

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

OLMSTED FALLS, OHIO • SPRING 2021

Mayor Graven's State of the City – Spring 2021

As you all are aware, our everyday lives are much different than they were a year ago. COVID-19 has had a huge impact on all of our lives. I want to thank all of our first responders for working very hard dealing with COVID-19. I also want to thank all of our residents. None of us could have envisioned the challenges 2020 would bring. All of our citizens found themselves placing community first by social distancing. I am immensely proud of how our community stepped up to the challenge, and continues to do so during this pandemic.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to all those who have suffered from COVID-19. 2020 was more challenging than any other year in my 33 years of public service. When COVID-19 hit about a year ago it was all about preparedness. We took immediate action to prepare. We made sure we had plenty of PPE for our firefighters and police officers, we closed the senior center a week before the Governor ordered cities to do so, and we got the word out about social distancing, hand-washing, and other measures to protect our citizens. I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of our administration for their hard work to engage with the community, and make the tough decisions necessary to sustain and guide our city.

We are all looking forward to a successful 2021.

First, I want to discuss my goals for our city this year.

Safety and finances will continue to be my top priority for 2021. Regarding your safety, Alertizen, our Modern Day Blockwatch program is alive and well. You can keep up-to-date with activity in your area almost in real time (5 minutes after police). I want us to be the Safest City in Ohio in 2021, just as we were in 2020. Regarding our police department, we will purchase a new police vehicle, and, we will continue Community Contacts to increase police visibility. The fire department will be applying for grants for some new equipment. The fire department will also continue to improve training and multi-company drills. As to finances, I want us to continue our economic success, because we have been fiscally prudent concerning spending, and we were able to build the General Fund back up. Additionally, it is clear that we need to establish a Rainy Day Fund as a hedge against unforeseen downturn in revenue. We have just concluded collective bargaining with our fire and service department unions with successful contracts for all concerned, and I thank these unions for their professionalism. We are looking forward to settling with the police unions in the near future.

When I took office 3 years ago, the unencumbered balance in the General Fund was only \$370,000, and we have built it back up to \$1.3 million.

After safety and finances, my other priorities are livability issues, such as upgrading roads, parks and recreation, and senior services, as well as promoting economic development.

We will be resurfacing Nobottom and River roads, Brookside from Bagley to Mill, and Mill from Brookside to Columbia Road.



*Mayor Graven
with Chief Rogers
and Chief
Sheehan
with our
new police
vehicle.*



State of the City - continued

On to Parks and Recreation

Another exciting project to improve Parks and Recreation, is our partnership with, Olmsted Athletic Commission (OAC), building 2 baseball fields, and a playground on city owned land next to the library. We also have had meetings with Olmsted Township and the JORD (Joint Olmsted Recreation District) to explore opportunities to enhance recreational opportunities in our community.

We will replace the playground equipment at the Village Green. Besides improving our parks, the city will also be improving entertainment opportunities for our residents. This summer we will resume our First Friday parties every month, and also our Halfway to St. Patrick's Day Party on September 17th.

The administration wants to enhance our senior center (we will re-open around April 15th). We recently bought iPads and a laptop computer to provide some virtual programs.

The last two segments of our priorities are economic development and growing the economy. Economic Development – In 2019 we had a new restaurant open, Gibbs Butcher & Brews, Grand Pacific Popcorn Company, and a new large business Forni Landscape Architects opened in 2020. Forni is now hiring new employees. In 2021, we hope to continue that success with new businesses moving in. The administration is trying to attract more commercial businesses in order to reduce the burden on individual residential taxpayers.

