



## Message from the Mayor

As we adapt to the impact COVID-19 has had on our community, I wanted to take this opportunity to provide a few updates and talk about some upcoming items to watch for in the coming months. These certainly are difficult times but, as a community, I believe we are coming together to work through this unprecedented situation in the best way possible.

### Short-Term Rental Update

At the City Council meeting held on May 18, a unanimous vote was made to place an eight-month moratorium on short-term rentals in New Buffalo. Like many communities along the Lake Michigan shores, we saw a significant increase in the number of short-term rentals. Given the potential long-term impacts on our community, the Council felt it necessary to put a temporary hold on the approval of new short-term rentals. A small exception was made for persons who could prove they had purchased property with the intent to rent but were unable to register the property due to COVID-19 restrictions put in place by the State. At this time, only a handful of properties have qualified for the exemption. With the moratorium in place, we can take a step back and determine the number of short-term rentals that is the right fit for our community. This process will help balance the impact tourism has on our economy while ensuring a year-round sustainable population that can support important institutions in our community such as the New Buffalo Area Schools.

### Municipal Marina



As is the case for many communities along Lake Michigan, high water levels have resulted in many of the marina slips being unusable. The City removed the marina's docks in the Fall of 2019 with the intent of making repairs, painting and reinstalling them at a higher level in the Spring of 2020. Unfortunately, the pandemic delayed the project longer than anticipated. Last week, contractors began the process of reinstalling the docks. Some slips will be available for use for 4th of July weekend; the remaining slips will be installed after the holiday weekend. While it has been unfortunate to miss the early boating season since the State lifted its COVID-19 ban on recreational boating, the raising of the docks will allow the marina to be fully operational for the remainder of the 2020 season. Once the work is completed, New Buffalo will be in better shape than many other marinas along the lakeshore, as a significant amount of them will not be able to open this season due to high water levels.

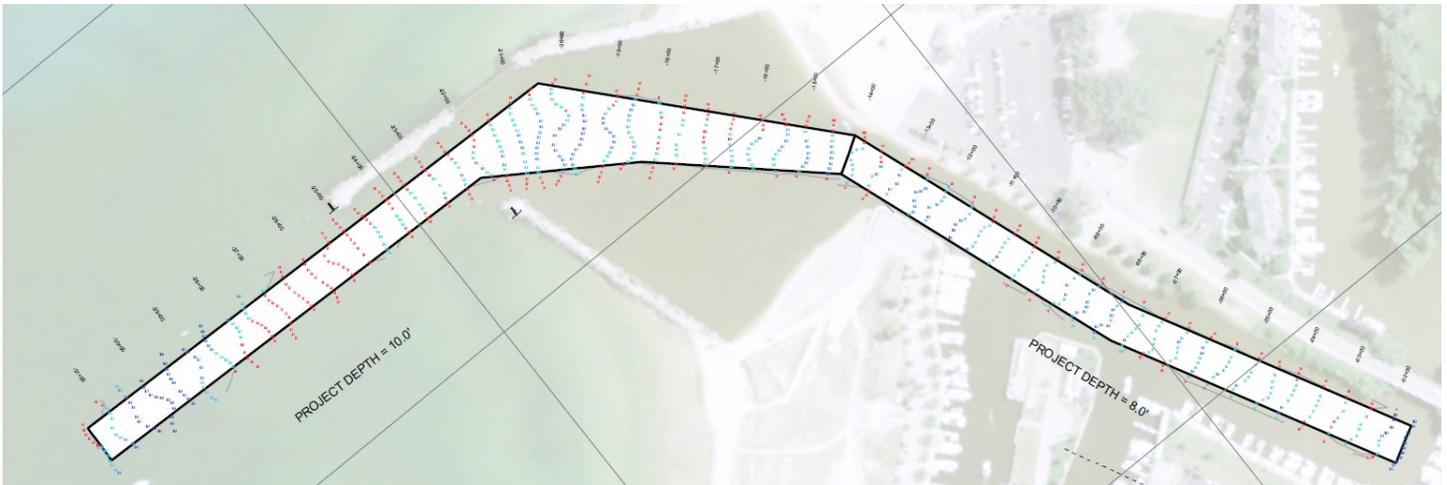
### New Buffalo Harbor Soundings

Recent soundings from the U.S. Corps of Engineers show that the overall depths in our harbor seem to be in good shape. As the following soundings from the U.S. Corps of Engineers show, dredging with the exception of some unexpected shoaling that may occur should not be required this year. It is worth noting that depths in these soundings are reported relative to Low Water Datum (LWD). The current water level is at approximately LWD+5'. So, a reported depth of 4' means the functional water depth today is 9'. The area within the channel appears to be mostly below the maintained depth with one exception — just past the north breakwater, some shoaling has occurred. The shallowest point reported is LWD-4.2', meaning the depth there is 9.2' today.

