR is not sufficient.

Councilmember Ken Tompkins weighed in with his concerns in a statement to the Reporter:

Tompkins said, "When the current ordinance was presented a couple of years ago; I was opposed to it for its lack of penalty and enforcement for the bad players that feel they don't need to follow the procedure that were established.

"As this one has been rolled out; I have questions:

Enforcement is the biggest issue. I have been told there may be almost 200 short term rentals operating illegally here in our city. Any new changes must find a way to take these off the market. It's not fair to the legal operators. I'm wondering if we could base the fee we charge for the special use permit to fund a code enforcement specialist to work on making sure only legitimate, inspected and approved STR are operating.

Inspections of STRs are different than a hotel or motel as you basically have the entire house or apartment including a kitchen. We must ensure that the visitor is in a safe, clean and sanitary environment.

Limiting the geographical area you



Niagara Falls City Councilman Ken Tompkins.

can have STR is a tough decision. I can see both sides of this. I know of quite a few STRs outside the proposed boundaries that seem to be operating without any harm to a neighborhood. I have one next door to one of my properties and another three doors away. They seem to have no issues and normally have quiet visitors. The big question is... are we better to lump them together or let them spread to every area of the city? It's worth debating.

Will folks that started the process but don't have final permits be allowed to finish the process if they are outside the new zone? Some may have put a lot of money and effort in based on current regulations. Will there be a "grandfathered in" clause?

Can the city dictate that a person must advertise on the Airbnb platform when there are other commercial competitors. An answer from our Corporate Counsel is needed.

"I know that many hours were spent on trying to improve the ordinance on the books. Enforcement appears to be the biggest challenge and issue going forward. We need to find a way to embrace this new and booming industry but still keep it on the up and up. I support STR but have questions that need to be answered."

Stay tuned on this subject as the Reporter continues to provide in depth coverage as the amendment winds its way before the council where it will either pass as written, be modified or rejected.

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COUPONS CANNOT BE COMBINED

# Maziarz Cont. from Cover



Former State Senator George Maziarz now works for a company he once criticized for their role in the courthouse scandal.

in his political campaign fund and had no qualms spending it to get favored candidates elected and enemies defeated.

He paid for favors with taxpayer money, giving jobs to supporters and donors and arranging for lucrative contracts with the state and county for those who towed the line and donated to his political causes.

It all came crashing down on him in 2014 when he learned he was under investigation by state prosecutors for corruption. By 2017, he was charged with five felony counts as part of an alleged scheme which saw payments funneled through a pair of companies so that the name of a former staffer who had been accused of sexual harassment, wouldn't show up on the senator's public campaign filings.

He spent years defending himself and ultimately secured a plea deal for a misdemeanor charge of filing a false instrument in March 2018 that allowed him to avoid trial. Maziarz paid a \$1,000 fine after admitting to one count of offering a false instrument for filing, as part of the scheme to cover up payments.

During the four long years he was under a cloud, fighting to secure his freedom, he lost his power hold on the Republican party - as politicians, donors, and political operatives avoided him like the plague.

However, Maziarz has a long memory and time has shown he holds grudges, lots of them. After taking his misdemeanor conviction, he went after former allies and friends, trying to settle scores and regain lost power in Niagara County. The stories of his vendettas are legendary in Niagara County among politicians in the know.

He tried to get former staffers indicted for stealing from his campaign fund. He tried to get his former best man at his wedding indicted for a county grant project he had no role in, and went after former allies and in one case a spouse, trying to ruin careers, get people fired, get investigations started and mailing distorted, misleading campaign mailers against those of his enemies who ran for office.

He was successful in none of it and it only made him more nuclear than ever. Many politicians who would have been only too glad for the chance to do a favor for Maziarz back in the day won't even take his calls.

Happily, most of this went on behind the scenes and he got work in the private sector with Gary Coscia and his Largo Group, a privately owned commercial mortgage banking firm. Maziarz



Largo owner Gary Coscia hit big on the Niagara Falls Courthouse - socking it to local taxpayers in what might be one of the biggest rip-offs in recent Niagara Falls history.

is in a senior management role with Largo, in charge of new business.

It's ironic that Maziarz landed at the company since, when he was a powerful senator, he condemned Largo's handling of the Niagara Falls Public Safety [AKA Courthouse] building on Main Street, a building that today, some 12 years after it was built, continues to plague the city by its high cost of debt payment and shoddy workmanship.

Former Niagara Falls Controller Maria Brown estimated several years ago that the cost of the courthouse was an exorbitant \$500,000 per year with debt service, multitudinous repairs, and other costly expenses.