Our Vision for the Future

The City of Olmsted Falls has a vision – we are a safe, caring and economically vibrant community in which to live, work, have fun, and prosper. Our community is a vibrant, business friendly city, with wonderful neighborhoods set among the beauty of our covered bridge, awesome water falls, spectacular parks, and last but not least, our unique historic Grand Pacific Junction. The vision of Olmsted Falls focuses on several areas of importance:

- Community Safety
- Good Government
- Infrastructure
- Superior City Services
- Livability
- Economic Development
- Enhanced Senior Services
- Pro-Business Policies, and
- Increased Recreational Opportunities

As Mayor, I am proud of the hard work of our employees over the last three years, which has improved our city immensely. The police department initiated a

Community Policing program, a K-9 Unit, bicycle unit, and kept us safe during the first ever protest in our City. The fire department has implemented a chase car vehicle policy that allows us to keep some firefighters in service for longer times, to respond to fires and emergencies. I am also proud of our team members, and their “can do” attitude during this most recent crisis. Our city administration is always looking to rise above the situation, and do our best for the citizens and business owners in our community. Our administration has been successful because we have been winning with TEAMWORK! We have strong leaders in all of our departments who have been providing professional leadership. The truth is that TEAMWORK is at the heart of all great achievement. As leaders, myself and all of our chiefs and directors are called to not only cast vision for our teams, but also to get down in the trenches. I have been riding with plow drivers, talking to police officers, frequently visit the firehouse, and also stop by the service garage. Our chiefs and directors also do the same. Our team has been doing an awesome job, and they will continue to do so throughout 2021.

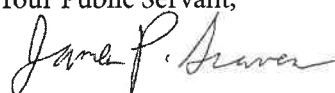
Our team listens to the citizens of Olmsted Falls. We try to connect with the residents. We strive to also see things from the citizen's vantage point. Our administration tries to gain awareness of the needs of our taxpayers when we make decisions. Myself and our directors try to keep in mind the best interests of our citizens. We lead in order to serve others.

Even with all these accomplishments, there is much more to come. As we begin 2021, our city will continue to look for ways to further our success and address ongoing challenges. There are many challenges and opportunities in 2021. We are trying to create opportunities for the business community.

In 2021, our administration will continue to be fiscally conservative with taxpayer dollars, just as we were the last three years. I believe that Mayors should be held accountable for what they do, and how they spend taxpayer money. We spend your tax dollars very wisely, and that is why we have reduced deficit spending. Now we have balanced budgets, reduced spending, and streamlined city agencies.

In closing, the year ahead is one that will continue to present challenges. Working together, our city administration and residents will help each other to stay safe, and ultimately become a stronger community. We have the vision, ideas, and a plan of action for our city's future. I hope that you can rely on me for proactive leadership that always tries to put the needs of the citizens first. Please have a healthy and happy 2021.

Your Public Servant,


James P. Graven, Mayor

Police Department Updates

Letter from Chief Odis Rogers

The Olmsted Falls Police Department recognizes the fact that the best way to accomplish our goals of protecting and serving the community is through positive, collaborative interactions with the public. 2020 was a particularly difficult year for everyone, including the Police Department. As we attempt to transition back to some normalcy, we will continue to strive to work and interact with the community through our Community Contacts Program.

We are currently in the process of hiring a new Patrol Officer and promoting a Patrol Officer to the Rank of Sergeant. We are also continuing to update our fleet of cruisers, with one new 2021 Ford Explorer being rotated into the fleet by this summer. We would like to extend our most sincere thanks and appreciation to Sgt. Floyd Takacs, who retired with over 27 years of service to the community. We wish him a happy retirement!

K9 Gauge is now two years old and fully grown! Ptl. Dan Daugherty and Gauge are currently certified in Patrol, Narcotics, Tracking, Articles, Area Search and Obedience. They are currently working toward a National Cadaver Certification. Furthermore, Ptl. Daugherty is working toward a National Certification as a Trainer to assist other Police Departments in the area train and certify their K9 Officers.

Legal Update

Letter from Law Director Bemer

The legal process has been seriously affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are the cases that continue to pend into the new year.

Gilles/Battaglia v. Donegan, et. al., U.S. District Court, Case #1:19-cv-01968 This case was filed by former Police Chief Gilles and former Lieutenant Battaglia against former Mayor Donegan and former interim Assistant Safety Director Traine for defamation and violation of a contract regarding a public disparagement of the two plaintiffs at a news conference, which allegedly violated the anti-disparagement provision in the settlement agreement which had been reached following the forced termination of employment of those individuals. The action against the City is for breach of contract, in view of the employment status of Donegan and Traine at the time of the alleged disparaging statements. This case continues to pend in Federal Court.

