

# **City of North Ridgeville, Ohio**

## **State of the City Address**

**January 19, 2018**

**Delivered by Mayor G. David Gillock**

Welcome to my fifteenth State of the City. My how things have changed!

First, I would like to thank Marjorie Snyder and the North Ridgeville Chamber of Commerce for sponsoring today's event. Our Chamber is very active and if you own or work for a business in North Ridgeville you should really consider joining and supporting the Chamber if you do not already do so.

Thank you to Dr. Powell and the school board for providing this great new facility! This is a tremendous change in the way our children are educated. Thank you to all the citizens that have made this state-of-the-art facility possible. I have heard nothing but positive remarks from teachers and students alike about our new school. This remarkable facility alone has changed our city landscape and will stand as a testament to our residents and their support for many years to come.

I would like to recognize several public officials that are with us today.

From City Council we have Council President Kevin Corcoran, Council at Large Martin DeVries and Michelle Hung; and from Ward 1 Gregg Westover, Ward 2 Dennis Boose, Ward 3 and President Pro-Tem Bruce Abens, and Ward 4 Bob Chapek. Special congratulations to Martin DeVries and Michelle Hung who won election to Council for the first time last November. While we hate to see familiar faces like Bernadine Butkowski and Roseanne Johnson leave after many years on Council, it is always refreshing to see new members with new ideas and enthusiasm. I think we have a great Council and while we don't always agree on everything, nor should we, I think we all have tremendous respect for each other and a willingness to get things done. This year, for example, we were able to move our appropriations forward and actually adopt a final appropriation ordinance prior to the end of 2017. This is a very important accomplishment and took a lot of hard work from Council and our Auditor's Office. Thanks to Jeff Wilcheck and April Wilkerson for the many hours they put in to make this possible. Why is this important? Well let me explain. In the past, we did not adopt a permanent appropriations ordinance until March. This meant we had to pass a temporary ordinance in December. So not only were we effectively duplicating our efforts to pass a budget, we had to wait until March or April to begin spending funds on capital expenditures and new projects. By passing a permanent appropriation ordinance in December the Auditor's Office now has a better handle on fund balances and our department heads have a more accurate understanding of their budgets from the beginning of the year.

Other public officials with us today include from Congressman Gibbs' Office, Jake Altman; State Senator Gayle Manning; State Representative Nathan Manning; Judge Gary Bennett; Retired Judge John Musson; Lorain County Commissioners Matt Lundy and Lori Kokoski; Elyria Prosecutor Scott Strait and North Ridgeville Prosecutor Cynthia Adams; and, School Board members Kelly McCarthy and Marci Saxon.

I would also like to thank Jeff Armbruster, Safety Service Director, Tissy Simon and Robin Mayda who collectively keep the Mayor's Office humming all year long. Thank you.

Also, thanks to my wife Beverly for all her support.

I have already mentioned a couple changes, the way we appropriate funds and our new Council make up as well as this new Academic Center.

In May, the redevelopment of the old shopping center was completed with the opening of the new Riddell Production and Distribution Facility. This state-of-the-art 347,205 square-foot-facility housing nearly 400 employees has redefined the western entrance to our community. Quoting from a Riddell news release, "not only does Riddell add visibility to our community from the Ohio turnpike but it also brings added commerce to a budding community that continues to expand through housing and business development." In addition, the west end of North Ridgeville is seeing more homes in Sandy Ridge; FriendShip Food Stores, a new convenience store and gas station at Case Road; and, a new occupant MyWoodLoft.com in the former Sandusky Electric building. We look forward to seeing more redevelopment at our western border in the future.

Another big physical change was the addition of the roundabout at the intersection of Route 83 and Mills Road. Prior to construction many people were apprehensive as to whether it would work or not. In fact, during the Mayoral Campaign leading up to the project, I heard it referred to as "the circle of death." I am happy to say that since the roundabout opened up to traffic on October 4<sup>th</sup>, we remain accident free at that intersection as of January 17<sup>th</sup>. And I still hear several times a week comments from people that were skeptical that now say they are converts and they love it! The roundabout works!

Of course, Lear Nagle also opened from Center Ridge Road to Lorain Road substantially improving traffic safety and congestion in that area. There are still a few items on the punch list to complete before the County signs off on the job. These items are restoration of properties that may need to wait until the weather breaks. Special thanks to Terrace Construction and GPI for a job well done!

