

FEBRUARY 20, 2018 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Since May 2nd I have been looking forward to the State of the City address, because for the first time I am not having to somberly inform people of the financial future of our city. For the past two years the financial outlook for the city was not good, but thanks to the residents of our city who passed the two levies in May, the 2018 financial picture is much better than it has been in many years.

Just to be clear, although the vote was in May of 2017 the revenues from the levies will not be received until this year, 2018. Therefore the audits for 2016 and 2017 will show large deficits, but 2018 will be much better.

In the past 4 years the city has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars more to provide very basic services than it received in revenue. This not only put significant pressure on the city's reserve funds, but it resulted in capital projects being put off each year. In other words, if the city had done the needed capital projects, the deficit would have been far greater.

Unfortunately, prior to taking office much of the city's financial needs was accomplished by borrowing money. For example, items that other cities budget for like police, fire and service vehicles were being financed. It was the family equivalent of using a credit card to buy groceries. This has left us with a large amount of debt that we will have to continue to service until 2021 and 2022. To give everyone an idea of how bad the financial situation was, had the levies not passed the city would have not had enough money to operate by 2020.

After the levies failed in November of 2016, the council and I had no method to prevent spending more than was received in 2017, because in the early 2000s the city's charter was changed to prevent council from adjusting the tax credit paid to other local communities without voter approval. Therefore the method used by other cities to avoid deficit spending was not even a temporary option for Munroe Falls.

Now that the foundation of our financial outlook has been stabilized, it allows us to try and plan for the future. Although finances are still tight, we have had meetings to address road work, capital matters, police staffing, and our water distribution system.

Thanks to passage of the police levy we have expanded our full-time police force. When I took office in January of 2016, we had 5 full time officers: The Chief; 2 sergeants; 2 patrol officers and one of the 2 full time patrol officers was the school resource officers. Meaning we had three supervisors, one officer at the school and one full time officer patrolling our community.

By the end of spring of this year, we will have six Full Time Patrol Officers, three times the number of Patrol Officers than when I took office in January of 2016. The reason our Full Time staff was small, was due to a ridiculous provision in the Police Union contract that required full time police officers and sergeants to work Monday through Friday: Resulting in only part time officers working weekends with no sergeants to provide on duty supervision. The potential problems with this arrangement should have been self-evident to everyone, but was especially concerning to a Mayor who is an attorney.

Both of these contract issues were resolved without risking an arbitration decision though our effective union negotiations with the Monday through Friday provision not applying to any new hires or promotions.

Thinking outside box, we resolved the no supervision on the weekends by utilizing the significant experience we already had in our department. Since we had 3 officers who had retired from other Police Departments as supervisors (2 sergeants and 1 lieutenant); we worked with the union and created a part-time sergeant position. These 3 highly respected individuals were promoted to sergeant effective January 1st of this year, and our able to cover the weekend shifts.

I actually got criticized for this decision, because some person apparently thought you could hire a full time sergeant to work 40 straight hours.

When I took office Munroe Falls had not had a city engineer for a decade. At the end of 2016 we contracted with GPD Group who spent 2017 doing significant amount of work in one year that should have been conducted over the previous 10 years. GPD's professional studies indicated that the City must address our water distribution system that provides water to our residents.

This includes not only replacing the discontinued waterline under the river, but also water circulation in our water towers and modernizing our pump station. To assist in our efforts, upon learning of these issues at the end of August and early September we immediately scheduled an appointment with the Ohio EPA to get guidance on how best to proceed with the EPA's assistance and cooperation.

The EPA stressed the importance of replacing the waterline under the river for both security and also to create a more circular water flow distribution system which should help preserve water quality.

The EPA also highly recommended a rate study so Munroe Falls would be in a better position to qualify for government financing programs. In reviewing this matter the water rates have not changed in Munroe Falls in almost 20 years, and the price we pay for the water we purchase from Cuyahoga Falls has increased at least 3 times during that period. Since water is a public safety issue, we intend to begin addressing these concerns as soon as realistically possible: Hopefully by 2019.

During the past two years I have made a point to include members of council in the administrative process. For example during the meeting with the EPA in September of 2017 Council members Jenny Markovich and Jim Iona attended. During my last meeting with GPD our newest council member Alan Mavrides participated. While preparing the budget, Gary Toth, who worked at FirstMerit Bank for many years, attended meetings with the department heads.

Our Council President John Hegnauer has been very helpful with his IT experience and suggestions regarding the city's computer and IT issues and Chris Ritzinger has been very effective in working with the park board and has provide significant support to our first responders as Chair of the Public Safety committee.

I cannot minimize the positive impact these members of council, along with former council member Steve Stahl have had on the city these past two years. In the past two years when there have been issues to resolve, these members provide and propose solutions.

