

**State of the City of North Ridgeville**  
**Mayor G. David Gillock**  
**January 16, 2014**

Thank goodness 2013 is done and gone. Let's just skip the recap and move on to better things.

All kidding aside, 2013 was a rough year in many ways, but to be honest there were some good things looking back. But none will rise to a level of positive goodwill to offset the feral cat issue. There, I've said it, right up front. First thing out of the box. We'll come back to it, but make no mistake we have never had to deal with an issue of the magnitude of the Woodpile 5.

Let me take this opportunity to thank a number of people for making my job easier. Thank you to the Chamber and Dayle Noll for once again sponsoring the State of the City Address. The Chamber is very active in supporting our businesses and it is my pleasure to contribute to their efforts.

Thanks to Superintendent Jim Powell and our city schools for again providing a venue that brings us all together.

Allow me to thank our City workers that show up every day, regardless of the weather, especially lately to clear our streets, provide fire and EMS services and keep us safe. Would those City employees with us today please stand up? In the last few weeks these employees have performed above and beyond the normal call of duty. A few weeks ago one of our service employees while cleaning a ditch discovered that a sandstone culvert on Stoney Ridge was collapsing. One of our engineering firms gave us a free analysis. He didn't know when it was going to go, but when it did it would be a total collapse. We immediately closed the road. As I was preparing emergency purchase orders to hire an engineering firm and go out for emergency bids, Al Swindig, our street superintendent came in and said, "We can do that!" So at a cost of less than \$5,000 not including labor and parts we had available in our yard, our streets department rebuilt a bridge saving our taxpayers thousands of dollars. I was out there several times while they were working in the cold and their pride in being able to complete this project was very evident. To our service guys – Job well done!

And last week, when we first had a gas issue and then a water shortage our fire and service guys were out on Barton Road at 10:30 at night in the freezing cold rigging a line to get water into our system from North Olmsted.

Although I have detailed only two incidents you need to know that we have some of the best, most knowledgeable and committed employees a City could have.

I want to thank Safety Service Director Jeff Armbruster for all that he does in keeping as many complaints as possible off my desk and trying to keep all those same City workers happy.

Finally, those that really keep the City administration office running smoothly, Robin Mayda, Tissy Simon and Penny Smith.

With us today are City Council President Kevin Corcoran and council members Dennis Boose, Bernadine Butkowski, Roseanne Johnson, and Bob Olesen and Clerk of Council George Smith and Assistant Clerk of Council Tara Peet. Unfortunately, Councilman Dr. Ron Arndt was unable to join us here today.

I would also like to mention and recognize a couple others for their service to the community for several years. Mayor Deanna Hill passed away in 2013. Mayor Hill led the City from 1995 to 2003. Also, Dick Jaenke passed away in 2013 after serving 9 ½ years on City Council. And, Nancy Buescher retired at the end of 2013 after serving 12 years on City Council. All three contributed to the City in their own way, giving up personal time to attend numerous meetings and trying to help constituents along the way. Personally, I admire anyone that takes part in Civic involvement, whether it be running for office or serving on a commission or Board. Thanks to the three of them for their many years of service.

Two other significant retirements during 2013 were long time French Creek Superintendent Don Daley and Fire Chief Rick Miller. While both will be missed personally, we did not miss a beat professionally with their replacements Corey Timko at French Creek and John Reese, our new Fire Chief.

One of the great things that happened in my life in 2013 is that at the end of November my wife Beverly retired. Now she is busy on the home front catching up on all those things she put off over the years because she didn't have time. Congratulations to her on her successful retirement.

Looking back at 2013 our construction projects are always interesting to me. Although we spend a majority of time on the Lear Nagle and Center Ridge Road widening projects that's not all we do. In 2013 we replaced water lines on Cornell Ave in two different phases, and Denise Drive and South Barton Road. The City

built a new detention basin for the Highland Drive area that so far seems to have helped reduce the flooding in that area substantially.

We applied for and successfully received a grant for our “Safe Routes To School” program in the amount of \$376,000. With our \$50,000 contributing funds we will be doing over \$400,000 in sidewalk and other improvements around our schools. The next phase of Chestnut Ridge Road was completed extending the reconstruction and paving to the Cuyahoga county line, as well as repaving from Route 83 to the western city limit. In 2014 the section of Chestnut Ridge from Bainbridge Road going west to just past the turnpike overpass will be completed, leaving one last phase to complete the road from city limit to city limit.