In 2018 you will see even more change. The University Hospitals medical facility on Lorain Road is coming along nicely. I have been informed that they anticipate starting to receive patients June 1<sup>st</sup>. That is well ahead of the anticipated finish which was scheduled for October. We look forward to seeing that facility open. Our residents will be able to receive faster medical care, and our emergency forces will be able to get back into service much quicker.

In 2017, we saw the opening of Ranger Way from Center Ridge to the new Academic Center. Let me tell you an interesting side story which demonstrates the outstanding capabilities of our Service Department. For the last couple years we had discussed with the Ohio Department of Transportation that when Ranger Way was completed there would be a gap from the end of Ranger Way to Center Ridge Road of 300' that is scheduled to be built as part of the Center Ridge Road widening project. ODOT told us not to worry; they would provide a temporary road so Ranger Way would be open for the new school year. About six weeks before school was to open, ODOT informed us that for a number of reasons, including the cost of the temporary improvement was more than anticipated and that they would not be funding the temporary improvement. You can imagine how this administration felt suddenly to be left in the lurch with the opening of the new school fast approaching and no way to access the new Ranger Way. At that point Al Swindig, Service Department Superintendent and Jon Montgomery, his assistant

came to me and said “Mayor, we can build the temporary road ourselves” and they did. They accomplished the impossible in record time and the road was open for the new school year. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to our service guys for another outstanding accomplishment.

The last two years have also seen our own Service Department crews complete approximately \$750,000 annually in paving of City streets. Last year we completed twenty-two residential streets. In 2018 the City will see about \$1,200,000 in repaving. Lorain Road will be repaved from the Cuyahoga line to the Ohio Turnpike, and from route 83 west to the alternate 83, and across alternate 83 to Chestnut Ridge Road with ODOT funding \$361,800 of those costs. That project total is \$669,262. In addition, the City anticipates spending another \$600,000 on mostly residential streets this year.

Last year our Service Department employees performed 10.72 miles of ditch cleaning, repaired 22 water main breaks, repaired 18 service lines, replaced 50 curb boxes, cleaned and jetted over 4 miles of sanitary sewer lines and flushed 2,417 fire hydrants. In addition, 80 catch basins were replaced or repaired, about half of those needing attention. It is the City’s plan to repair or replace all of the remaining catch basins that need attention this year. Finally, the Service Department responded to over 16,000 OUPS requests, a 60% increase from the year before. Most of the increase can be attributed to the installation of WOW underground cable requiring our department to locate underground water lines.

The Service Department also recently purchased and was trained on a new piece of equipment, KM T-2 Asphalt Recycler. This will allow us to have access to hot mix asphalt year round – it’s like owning our own mini asphalt plant. There will be a cost savings, too! The cost to produce our own asphalt is \$15-25 a ton compared to \$60-75 a ton at the plant; or, \$110+ for cold patch.

As you can see, our Service Department has been extremely busy. Although even with all their cool construction equipment they couldn’t match the Fire Department during the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade tours. One young lady wrote, “Dear fire fighters, Thank you for giving all your tour time. One thing I liked about seeing you is you were all kind. One thing that was very cool is one of the fire fighters let me hold a crow bar. Thank you!”

You can’t see it, but another major improvement in 2017 was the redirection of Turnpike storm water runoff into the city-owned detention pond off of Bainbridge Road. When the Turnpike was built no storm water detention was provided and the 72+ acres of concrete runoff went into the Mills ditch and ultimately into the Pitts/Gina area. The City applied for and received a \$352,500 grant which was used to redirect all of this water flow from the Mills ditch into the West Point regional retention basin. It is anticipated that this will reduce the 100-year flood level on the Pitts/Gina area by up to 6 inches. This will have a significant impact on flooding in that area.

In 2018, we’ll see the preliminary engineering and land acquisition work being done to replace the bridge over the French Creek on Mills Road. This bridge is in very poor shape and requires replacement. Fortunately, again working with the Ohio Department of Transportation the majority of the costs will be financed by grants through the ODOT Ohio Bridge Partnership.

