

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
(Presented to Stow-Munroe Falls Chamber of Commerce February 16, 2016)

It is a great pleasure to be with all of you for my inaugural State of the City address.

A city is its residents, and since Munroe Falls' population contains within our borders the friendliest and warmest group of citizens a city could hope for, Munroe Falls is a very strong community and an ideal place to raise a family or start a business.

However the Munroe Falls government is not financially strong. A city government has a responsibility to its residents to be honest and transparent in fiscal matters and unfortunately the City of Munroe Falls finances are not currently on a solid foundation.

Since taking office the 1st of the year, it is apparent that we face two significant problems: First, over the past years we have significantly reduced our full time police and service departments and also have not consistently repaved or rebuilt our streets and water lines.

Second, although city staffing has been significantly reduced, for the second year in a row we will have an operational deficit. In other words, our expenditures will be greater than the incoming revenue despite operating the city on what can most accurately be described as a skeleton crew.

Last month, when a snow storm hit Washington D.C. and federal offices were closed for all but essential employees, there was no one on the roads. If we made the same suggestion, every full time Munroe Falls employee would have to report to work.

In just the last 5 years our full time police force has gone from 8 full time officers including the Chief to 5 at the end of December of 2015. That does not mean we do not have police protection, but instead of full time officers who have been with the city for many years the department is primarily staffed with part-time officers. Very good people, but most of whom are seeking full time work.

This means we take the time and resources to educate and train the officer, and then watch them leave for another city and the process starts all over again. Further, over reliance on part time police officers limits the department's ability to do community policing. Community policing done properly typically results in fewer minor offenses, such as parked cars broken into, and such an active police presence helps deter crime in general.

According to information I received from Chief Tom Pozza, law enforcement guidelines recommend 2.5 officers per 1000 residents, which would be 12 full time officers for a city our size. This is what our citizens deserve and therefore returning to a primarily full time police department will be a priority.

We are blessed to have an excellent fire chief in Lee Chafin, a resident of our community, who is committed to providing the best service possible for our city. However, with fire and EMS certification requirements becoming more stringent, relying on only part time Fire/EMS personnel is becoming more difficult to maintain.

For example, in 1990 total initial training hours for Fire and EMS personnel was 48 hours, it is now 1,382 total hours. The annual training requirements have gone from 12 continuing education hours in 1990 to 120 hours in 2016. It will therefore be necessary to add 3 full time members to our Fire/EMS Department. Thus allowing our city to take solace that there will be a full time person on all shifts in the department.

Our Service department in past years has also been downsized from 7 to only 4 full time people, which includes the Service Director. Considering our excellent Service Director Jim Bowery, who works unbelievable hours, informed me that he could use two people just to handle our water department service issues, clearly more personnel is needed to provide the service our residents have earned. To compare, the Village of Silver Lake has 7 full time Service employees although the Village is a fraction of the size of Munroe Falls.

The city has also been without a city engineer for more than a decade. Therefore there has been no comprehensive study to determine the need and priority for any capital and infrastructure repairs and improvements. This also means there has been no one available with immediate knowledge of the city in emergency situations to provide guidance, such as the flooding issues we have had in the recent years.

One may think that with the reliance on part time police officers, only two full time people in the Fire/EMS Department (the chief and deputy chief) and cuts in the service department that the city would be in good financial shape. Unfortunately last year the city ended 2015 having spent a little more than \$300,000 more than incoming revenues, and in 2016 it appears that more than a \$430,000 operational shortfall is projected. What is most troubling is the previous finance director Dave Bailey predicted this shortfall more than ten years ago if nothing was done to correct the financial situation. Nothing was done.

Last summer council discussed placing an operational levy on the ballot for March of this year. Legislation needed to be introduced and passed by the middle of December to put an operational levy on the ballot for March: No such legislation was proposed in time to meet the December election deadline. Therefore, barring an unforeseen

influx of revenue, Munroe Falls will end 2016 spending more on basic operations after significantly reducing the full time staff, than it will have in incoming revenue.

Fortunately the city has investments that are available cover this shortfall, but possibly liquidating investments to pay the electric, gas and water bills is not an acceptable situation for a household or City. If a city has to use its investments to pay general operational expenses, it should only use the interest, not principle. Regardless, we cannot continue to operate spending annually more than the city receives in revenues. Therefore it has become necessary to ask our citizens to pass a much needed levy this November.

Last year I decided to run for Mayor when I got frustrated with constant reactive decisions toward capital and infrastructure issues overlapped with policies of kicking the financial can down the road. A road that probably should have been repaved years ago.

Since we can see the end of the road; I cannot and will not continue to kick the financial can any longer. Although, like all of us, I do not want my taxes to go up, but I would rather invest in the basic services of my city than see my property values go down; like we have seen in other communities such as Youngstown. Based on my many conversations with residents during the campaign, I believe the residents of Munroe Falls agree with me that basic city services and capital improvements again need to be the priority of their City. It appears the majority of our present council also understands the current situation, thus allowing us to work together to address these issues.

Any additional revenues received will first go to shore up existing expenditures, then we will focus like a laser on properly staffing our Police, Fire/EMS and Service Departments. This will provide the City with a stable full time staff, and be more efficient than continuing to spend time and resources hiring and training new employees who typically leave within a year for full time work elsewhere.

Instead of being reactive to service and water problems, we will properly plan, prioritize and be prepared to proactively address capital improvements and infrastructure projects. This will save us money in the long run and assist us obtaining grants much like the City of Barberton has done.

There is much work to be done, but knowing what needs to be done to rebuild Munroe Falls' financial foundation allows all of us in both the administration and council to work toward continuing to make Munroe Falls a place where residents are glad they live and others wishing they did.