In 2013, we continued to move forward on Center Ridge Road and Lear Nagle Road. Almost \$500,000 was spent to complete the detailed design work on Lear Nagle. We have now reached the point where we are starting to acquire the properties necessary to complete the project. Fortunately, there are no total takes on the Lear Nagle project. We only need about 90 small parcels along the right-of-way, mainly for construction easements. We don’t have to take any buildings or relocate anyone. The City’s remaining obligation on this \$12,252,800 project is \$2,878,900. This project is scheduled to go to bid June 2015.

Center Ridge Road also continues to progress however is a much more complicated project. Currently projected to cost \$43,195,470, ODOT is presently sending letters to property owners on Center Ridge, whose property will need to be taken. Detailed engineering is essentially done. The City’s remaining obligation of the total of \$43,000,000 is approximately \$4,000,000 assuming we receive an estimated \$14,500,000 through the TRAC. In 2013, as part of Governor Kasich’s bid to obtain approval to sell bonds, financed by proceeds from the Ohio Turnpike Commission, Center Ridge Road was one of those projects touted to benefit. Governor Kasich spoke of being able to move this project up the schedule. ODOT through the TRAC commission approved the project. However, the bond issue as passed requires the approval of the Turnpike Commission, now called the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission. I want to point out that our own Senator Gayle Manning, who sits on the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission, was instrumental in helping to get the bond issue passed and keep the majority of those funds in Northeast Ohio. It is our understanding that approval of the Center Ridge Road project by the Ohio Turnpike Commission will occur sometime this spring. As soon as that piece of the puzzle is put into place, the last major step is for the City to step forward with their portion of the costs, which are about 10% of the total project.

To finance the City's portion of the widening of Lear Nagle Road and Center Ridge Road a bond issue is being placed on the May ballot. This bond issue, payable over 20 years will raise \$8,000,000 to finance our portion of the two projects. The cost to a homeowner of a home with a fair market value of \$100,000 is \$30.10 per year. An owner of a home valued at \$200,000 would only pay \$60.20 per year. I have already received my first email in opposition. And I quote "You are like the President of the USA... spend spend spend... the residents especially seniors cannot give up any more to pay the taxes in N.R. and you want to put more on us..." I responded "I find your email interesting as I have been Mayor for 10 years now and have not raised taxes in those 10 years. We have renewed property taxes as replacements which restores them to the level at which they were passed. Our income tax remains 1% the lowest in the entire State..." And, the condos where this particular person lived are valued at approximately \$100,000. I told her that I think even most seniors on fixed incomes can afford \$2.50 per month. Most of us probably spend more than that in gas, just sitting in traffic on those two streets.

These projects are crucial to the future of North Ridgeville. It should pass easily but I request your help in making sure they pass. Last November, Jim Powell and our city schools passed a bond issue that will result in about \$60,000,000 in new construction over the next few years. Congratulations to them for an outstanding job. But when we pass our bond issue we can totally revitalize our community with the two projects. We can finally have a town center at Route 83 and Center Ridge Road. We can eliminate the school traffic jams and the congestion every day on these two major thoroughfares. We can create about 1,000 new jobs directly over the next few years in construction and an unknown number of new jobs due to new economic development. We are talking about \$120,000,000 in construction in North Ridgeville in the next few years. Many of the businesses that require taking are looking at constructing new and more modern facilities. No more will prospective employees decline to move here because they don't like the school facilities. We are on the verge of the largest leap forward this community has ever seen!

As you can see, this is something I am quite passionate about, but I know I am right. How do I know? A Liberty third grader wrote to me and said, "You make all the right decisions and I am glad that we elected you and you taught us that being a Mayor is hard and one question, how many friends do you have?"

This spring you will see new sound barrier walls being constructed by the Ohio Turnpike gate. Long a burr in the side of residents adjacent to that area, we were finally able to convince ODOT and the Turnpike Commission to do something.

Councilwoman Roseanne Johnson and Senator Gayle Manning were instrumental in getting the two agencies to the table together. The walls will be put up at no costs to North Ridgeville.

I don't want to forget to mention the new Lorain Community College Ridge Campus facility on Lorain Road. A fantastic facility and Dr. Roy Church told me it is already too small. On the top floor is a forensic lab used to teach law enforcement how evidence is processed. The FBI acted as consultants on the lab and as a result actually uses the lab for real on occasion. An interesting thing occurred when the new digital sign on the east side of the building was initially turned on. There wasn't any information on the sign; it was just all white, like a giant spot light! The intensity of the light was overwhelming. It lit up North Olmsted like a Broadway stage. The problem was quickly corrected when new information about the college was put on the sign and the brightness was turned down.

You will also see a new cell tower constructed behind City Hall on school property in 2014. Our tower behind the service garage is so old no one knows when it was originally built. It was going to cost us substantially to have it assessed for safety. There are several critical functions located on the tower including some of our police and fire transmissions as well as our water meter system and several sub contracts. The new tower is being built by TowerCo at no cost to the City. We will only have to construct our own building to house our equipment.