The document we received from the U.S. Corps of Engineers is available at [https://www.cityofnewbuffalo.org/downloads/may\\_2019\\_soundings.pdf](https://www.cityofnewbuffalo.org/downloads/may_2019_soundings.pdf).

## North Whittaker Road Flooding

The portion of North Whittaker Street which leads to the beach has flooded repeatedly due to the high lake level. I recently traveled to Grand Haven, Saugatuck and South Haven to compare flooding issues and solutions. Each of those cities are experiencing the same issues, although to a much worse degree than New Buffalo. The City has taken a phased approach to address the flooding and is preparing for a long-term fix as part of the planned improvements to the community's waterfront. The first phase was the installation of a concrete barricade between Whittaker Street and the Galien River. This was installed to prevent the river from overtaking the banks and flooding the street. Once that work was completed, attention was focused on addressing the remaining issue — drying out the roadway so repairs could be made.



June 8, 2020 Harbor Depths

Due to high river levels, water was actually flowing from the river onto the streets through the storm drain. This problem was further exasperated by the concrete stormwater structures in the roadway which had dirt bottoms and were structurally failing. With the extremely high water table currently in the waterfront area, groundwater was being drawn into the structures and exiting into the roadway. Work was successfully undertaken to prevent this from happening in the future. Unfortunately, this work also prevents stormwater from exiting the roadway which was an already existing condition prior to the work that was done due to the constant standing water in the road. Plans are now underway to design improvements to the section of road that had been flooding that will address drainage issues and the overall condition of the road. This is the busiest time of the year for contractors who conduct this type of work, but we are working to complete the improvements as soon as possible.

At its special meeting in June, the City Council also approved the installation of additional concrete block along the river bank to further protect our parking lot and beach areas. These assets are important parts of our community and we will continue to work to protect and preserve them.

## Marquette Drive

The work in Union Pier and its associated detour down Marquette Drive has brought increased attention to the poor condition of that road in some areas. One of the areas of most concern is the stretch of Marquette Drive as it enters the City of New Buffalo near the boat launch. While this road is within the City, it is actually a private road owned by the adjacent property owners. The City has been monitoring the condition of the road since early 2019. The City cannot legally pay the costs of the needed improvements as public funds cannot be used for work conducted to a private road. After significant research on the history of the association own-

ing the road and consulting with our legal counsel, a plan was developed to improve the condition of the road in this area. The City will be offering to lead the effort to make the road improvements if the owners agree to reimburse the City through a special assessment. If 70% of the property owners along this stretch of road agree to this proposal, work will begin immediately to design and implement the improvements. As this is one of only two roads to our community's waterfront and an important component to public safety response time to this area, we believe it is worth the effort to develop a solution.

### North Whittaker Street Bridge

Work was substantially completed on a rehabilitation of the bridge in the late Fall of 2019. At that time, a "punch list" was created of corrective actions and work to be completed which is typical at that point of a project. The plan was for work to be completed in the Spring of 2020; however, COVID-19 delayed those plans as well. The City has been in communication with a contractor who has been balancing finishing projects from 2019 and starting projects committed to in 2020. As schedules have started to stabilize, the contractor will be back on site in July to complete the work. We will coordinate activities with the contractor to minimize impact to the users of the river and bridge.

### Infrastructure Needs

When one looks around our community, it is hard not to see infrastructure and utility improvements which have taken place over the last 5 years. From water main upgrades and street improvements in many of our residential neighborhoods to the significant improvements in our downtown and new sidewalks in our residential areas to improve pedestrian safety, we have made a concerted effort to make good investments and improve our community's built environment. However, there is much more that still needs to be done. Over the next few months, we will engage the community in reviewing the condition of our infrastructure and what is needed to ensure its sustainability moving forward. We hope that this community dialogue can lead to a long-term vision to create an infrastructure and utility investment roadmap for us to follow.

### Life Jacket Loaner Program

The beach has attracted high numbers of visitors this year as it allows people to be outside while still practicing appropriate social distancing. Given the increased use of the beach, the City is in the process of seeking funding to pay for a new Life Jacket Loaner Station. The station will provide lifejackets at no cost to residents and visitors using the beach for the day in sizes that vary from infant to adult. Between the City's lifeguard program and this new lifejacket program, the City is committed to making the beach as safe as possible.

