

Dear Editor,

Michael Parsnick, Chair of Niagara Falls Preservation Committee, has stated that gorge parkway removal would result in such increased traffic on Lewiston Road that the safety of Maple Avenue School students, already threatened, would be at even higher risk. What evidence does Parsnick offer to support his statement? None. He imagines this.

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Technically, though, he is correct. Even five more cars per day, or one, would result in an increased risk, however slight, that could probably be calculated using some insurance company formula. Whether or not this risk translates into actual risk in the world of reality beyond statistical analysis is another question. If such slight risks are cause for genuine concern, then Parsnick should have protested Lewiston Road being repaved, because a smooth road without potholes encourages drivers to speed up, therefore increasing risk to school children.

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Parsnick and I agree that the protection of school children from traffic on their way to and from school is of paramount importance. We probably have different perspectives: he is desperate for reasons to object to parkway removal (he is also a member of the Parkway Preservation Committee, where 22 of the 26 members are from Lewiston or Youngstown and have their own irrational reasons for "preservation."); I am a member of the Niagara Heritage Partnership, advocating for total gorge parkway removal, seeking to use reason to eliminate objections to removal.

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Short of each child having an underground tunnel from home to school, or living in a house fifty feet away from the school, there is no way to guarantee 100% safety. What then do we as a society do to ensure as much safety as possible? Everything we deem necessary, as it should be. We educate and instruct our children; we reduce speed limits near the school; we, as drivers, respect these limits; we install fences that prevent access to streets from playgrounds; we walk or drive our children to and from school; we sometimes employ crossing guards; we install stop signs and traffic lights, we might use speed bumps; we may require a police presence during school start and finish times. This seems to work well, regardless of traffic counts.

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How else does Parsnick explain, for example, the safety at Hyde Park School? According to the DOT, traffic counts past the school average 14,152 per day, more than double the number Lewiston Road would ever

experience, even if every car currently using the parkway were to suddenly begin to use it as the preferred commuter route. Parsnick refuses to acknowledge routes other than Lewiston Road--he seems unaware of other road removal projects across the nation and around the world where imagined and feared traffic impacts did not emerge. What the evidence shows is that commuter traffic denied one route fans out to multiple alternatives. Here, many currently using the parkway would utilize the I90, Military Road, Hyde Park Boulevard, Hyde Park-Highland, Hyde Park-Lockport Road (as well as Lewiston Road.) Parsnick's imagination fails him here. It doesn't extend to alternate routes.

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Parsnick says he feels "obliged to preserve the quality of...neighborhoods." He should also feel obliged to be informed. Did he, upon learning about the reconfiguring and repaving of Lewiston Road, lobby the City to use "traffic calming" techniques designed to make the road less appealing as a thoroughfare and more attractive as a neighborhood street? He did not. These techniques have been used all over the world for many years. Some were used on Center Street in Lewiston. Is Parsnick aware that the problem of snowplows making sidewalks impassible in DeVeaux (requiring schoolchildren to walk in the street) has been corrected? Evidently not, because he is still complaining about it.

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Because he is unaware, Parsnick does not credit the Mayor of Niagara Falls and City government for eliminating this unsafe condition that had existed for many years--and moreover, repeats his support for parkway removal from Main to Findlay, etc, as if that's some great concession, blissfully ignorant of the fact that the Mayor and other members of his family have signed the NHP online petition for total gorge parkway removal.

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Parsnick also says he supports State Parks (OPRHP), which he says has "\$2 million in Greenway money," in their "enhancement of six miles of trails along the gorge." Actually, OPRHP gets 3 million a year for 50 years from relicensing agreements--and the New York State Power Authority funded this "trail enhancement." In this instance, OPRHP was unable to satisfactorily answer questions about the protection of rare gorge plants impacted by this "enhancement," and NYPA announced a short time before this "enhancement" meeting that they found it was "not feasible" to restore the ecology of the gorge, largely harmed by their power plant construction and continued operation. That view has been challenged by botanist Patricia M. Eckel, in "Comments on the Feasibility Study of the New York Power

Authority," posted on the NHP website. So Parsnick can support anything he wants, but being informed might earn some respect for his opinions.