In 2013, we negotiated a new water contract with the City of Elyria which will help keep our rates down for the next ten years. We purchase about 3 million gallons of water daily, and about 2 million of this comes from Elyria, with the balance coming from Avon Lake. As a side benefit, during last week's water emergency, Elyria's water intake was not affected by the frazil ice that disabled Avon Lake's intake system. Fortunately most of North Ridgeville was not affected by the emergency.

I was sincerely impressed with all involved in the gas and water emergencies of last week. However, we did notice one area that I believe we can improve upon. In 2013, we began a project to give us the ability to communicate more effectively with our residents and businesses. Currently, when we need to get information out to them we have three ways of doing that internally. We put bulletins on our website and on our cable channel updating our residents with the best information we had available. We also have an email blast that we use that residents can sign up for through the City website at [www.nridgeville.org](http://www.nridgeville.org). Still we heard from residents that said they did not feel they had up-to-date information. We need to

get back to that project and complete it. Systems such as Red Alert or Reverse 911 could give us the ability to record a message and communicate it to those that need the information. Because of the two emergencies last week we have elevated this on our priority list and anticipate having a recommendation for Council during our appropriations process the end of next month.

Speaking of utilities, I want to talk about NOPEC a little bit. NOPEC, the Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council, is the largest governmental public retail energy aggregation in the nation. It currently has 134 members, serving 174 communities in 10 counties. I represent Lorain County as one of the ten directors. In the next few days you will be receiving another opt-out letter. NOPEC is required by law to send this letter out to gas customers every two years. I am proud to tell you if you didn't know already that NOPEC has signed a new six-year agreement with Next Era Energy Services that has the potential to save 50 to 60 cents per thousand cubic feet (Mcf) due to lower costs compared to today's delivered gas prices. In addition, much of the gas in the NOPEC territory will come from Ohio Shale production buying Ohio gas over other interstate suppliers. This is good for all of Ohio.

In 2013, construction continued to boom in North Ridgeville. There were a total of 224 new house permits and 6 apartment building permits totaling 29 apartments issued. Our building department conducted over 9,000 inspections. This year in keeping with our goal of reducing paperwork and being more efficient, the Building Department will begin using electronic plan review which will allow homeowners, builders and contractors to upload applications and drawings for permits through the internet. Users will be able to track the status of their application, always a concern to builders, and they will know when their permits are ready. Less trips to the building department and less interruption to our staff. A win-win situation for all those involved in plan review.

2013 was a transition year for the French Creek Waste Water Treatment Plant, a regional sewer plant that is wholly owned by the City of North Ridgeville. Long time superintendent Don Daley retired and Corey Timko took over the helm. Corey performed an evaluation of the internal systems and has given us some outstanding recommendations for improvement. We are replacing an undersized 500 kW emergency generator with a 2500 kW generator that will keep the plant operating efficiently during power outages. French Creek tightened regulations on trucks hauling waste to the plant leading to a more stable plant chemistry and a 30% reduction in sludge production. We completed an inspection of the 14 miles of sewer pipe that leads from North Ridgeville through Avon to French Creek. As owners of the plant, you will be glad to know that while we did find some

problems that need addressed this 30-year-old pipe itself was found to be in great shape. And quasar, our private partner on site that converts sludge into electricity became fully operational and took all of our sludge in 2013, keeping that sludge off of farmers' fields and out of the landfills.

Our Parks and Recreation department was very busy in 2013. We completed renovation of our restrooms in South Central Park. All of our restroom facilities in all of our parks are now ADA compliant. With the help of Schmidt Properties we expanded the parking facilities at Root Road soccer complex, a great improvement to that facility. Parks and Recreation completed a comprehensive Master Plan that will guide that department for the next several years. Recently we were able to acquire the property in front of South Central that will let us expand our tennis courts which will enable them to sponsor tournaments at the North Ridgeville tennis court. Finally, we opened bids on our walking trails to be built which will connect the Middle School parking lot and ultimately the Center Ridge Road multi-purpose path to South Central Park. This is the project I have talked about before that was instigated by Morgan Rogers and Caitlyn Tipple as a Girl Scout project. The trail will wrap around the lakes and give our residents an outstanding walking/running trail through the central part of our community. Great job in 2013 to our Parks and Recreation Department, Director Kevin Fougousse and thanks again to Morgan and Caitlyn.