The story of Largo's role in the courthouse is an extraordinary one - and at the time Maziarz was right to call it for what it was - an enormous rip-off of the public.

This is part #1 of our analysis of the scandal:

The Public Safety Building [Courthouse] was planned under former Mayor Vince Anello and constructed during Mayor Paul A. Dyster's administration.

After it was built then-State Senator Maziarz described the courthouse as a "\$22 million building, we paid \$50 million for."

## The Scandal Was in Plain Sight

A Limited liability Corporation, called CLP3 LLC, a partnership between recently-convicted-for-bid-rigging, Buffalo developer Louis P. Ciminelli and Gary Coscia, owner of Largo, built the courthouse. The original contract was for \$44,600,000.

During construction, Coscia [CLP3] put in for millions of dollars in "change orders" -- work that was not in the original contract but should have been.

According to information obtained through a Freedom of Information request, there were more than 200 change orders approved by Dyster's administration during construction.

It is important to note that Coscia and Dyster went to high school together and Coscia made numerous donations to the Dyster campaign, so that they were well prepped to be amiable to change construction plans after they inked the deal.

Some of the 200 plus change orders increased the price, while others downgraded materials and quality of construction, like changing railings from stainless steel to wood, and using inferior ceiling tiles.

When work was done, the courthouse project cost more than \$47,845,587. Taxpayers paid more than \$3 million more than the contract price and got a vastly inferior building than what was described in the contract.

By hiking the price and reducing quality through the arguably dishonest process of pre-planning change orders, then applying for them, taxpayers got ripped off for likely more than \$6 million, three million more on the price tag and three million in cheaper materials and other cost savings on items that were in the original contract but never delivered.

## How Did It Happen?

To recount a little history, Dyster fired former city engineer Bob Curtis on day one of his administration, just as work on the courthouse began. A city engineer's job is to monitor major public works projects such as a courthouse. Dyster did not hire another engineer until after the courthouse was largely finished.

It is a matter of record that prior to their starting construction, Curtis criticized Ciminelli and Coscia warning that Niagara Falls would get hit hard with change orders if these two developers were not monitored. [Ciminelli is headed to prison for just this kind of bid rigging behavior in Buffalo, in connection to the Buffalo Billion].

Curtis suggested taking the project away from Coscia and Ciminelli and doing the courthouse as a public works project. Those comments got Curtis fired.

Then came the massive change order scheme. There was no semblance of adherence to the contract. Coscia and Ciminelli, unbelievably, were the foxes who were watching the henhouse.

Some of the change orders Dyster granted to Coscia, without ever monitoring price or the necessity of the change in the work, were [and remember all of these costs were not included in the original contract but should have been, but were "change orders"]: \$24,914 for a plan to revise a storm pipe [not the pipe itself - just the paperwork]; \$33,377 for a storage garage. A water valve: \$2,282. A blueprint for a garage door: \$24,000. Door modification: \$1,244. Work to assist Verizon: \$10,804. A ditch for underground cable: \$13,881. Grading the parking lot: \$40,649. Telephone outlets: \$4,200. Outlet(s) in the jury box: \$1,444. Circuits for phones: \$2,684. More outlets: \$8,894. "Unforeseen conditions": \$110,581. Normal project changes: \$25,228. And - significantly - environmental cleanup: \$2,564,035.

That's right -- \$2.5 million for environmental cleanup that Coscia and Ciminelli knew full well they would have to do --- but chose to leave the figure blank in the original contract.

It was smart thinking. Once into the project, the city could not easily get another developer, and Coscia and Ciminelli held the city hostage and named their price.

Happily, it was not Dyster's money. It was fi-



The end product was a hugely overpriced, rather incongruous building, that costs the city a fortune to operate and pay for.

nanced by taxpayers - and in the end his two donors - Ciminelli and Coscia - were elated with the good mayor and his lack of oversight.

The mad runaway of expenses was in part a comedy of errors for the then hapless city council. It was actually months into construction -- after much of the work was completed -- before the council even realized that Dyster had no controls in place to monitor Coscia and Ciminelli and the flood of change orders the city was approving almost daily was all but done.

This gave Dyster a chance to hire another campaign donor. Dyster had fired his city engineer Curtis - on the day before the work was started. After the work was almost completed, Dyster hired LiRo Engineers Inc., of Buffalo, to be the city's project manager, at \$14,600 per month.