Traine v. City of Olmsted Falls, et. al., Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court Case No.: CV 18-896234, Now pending in the 8th District Court of Appeals Case # CA-19-108450. This is an action for wrongful termination of employment following his termination by the City on February 19, 2018, where he had been serving in the position of interim Assistant Safety Director. On the same day, Odis Rogers was named Police Chief, as he had scored the highest on a Chief's exam which was offered for promotional purposes, by the Olmsted Falls Civil Service Commission. Traine did not sit for the promotional exam, even though he had signed up for it. Traine alleged that he was in effect the police chief, even though his specific appointment was as Interim Assistant Safety Director. The City was successful in the case, and granted summary judgment on wrongful termination and that decision was upheld on appeal. A claim of age discrimination is still pending.

Elko v. City of Olmsted Falls, et al., U.S. District Court Case No.: 1:17-CV-02247 This is a Civil Rights case along with allegations of malicious prosecution, battery against the city and two officers. Christine Elko was arrested in September 2016 for domestic violence and assaulting a police officer as a result of her failure to comply with a lawful order of arrest and her aggressive behavior in tussling with two Olmsted Falls Police officers. While she was charged with a felony assault of a police officer, she plead to the misdemeanor of resisting arrest at the Court of Common Pleas criminal level, but that plea was vacated. She was retried on the assault case and found guilty of a misdemeanor, which was reversed on appeal due to incomplete jury instructions. The case is back on for trial on the assault issue. At the municipal court level, her domestic violence charge was reduced to disorderly conduct, to which she also plead no contest. The civil case will pend until the criminal process is concluded.

Ann Marie Przybys Donegan v. City of Olmsted Falls - Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Case # 19CV910041 - the former mayor filed a complaint in the Court of Common Pleas on 01/23/2019 for unused sick and vacation time alleged to have accrued during her term as Mayor for \$24,000. Case law holds that as an elected public official, Donegan is not entitled to benefits provided for public employees. Accordingly, there is no legal support for her claim for payment of unused sick time. The claim for payment of unused vacation time is in dispute, but does not exceed \$9,000. Reciprocal motions for summary judgment were filed on October 25, 2019, and the court has not ruled on those motions. This case is still pending.

Service Department Updates:

Phase V

The Phase V Sewer Project is almost finalized. The City still has a “punch list” that has to be completed before the project will be turned over to the city. Once the project is turned over, the city engineer will forward the city the final assessment costs. Those letters will be mailed to affected residents via certified mail. Those letters will contain information regarding the costs and payment options. We are anticipating that this will take place in early Summer.

Maintenance Update

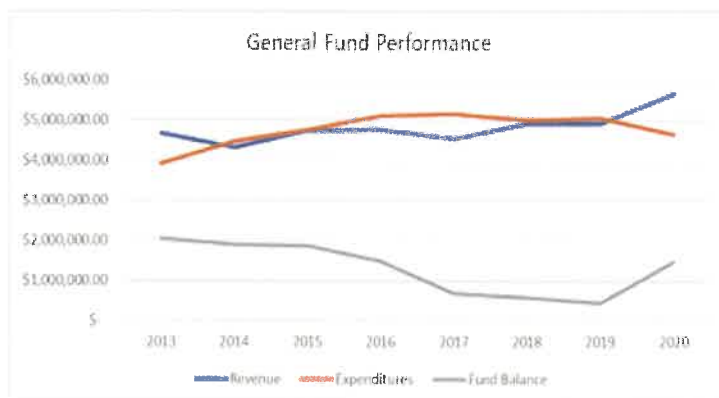
The Service Department will be completing miscellaneous concrete work throughout the city this year, as well as repairing and resurfacing roadways. The city also received funds from the State Capital Budget for playground equipment at the Village Green. We are currently working with the state to firm up those funds and are anticipating new playground equipment to be installed at some point this summer.