Before I get into our financial status let me just give you some interesting statistics that reflect on how busy our City really is. Our Meals-On-Wheels program served over 10,000 meals. Our street department cleared almost a mile of ditches, repaired 21 water main breaks and replaced 101 curb boxes. Our police department answered 35,753 calls for assistance. I performed 17 weddings, giving me an all-time total of 273! The City sold 24 cemetery plots and performed 24 burials. Our fire department went on 2916 runs last year, 545 fire runs and 2371 EMS runs. They also inspected or re-inspected 211 businesses. Our Mayors Court handled 4,720 cases last year. As you can see, City Hall is a busy place. We dress for success too! After visiting Liberty Elementary a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader wrote to me "Thank you for coming to Liberty Elementary. You taught me a lot about yourself. Like casual day on Friday's you can wear jeans and any shirt. Other days a tuxedo and tie!"

We also had to deal with the most controversial event I have ever seen since I became involved in politics. I remember getting a call telling me that our Animal Control Officer had shot 5 feral kittens and the homeowner was upset. I knew immediately that this wasn't going away any time soon. I am not debating the merits of the issue itself in this setting but I had no idea that 8 months later I would

still be getting emails and phone calls regarding the Woodpile 5. We have changed our protocol regarding feral cats, and we now have a citizens committee and the Friendship Animal Protective League working with our police department to manage a Trap, Neuter and Release program. The most astonishing part of this controversy was the power of social media. Once the event was put on Facebook the City began receiving emails and phone calls from around the world. The issue was discussed on CNN, appeared in USA today and I had phone calls for interviews from as far away as Fox News in Florida. I once heard that to a politician bad news is better than no news. I respectfully disagree.

Moving on in 2013 North Ridgeville was named the 21st safest City in the United States by NeighborhoodScout a real estate rating service. With the growth that we see each year with the number of new homes being built, I truly believe our residents feel safe in North Ridgeville.

Financially, it gets tougher every year. The new residents we see each year are one of the primary reasons that we have been able to stay in the black but each year our revenues continue to actually decrease.

When I compare 2013 to prior years, I look at our operating funds including the general fund, state highway, motor vehicle tax and income tax. This gives us the best indication of trends and balances that we watch closely. Our carry over balance at the end of 2013 was \$2,020,447 less than it was at the end of 2012. Those balances went from about \$6 million to a little over \$4 million. Now it's not quite that bad, a 33% decrease, but the trend is not good.

In 2013, our income taxes actually declined by about \$650,000. That is primarily because when we switched to RITA reimbursements to us were delayed by one month. In 2014, we will collect for a full 12 months so that should restore itself.

Our property taxes also declined by \$463,426 due to the tri-annual reassessment. As property values continue to slowly rise and with new construction this also will decrease. Income tax and property tax reductions combined, account for over half of the decrease in funding. We also had an extraordinary expenditure of \$130,000 for land purchases which puts us at about \$570,000 behind last year. Four parcels of land became available near the end of 2013 that we have eyed for a long time. One of the parcels I mentioned earlier is at the entrance to South Central Park. Up to now we only had an easement across that property allowing us access to the park. Now we own that parcel. There were also two parcels at the corner of Barres and Stoney Ridge that retired Fire Chief Rick Miller and I identified several years ago as an ideal location for a satellite fire station. The other parcel is



adjacent to Safetyville at the corner of Bainbridge and Route 83. We still have some encumbrances out, purchase orders that haven't been closed which will further reduce the gap. But, our local government funds also went down from \$506,000 to \$384,000 another reduction of \$122,000. What this shows us is that other than the land purchase, we are more than holding the line on expenditures but our revenues keep decreasing. And since we budget off of last year's revenues, 2014 is going to be a very difficult year. Council and the administration work extremely well together to prioritize our expenditures during our appropriations process at the end of February but this year is going to be tougher than ever. On an up note, we recently visited Moody's rating service in our plan to sell bonds to finance some of our borrowing and refinance some earlier bonding that can save us about \$300,000 over the life of the bonds. Moody's was very happy with our financial controls and overall outlook and again gave us an Aa2 rating which is very good. Actually, just last Friday for the 13<sup>th</sup> year in a row, the City received a Government Finance Officers Association Certificate of Achievement. City Auditor Chris Costin and staff are to be commended for their outstanding work. I might also add when the State Auditors come to North Ridgeville each year they point out they like doing our audit since it's always so easy and all of our funds are always in order.

I can assure you this administration and City Council will continue to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. We are recognized as being extremely conservative with our financial practices and efficient with our budget and we will continue to do so in 2014.

Finally, I want to reiterate that 2014 is shaping up to be one of our most challenging and exciting years ever. Progress on widening Center Ridge Road and Lear Nagle along with the new schools project will certainly keep us busy, and these are exciting times in North Ridgeville. Our future is in our own hands and I am thrilled to be a part of it. The State of the City is very good and is getting better each year.

Thank you very much!