LiRo was touted as having no connection to Coscia or Ciminelli. However, LiRo's engineer, David Jaros, was a longtime friend and supporter of Dyster. Curtis had made \$6,000 per month as city engineer and would have watched Ciminelli and Coscia, as well as doing other duties for the city. He had promised to hold Coscia's feet to the fire.

By the time LiRo made its first report, in July 2008, the price had jumped millions and the work was almost done.

## Maziarz was Right About Coscia

The city vastly overpaid for the Courthouse. Maziarz was right.

Reeds Construction Data's study of 25 American cities revealed that courthouses and jails, even in expensive-to-build places like New York City, where unions, bureaucracy and corruption through kickbacks and backdoor deals are a way of life, were built for under \$275 per square foot.

The Niagara Falls courthouse cost \$415 per square foot, making it the most expensive courthouse per square foot in America up till that time.

And guess who got the profits?

Still, why did Dyster turn a blind eye to Ciminelli and Coscia? Why didn't he hire a city engineer until the courthouse was finished?

Dyster is not a man who forgets a favor. It is a well-known that Ciminelli and Coscia knew how to play the game. Coscia helped Dyster enormously during his run for mayor during the summer of 2007 - especially by befriending, then sabotaging his opponent.

Dyster was running against then Councilman Lewis "Babe" Rotella. Rotella had, ironically, fought hard during the Anello administration for Coscia to get the courthouse contract.

Anello loudly complained that the Coscia and Ciminelli combine was a recipe for carpetbagging in this city.

But Coscia was smart. He initially supported Rotella when he needed his council vote.

During the primary, however, after he got Rotella and the council vote to give Coscia the contract - against Anello's wishes, it appeared that Rotella was badly trailing Dyster in the polls.

Coscia understood that Rotella was going to lose, and he also understood that construction would be done during the next mayor's term. A hostile mayor might scrutinize the project too closely. Change orders might not get approved.

Coscia quietly threw his support behind Dyster. The story of how they deceived Rotella is a great story in itself.

Several sources say Coscia and Ciminelli, in addition to open donations made to Dyster, arranged for donations through other individuals. Dyster and campaign aides repeatedly, secretly met with Ciminelli/Coscia representatives during the campaign.

But the great service Coscia afforded to Dyster, according to sources, was, while pretending to support Rotella, Coscia planted a spy in the Rotella campaign to report back to the Dyster camp.

This woman was later rewarded by being employed by Coscia and Ciminelli.

This led to another revelation: While Coscia and Ciminelli could have started construction on the courthouse during the campaign season of 2007, when Rotella could have taken credit, it was alleged that Ciminelli/Coscia deliberately delayed groundbreaking until after the election - as a favor to Dyster.

Rotella told the Reporter at the time that he

was furious with Coscia over this betrayal.

Of course, Coscia showed he had the same good instincts as his employee Maziarz. He knew which side of bread the butter was spread.

And Dyster returned the favor, again and again with taxpayer money, starting by firing Curtis and allowing Coscia and Ciminelli to monitor their own work on the courthouse.

The result was that Niagara Falls added better than \$3 million to the cost of the courthouse and cheapened the quality of it by probably an equal amount.

And two developers got the difference. Today, the courthouse, in yellow brick, cocked at an angle not perpendicular to the street, with an odd, ugly and obscure misrepresentation of the old suspension bridge for an entrance way, stares back at us as an ugly reminder of our inept leadership, of greedy politicians and questionable businessmen, and potential corruption.

In our next in the series, we will explore how Coscia maneuvered the city council to up the price on the courthouse from an initial \$20 million to almost \$50 million. We will explore how Coscia originally promised to arrange the financing for the city on a lease arrangement then reneged - at tremendous cost to taxpayers, obviating the very reason for his selection as developer.

The city had to float an expensive bond and wound up not only paying more for the courthouse because of corrupt or inept construction but also much more for financing because Coscia misled the city on financing. It is all a matter of public record. The Reporter could write a dozen stories on Coscia and how he wound up with luxury condos in Saratoga, Toronto, and New York City.

Hopefully, we will also examine his role in other scandals, including potentially false charges he fomented against one of his competitors in Rochester, New York, who had the audacity to compete against him for mortgage lending work.

## Why Did Maziarz Go to Work for Coscia?

Largo's website claims, "During his time as a senator, Maziarz chaired the Energy and Telecommunications Committee, leading the charge for private and public investments in those sectors of the economy. Largo is Upstate New York's largest privately owned commercial mortgage banking firm. At Largo, he will continue to work closely with companies seeking to invest in New York, by assisting commercial real estate owners/developers with their financing needs, and is headquartered in Maziarz's native Western New York."

