



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Years in the Making: Kennedy Announces Cheektowaga Set to Receive Millions in State Aid to Overhaul Sewer System

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY August 18, 2016

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*Announcement of \$5 Million Grant Combined With \$15 Million in Interest-Free Loans Will Enable Town to Address Systemic Inflow/Infiltration Issues That Lead to Pollution of Scajaquada Creek*

*In 2014, Kennedy Penned Letter to State Calling for Assistance to Town and Organized Numerous Meetings Between Town and State Leaders*

CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) announced a major state grant to the Town of Cheektowaga today that will support the town's ongoing efforts to reduce its environmental impact on local waterways such as Scajaquada Creek. Today's announcement of a \$5 million Water Infrastructure Improvement Act grant, on top of \$15 million in interest-free state loans, will give the town badly-needed resources, enabling them to combat the inflow/infiltration problems that have plagued the town's aging sewer system for years. After seeing firsthand the pollution of the Scajaquada Creek in 2014, Kennedy penned a letter (*see at end of release*) to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), urging them to provide resources to allow the town to implement a solution to their overflow problems. Following this, Kennedy organized a series of meetings between officials from the DEC, the Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC), and the Town of Cheektowaga to develop a plan to secure essential funding.

"It's no secret that Cheektowaga's aging sewer system is badly in need of an overhaul," said **Senator Kennedy**. "Today's announcement of \$5 million in Water Infrastructure Improvement Act funding, along with an interest-free loan of \$15 million will enable the Town of Cheektowaga to do its part in protecting waterways like Scajaquada Creek. This funding has been years in the making, and as part of that effort I pushed strongly for increased WIAA funding in the past several state budgets. My office has worked with the town and the state for over a year to secure this funding, and I want to offer my appreciation to Governor Andrew Cuomo for recognizing the importance of improving Cheektowaga's aging sewer system."

"This is a great day for Cheektowaga," said **Supervisor Diane Benczkowski**. "The \$5 million grant and \$15 million interest-free loan from New York State will allow the Town to upgrade our aging sewer infrastructure and reduce sanitary sewer overflows into our local waterways, while limiting the financial burden on taxpayers. Since my first day in office, I have made it my goal to explore every funding source available to Cheektowaga, especially when it comes to State funding. I thank Governor Andrew Cuomo and Senator Tim Kennedy for listening to Cheektowaga's concerns and making this funding a reality. I will continue to do all that I can to make sure our Town protects the environment we live in, while also safeguarding our taxpayers."

Under a Consent Order that has been agreed to by the State, the Federal Government, and the Town of Cheektowaga, the town is required to improve and modernize their sewage treatment system in order to reduce sewer overflows that result in raw sewage draining into area waterways. The consent order calls for the town to prioritize the eliminate of Infiltration/Inflow, also known as I/I. Infiltration refers to water that has improperly entered the sewer system through deficiencies such as cracked and damaged sewers, while inflow refers to improper connections to the sewer system, such as illegal downspout

connections. The DEC has expressed a preference for this problem to be addressed before assessing the need for additional sewage capacity. I/I results in increased amounts of water in the sewage system during heavy rain, resulting in an overload of the system that much be alleviated by releasing untreated diluted sewage into area waterways.

The text of Kennedy's 2014 letter can be found below:

July 23, 2014

Commissioner Joseph Martens

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

625 Broadway

Albany, New York 12233

Dear Commissioner Martens:

I write to bring your attention to the deplorable state of Scajaquada Creek, and to request the Department of Environmental Conservation immediately begin working with local municipalities, including the Town of Cheektowaga, in order to improve the quality of this vital waterway. The Scajaquada has suffered from decades of pollution and neglect, and now

New York State must do its part to help clean it up.

As you may know, recent reports have brought to light a variety of environmental issues on the creek. For example, hundreds of birds have been killed as a result of avian botulism, while fecal bacteria rates are up to 2000 percent higher than levels that are considered safe. A large amount of this results from sewer overflows due to Buffalo's aging sewer system. Thankfully, the City of Buffalo is embarking on a long-term plan with both the DEC and the EPA to modernize the system in order to drastically reduce the occurrences of these overflows that dump millions of gallons of untreated sewage into the creek.

It is my understanding that the Town of Cheektowaga has also submitted an engineering plan to reduce its sewer overflows. However, there appears to be confusion between the DEC and the Town as to whether or not this plan has been either disapproved, or simply not responded to. The DEC must work with Cheektowaga to resolve this confusion, and if the plan has been disapproved, the DEC is obliged to work directly with the Town of Cheektowaga to formulate an improved plan. The DEC must also work with the Town to identify financing opportunities and secure needed funds to cover the costs of these plans.

It's also important to note that even if these overflows stopped tomorrow, the creek still faces severe ecological and environmental problems. Several feet of sewage sludge have built up from the years of overflows, and nearly 98 percent of wetlands have been destroyed. This is not just a sewage issue, and I urge the DEC to collaborate with local municipalities to develop a comprehensive plan that addresses the various problems facing the creek, and to devote the necessary funding and resources to bring this project to fruition.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Should you have any questions, or if I may be of assistance in any way, as always, I welcome your call.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Kennedy

New York State Senator, 63rd District