### Waterfront Improvements

In 2019, the City of New Buffalo was fortunate to receive a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to cover 90% of the cost associated with creating a new Master Plan for our community's waterfront area. The City is in the process of pursuing two potential grant sources to offset a portion of one of the phases of the planned improvements along the Galien River between the bridge and the beach. The proposed improvements call for a new wide walkway along the water which will significantly improve pedestrian safety in the beach area. Additionally, the project will result in the installation of a pile wall along the river. This wall will have two benefits to the community. First, it will create a long-term solution to the flooding on North Whittaker Street. Additionally, it will allow for the expansion of the municipal marina by creating a broadside docking area that will increase the size and number of boats we can host. Given the economic impact of recreational boating on a waterfront community, these additional boats will mean more spending at local businesses and the support of jobs in our community. The project will also enhance New Buffalo's status as one of the



more desirable waterfront communities on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan.

### Dune Walk

For over three decades, the Dune Walk has been an iconic part of the community. It is a place where residents have created countless memories from marriage proposals to graduation photos and enjoyed many a beautiful sunset. Unfortunately, the structure has reached the end of its expected lifecycle and it can no longer be economically maintained. The City began planning for its replacement and was fortunate to receive a grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund that will pay half of the cost of rebuilding the existing dune walk and also build a new, fully accessible walkway into the dunes, opening up this area for persons of all abilities. The project will include an educational component to inform people of the importance of the dune's ecosystems to waterfront communities. The City is in the process of finalizing the final components necessary to close on the grant. Once this step is completed, the design process will commence, followed by construction which is anticipated to be finished by Memorial Day of 2021.

### Downtown Business Assistance

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on businesses throughout our community. The challenges of the pandemic are magnified by the fact that many local businesses earn a significant amount of their annual revenue in the Spring and Summer months. The occupancy restrictions imposed by the State make it harder for business owners and their employees to recover from the stay-at-home orders of early Spring. To address this problem,



the City partnered with the Downtown Development Authority to create a policy that would allow businesses to use public spaces adjacent to their business to expand merchandising areas and seating for dining. As this is a new endeavor that many other communities are trying out as well, we will actively monitor this effort and make adjustments as necessary to ensure we are creating the best environment possible for businesses, employees, customers and residents alike.

### Fireworks

The 4th of July fireworks are another tradition for waterfront cities and towns that have been cancelled in most communities as a result of the pandemic. While we will not be able to have our normal community celebration for July 4th this year, many people will still be enjoying fireworks on their private properties. Given that people often visit our community from other states, it is a good time to review the Michigan Fireworks Safety Act which outlines what is allowed during the July 4th holiday. We have posted the act to the City's website for easy reference.

<https://www.cityofnewbuffalo.org/news.asp?aid=198>



### Beach Passes

Given the increased use of the beach as a place to safely get outside during COVID-19, it is a good time to remind property owners that they no longer need to get a parking sticker at City Hall to park free of charge at the beach. Under the new parking system installed in 2019, it is as simple as going online to register up to two

cars for each property. To register your vehicle(s), simply go to [https://www.cityofnewbuffalo.org/downloads/beachpass2020\\_final.pdf](https://www.cityofnewbuffalo.org/downloads/beachpass2020_final.pdf) to access the City of New Buffalo 2020 Season Beach Vehicle Pass form.

Once you have completed the form, simply drop it off at the City Hall or email it to Gail Grosse at [ggrosse@cityofnewbuffalo.org](mailto:ggrosse@cityofnewbuffalo.org). Please allow up to 48 hours for the plate to be recognized in the system once you submit the form. After 48 hours, the system will recognize your vehicle and you will be able to park free of charge at the beach.

### City Hall Safety Improvements



While City Hall has been closed to the public due to safety precautions during COVID-19, our staff has still been on site working everyday to deliver services to residents and businesses. During the closure, we have been making improvements to create a safer environment and ensure proper social distancing for both employees and people who conduct business at City Hall. As a reminder, tax and utility bills can be viewed/paid online at [www.cityofnewbuffalo.org](http://www.cityofnewbuffalo.org),

mailed, or put in the drop box at the front entrance to the City Hall. Property tax bills were mailed out July 1st. If you need to drop off or pick up items, call the number on the front door and our staff will come out to help you with whatever business you may have.

Like everybody else, COVID-19 has impacted the timing of some projects and caused the City to change some plans. The City Council and myself will continue to work to make this the best community possible for our residents and businesses. I'd like to thank our staff for their commitment to serving our community during this challenging time. And, to our residents, I hope you found this information helpful. I also hope I've answered some of your questions, and provided you with a better understanding of community projects and goals. If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact City Hall at (269) 469-1500.