Clearly Coscia sees a value in having a kindred spirit on board - even if he once called him out on it. Still it is a curious pairing to say the least. Companies that might hope to reap windfall profits from taxpayers, provided they can pay the cost of friendship with this odd couple, might be well advised to contact them. They might yet get to build a \$20 million building for \$50 million courtesy of the taxpayers, with Coscia arranging the financing or as Maziarz once implied - the fleeing.

A call to Largo media representative was not returned. A request for comment made to Maziarz was declined.



Former Mayor Paul Dyster had one amiable quality; he always took care of his campaign donors.



# NORTH TONAWANDA

## North Tonawanda Celebrates Graduation of Recruits Donner and Vossler



### Reporter Staff

On February 7th, 2020, the North Tonawanda Fire Department swore in two new recruit firefighters.

These recruits were then sent to the New York State Fire Academy in Montour Falls on February 23rd with an anticipated graduation date of May 21st.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all recruits were sent home after the third week of training. It was at that time both recruits began train-

ing through virtual learning until returning to the academy in July.

On Tuesday, July 28th, almost two months after their originally planned graduation, James Donner and Nicolas Vossler graduated and were pinned with their badges.

“We are proud of both young men and thank them for their decision to serve this community,” said Mayor Arthur Pappas.

Congratulations!!

## Residents 'Rally the Blue' to Support Local Law Enforcement



North Tonawanda residents and city officials attended a "Rally the Blue" demonstration to support local law enforcement held on Saturday, August 1st, 2020. More than 100 individuals came out to cheer and chant in support of those that serve the community.



## Registered Apprenticeship

The US and New York State Departments of Labor recognize and monitor registered skilled apprenticeship programs in NYS and throughout the United States. The Laborers' International Union of North America publicly promotes our successful model of labor-management registered apprenticeship programs to combat the growing emphasis on employer programs supported by taxpayers.

### What is Registered Apprenticeship?

It's a job. Apprentices start working from day one with incremental wage increases as they become more proficient.

It's on-the-job learning and education. Registered Apprenticeship includes on-the-job learning from an assigned mentor combined with technical training provided by apprenticeship training centers, technical schools, community colleges, and institutions employing distance and computer-based learning systems.

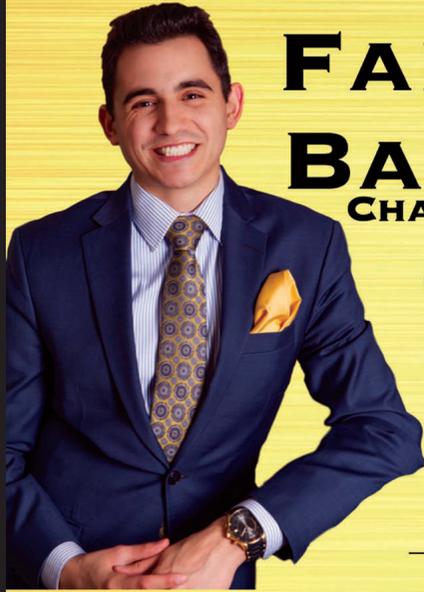
It's a credential. At the end of the apprenticeship, all apprentices receive a nationally recognized credential. Some apprenticeship programs offer interim credentials as apprentices achieve important milestones during their apprenticeship.

### What are some advantages of Registered Apprenticeship?

The benefits to employers are: more highly skilled employees, reduced turnover rates, higher productivity, lower investment in recruitment, a more diverse workforce, a new pool of workers and the creation of career pathways. The benefits to registered apprentices are: being nationally recognized and portable credentials, improved skills and competencies, higher wages as skills increase and career advancement.

Registered Apprenticeship programs are operated by partnerships of employers, labor management organizations and government. Apprenticeship sponsors – employers, employer associations and labor-management organizations – register programs with federal and state government agencies. Sponsors provide mentors, on-the-job learning opportunities and required technical instruction to apprentices. Incorporating Registered Apprenticeship directly into your workforce development system will strengthen your local and regional economy by offering highly trained and educated residents. Let Registered Apprenticeship be your competitive advantage. Laborers' Local 91 accepts apprenticeship applications the first Tuesday of every month from 8 AM – 12 noon at our training facility located at 4500 Witmer Industrial Estates Niagara Falls, NY 14305.

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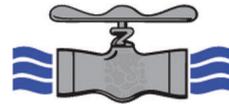
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