Although sometimes it may appear that there is drama in Munroe Falls, the reality is 6 members of council and administration are rowing in the same direction to address the long neglected problems that affect basic city services.

Working with these 6 members of council we have been able to begin fixing the city's crumbling financial foundation, address staffing needs in the city, improve the relationships with our surrounding communities, and improving governmental transparency by including Munroe Falls on the Ohio Treasurer's Checkbook Ohio website so everyone can see where money is being spent and the residents can see 100% of the financial picture, not just selective information that does not accurately reflect that fiscal situation.

We have an excellent team in Munroe Falls. Fire Chief Lee Chafin works unbelievable hours and is without question the most popular person in our city. If you don't believe me, all you have to do is go to Mulberry Garden and you would think he was a rock star.

Service Director Jim Bowery makes being Mayor in the winter very nice. A few weeks ago I was at the courthouse and one of the court employees mentioned how clear the roads were in Munroe Falls and recently at church one of the parishioners sought me out to pay a similar complement to our Service Department. Jim does a tremendous job and we are better place to live because of his service.

Anne DiCola has a difficult job of promoting economic activity in a bedroom community with no real vacant land. Regardless of these obstacles, Anne is continuously promoting our city to potential businesses and looking and applying for grants for Munroe Falls. The lighting of our basketball courts was made possible by a grant Anne obtained from the State.

Anne also is the Executive Director of our Community Improvement Corporation, which is a public/private partnership designed to advance, encourage, and promote economic growth in our city. We have some promising proposals that have recently developed in our city, so hopefully I'm discussing the specifics of these positive developments next year.

A former auditor for the State of Ohio, our Finance Director Karen Reynolds has the difficult job of reminding the Mayor of the fiscal reality that we cannot do 10 years of capital projects in a year or two. I am very happy Karen agreed to become our Finance Director, since her personality helps create the positive working atmosphere at city hall.

When I was looking for potential candidates for Chief of Police, I had a conversation with an attorney I have known for over 20 years. He had been the lead prosecutor on the Hannah Hill case, in which the lead detective was Jerry Hughes. When I asked him about Jerry, he said if he lived in Munroe Falls, Jerry Hughes is the person he would want to be Police Chief, because both as a prosecutor and now as a defense attorney, he said Jerry is a stand-up guy. He was right.

When I go to meetings at the county, with other cities, or just when I am at court as a lawyer, numerous people unsolicited come up to me praising our Police Chief. The head of the County's Emergency Management contacted me a few months ago about what a great job Jerry did in conducting a training exercise of the Emergency Management team.

Munroe Falls is too small to have the largest police force, but Chief Hughes is creating the most professional police department and the vast majority of the members of the Munroe Falls Police Department appreciate and respects his efforts and leadership.

Law Director Tom Kostoff has provided wise counsel to myself and council. What I appreciate about Tom is he always is very deliberative and is willing to take the time necessary to provide the most accurate legal decision regardless of the situation or the criticism that may occur.

The only directions I have given to the Chiefs and Directors in running their respective departments was to do the right thing, and I can honestly say they have. This has not always been easy, because I did not run for Mayor to manage the status quo. I ran to change the status quo.

I ran to stop the city from going over the financial cliff and to turn the situation around so we could begin moving in the right direction, where once again city services and the capital projects are performed and various departments are properly staffed. Where we look at where we need to be in 5 and 10 years and not whether we can get past the next election.

Since we have spent the past two years focused on addressing the serious financial situation we faced, it is exciting to now focus on moving our city back to where it needs to be.

Munroe Falls is great city with good neighbors, next to fine cities like Stow, Tallmadge and Cuyahoga Falls with whom we work and collaborate in the best interest of all our residence, not as individual islands.

This past year a main storm sewer needed replacing at State Route 91, a road which we share with Tallmadge. Instead of closing the road and debating whose side of the road needed repaired or giving up the property to Tallmadge, we immediately addressed the issue with both Tallmadge and Munroe Falls paying half and the repairs went forward and the entire road was soon opened to the betterment of all who travel Rt. 91. This is one of the benefits of belonging to our local Mayor's association, where you have the opportunity to meet with other individuals representing their communities and who frequently have similar issues.

On a personal note I want to thank my friend and fellow Mayor Sara Kline for her willingness to always be available to discuss matters with me. I also must thank my mother, my sisters and my friends for their continued support.

Most of all I want to thank wife Lisa, my daughter Alexis for being patient and understanding when my time gets limited. I also want to thank my wife for ignoring social media and providing the support needed to allow me to continue working in the best interest of our city.

I thank the Chamber of Commerce for the invitation to speak today. This is a wonderful organization comprised of true community leaders and I am always honored to be in your presence where I have the privilege to represent the citizens of Munroe Falls.