Finance Perspective In Brief From Finance Director Swaisgood

The City entered into a time of financial uncertainty when the COVID-19 pandemic started in early 2020, considering approximately 33% of the City’s revenue is derived from local income tax. With the City’s main financial focus shifting to maximizing resources for public safety, initial income tax revenue projections for 2020 were at historic reductions, ranging between 2% and 30% revenue loss. Consequently, the City took immediate action to cut expenses. The Mayor, Chiefs, Directors and non-union employees took a 10% pay cut for multiple months, along with other cost cutting moves to reduce spending. However, the local economy proved strong to end the year as 2020 actual income taxes were consistent with prior years. The City is not completely out of the woods, yet, as the 2020 tax filing deadline will provide the true picture of 2020 individual income tax revenue, which makes up 60% of total income tax revenue.

Over the past 3 years, the City has been diligent in maintaining a balanced budget. One of the Mayor’s priorities was to end deficit spending, and develop sound financial policies to increase General Fund reserves for future financial stability. Although it has been a challenging process along with a global pandemic, the City’s financial outlook is strong and actions have been taken to ensure the City’s annual budget is balanced. The Mayor has significantly reduced annual costs in higher spending categories, such as outside legal expenses. From 2014 to 2017, outside legal expenses cost the City approximately \$123,000 per year. Outside legal expenses from 2018 to 2020 were approximately \$30,000 per year. In 2020, General Fund revenues were approximately \$5.6 million versus expenditures at \$4.6 million, with an ending cash balance over \$1.4 million on December 31, 2020. The City is using 2021 to implement more financial planning strategies and expect to end the year with a General Fund balance over \$1 million.



City Service Reminders:

Brush collection will begin in April. The first Monday of each month. Waste will begin yard waste pickups in April.

Grass clippings and other yard waste should be placed in bags. Small branches must be cut and bundled not to exceed 4ft in length. There is no limit to the number of yard waste bags or containers you can use.

Fire Department Updates



Chief Matt Sheehan

2020 was a very challenging year for the citizens of Olmsted Falls and for the Olmsted Falls Fire Department. Many new guidelines were put in place by the Center of Disease Control and by our local Medical Directors. The amount of Personal Protective Equipment used compared to previous years greatly increased. As a fire department, we were well prepared due to our firefighters doing an excellent job of keeping our supply of PPE (Personal Protection Equipment) well stocked. Local Companies donated hand sanitizing agents and surgical masks, which I cannot thank them enough.

On October 9, 2020 we had the dedication of the 9-11 memorial. The event was well attended. If you have not had the chance to see the memorial, please stop at the fire station.

In 2020, the total of emergency responses increased to 1302, from the total in 2019 of 1197. The fire department also responded to a total of 20 structure fires inclusive of our own and neighboring cities.

The Cleveland Chapter of the American Red Cross has continued its partnership with Olmsted Falls to provide smoke detectors to those in need. The fire department will also install them.

As we embark on 2021, we are still in the midst of the COVID 19 Pandemic. The firefighters have been fortunate to begin to receive the vaccine. The vaccine should be available to all others very soon.

We are updating our hands on training to keep all of our firefighters proficient with their firefighting and EMS skills.

The fire department is in the third phase of replacing all firefighting gear whose life expectancy ends this year. Our self-contained breathing apparatus will also be updated. We appreciate our citizens for their support in passing our equipment fund levy last year. Thank you!

Hopefully by this time next year, we will be back to what is considered a normal lifestyle.



Each month the city will pick up brush. Please place brush on the tree lawns for pick up. Do not place any brush in ditches. Allied

own paper bio-degradable bags or loose in 32 gallon plastic cans clearly marked with "yard waste" or "YW" and not exceed 40lbs. Length or 40 lbs. Plastic bags, dirt, stone or branches larger than 6 inches in diameter will not be collected with yard waste. There is a place out each week. Yard waste will be collected April 15, 2021 thru November 26, 2021.



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Economic Development staff has published the Report to the Community in cooperation with the Finance Department and Mayor's Office. Additional copies are available at City Hall and in digital format at www.olmstedfalls.org.



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