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John Hulligan of Youngstown also expresses his parkway opinions, initially aware of the faults in Soluri's reality-denying fantasies and fears, but ends up revealing he is as uninformed as Parsnick: he states he agrees with Soluri and Parsnick "that it is a complete waste of money to allow another parkway study on a proposal that has been studied ad-nauseam...." The study to which he refers, however, is not a "parkway" study. It's titled "Regional Economic Growth Through Ecological Restoration of the Niagara Gorge Rim." This has never been studied previously, not even once, let alone ad-nauseam. Hulligan confuses "study" with municipal plans formulated at the behest of governments who imagine things and then pay money to see what they've imagined turned into drawings. For those of us who value the natural landscapes of Niagara and the need to preserve and restore them, the bulk of these drawings deserve to be gathering dust on a shelf somewhere, as most of them are.

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It is Hulligan's fantasy (in fairness, only implied) that national environmental groups can be successfully invited here as part of developing a new ecotourism market to hike and bicycle alongside a two-lane commuter route. What evidence does he offer that this would be a successful enterprise? None.

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But this was also Soluri's notion, and that of Senator Maziarz, when they spoke in opposition to funding the aforementioned study. Soluri repeated the lame and misleading arguments presented on the Parkway Preservation Committee website; Maziarz cited the "studies ad-nauseam" argument, then asked what about "his" studies, he knew they weren't "scientific," but everybody he asked wanted to keep the parkway. He'd also confused studies with drawings and polls, and minutes after the meeting concluded insisted he hadn't spoken against the funding of the study. But he had. I was there.

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Hulligan had nothing to say about the ill-advised Lewiston "scenic trail" to be constructed up the escarpment alongside the parkway to Devil's Hole; nothing to say about the dog park and the dysfunctional Greenway Commission that permitted it; nothing to say about the sham trolley-on-the-parkway "study," concocted by Legislator John Ceretto, with support from

Maziarz and Soluri as Project Leaders. Unfortunately, this bogus study involved Niagara University and students. Maziarz and Soluri evidently had no problems with this "study."

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Now Maziarz endorses Ceretto's political ambitions. Legislator Ceretto, an employee of State Parks, improperly influenced the actions of the Niagara County Environmental Management Council. (Rob Nichols, Lewiston Republican Committee Chair, not introduced at the time, tagged along to one of these meetings where he taunted a pro-removal citizen into confrontation.) Cerreto was later found to be in conflict of interest for sponsoring a resolution having to do with parkway retention and was forced to withdraw it. Evidently, none of this troubles Maziarz. Ceretto was willing to take the heat and look like a fool over the bogus trolley "study," for which Maziarz was a Project Leader.

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I accepted Parsnick's invitation to observe at Maple Avenue School at dismissal time. What I observed: responsible parents picking up their well-behaved children (not carelessly "darting" into the street). Most drivers proceeding cautiously. (If some drivers speed here, they should be ticketed and heavily fined into compliance--this would encourage them to slow down or find alternate routes.)

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Now I invite Parsnick to read the details, facts, and rationales for gorge parkway removal at www.niagaraheritage.org. If he declines the invitation and chooses to remain ignorant, perhaps he will contact Hulligan and they will form an Opinions of the Uninformed Committee (OOTUC). Cerreto, Maziarz, and Soluri would be quick to join. Facts and logic will be unimportant. They could rejoice in their knee-jerk reactions and opinions based on misinformation, political pressures and manipulations, and "feelings." Perhaps they will start an OOTUC newsletter.

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For those who'd politely refuse membership in OOTUC, details of issues mentioned here can be found on the NHP website, in comments such as "Parkway Preservation Committee Nonsense," and in a score of trolley remarks and other statements, many under Recent Postings. Happy reading.

Bob Baxter
Conservation Chair
Niagara Heritage Partnership