Speaking of our emergency forces, we broke ground last week on our new main Fire Station. It is scheduled to be completed in early 2019. Located on Ranger Way this new 23,767 square-foot-facility will include four apparatus bays and a fire training tower. Our department will now have a clean room for medical supplies, an EMS decontamination room and a protective gear

storage room, necessities that were lacking at the old facility. They will also have a conference room, training conference room and fire prevention office. Another new feature will be a patient triage room which will allow our paramedics to treat walk-in patients as well as potentially deliver medical services such as flu shots or other community services. Thank you again to the voters who made this state-of-the-art fire and EMS service a reality. Our firefighters will be safer as they work and train to keep us safe and the community will be safer with up-to-date training, equipment and facilities and access to a new 24-hour emergency care at the new University Hospitals facility. This is a big change and a big win for our community all the way around. Plans are to raze the old station after the move to the new station is completed although funding for demolishing the building has yet to be determined.

In 2017, Scott Bement retired as Assistant Fire Chief after 35 years of service. He did an outstanding job and I would like to thank him for his dedicated service to our City. With his retirement, Mike Uhnak was named Assistant Fire Chief. Mike has been with our Fire Department since 1996. I would be remiss if I didn't mention Assistant Fire Chief Jon Graf who's been with us since 1995. All three assistants serve under Fire Chief John Reese.

Last year our Fire Department went on 3,662 runs, of which 3,109 were EMS/ambulance runs and 553 were fire runs. This is an increase of 11% over 2016. The opioid crisis continues unabated as the Fire Department administered Narcan to 100 patients, comparable to the 103 patients the year before. The Nord Foundation has initiated a program to combat this crisis and is being led by Dr. Don Sheldon. I will be attending an advance discussion next Monday at the Lorain County Community Foundation and a community-wide discussion next Thursday evening at LCCC. This administration remains committed to doing whatever it can to help address this issue on a local basis.

At the end of August last year our Fire Department was notified that they had achieved the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services accreditation with a perfect score! Our Fire Department is one of 170 CAAS accredited emergency medical services in North America and one of only five in the State of Ohio. This independent accreditation signifies that the North Ridgeville Fire Department has met the "gold standard" determined by the ambulance industry and assures our residents that quality care is being provided to our community. Congratulations to our fire service for a job well done! And to confirm how good they are, I would like to read to you what one of our third graders wrote after visiting with us. "Dear Fire Fighters, I loved what you did with your day by putting off your day to teach us. I learned that you guys carry a lot of equipment around. I loved that you have saved 20 million people. Thanks for teaching our class."

Our Police Department also had a great year answering over 30,000 calls for service. These included:

- Over 220 welfare checks
- Over 560 vehicle crashes
- Over 190 domestic situations
- Over 60 missing persons
- Over 200 juvenile complaints
- Over 2,200 hours of traffic enforcement
- Over 500 disabled vehicles
- Over 80 suicide threats or attempts
- And over 35 lost dogs returned to their families.

Our officers also worked with the Ohio State Highway Patrol and the North Ridgeville Fire Department to speak to juniors and seniors about the dangers of drinking and driving, especially during prom weekend. Some of the students had a chance to go through a series of field sobriety tests while wearing a pair of goggles that simulate different degrees of intoxication. In May, Patrolman Mitch Lorig met his new partner, K9 Hecter. Patrolman Lorig and Hecter attended Gold Shield Canine Training in Columbus. To help with the funding of this training the Police Department received a \$10,000 grant from the Ben Roethlisberger Foundation. Patrolman Lorig and K9 Hecter graduated in June and have been patrolling midnight shift together ever since.

In October, K9 Rambo retired and is now enjoying his retirement in the Cory Sabo household. Although retired, that is one household that any burglars would be well advised to stay away from. The City now has three K-9 officers, Hecter, Bear and Leo that provide many services for our Police Department.

In June, the City received a proclamation signed by Governor Kasich and Lieutenant Governor Mary Taylor congratulating North Ridgeville for being named one of the Top 50 Safest Cities in Ohio by the National Council for Home Safety and Security. The proclamation went on to say, "With a strong sense of community and friendly residents, North Ridgeville exemplifies characteristics that make living in Ohio Great." All of us should be proud of that recognition, but we already knew North Ridgeville is a great place to live.

In October last year, Kelsey Garrabrant was sworn in as the first female police officer in the history of the North Ridgeville Police Department, a big, welcome change to the department. Kelsey has already been serving the citizens of North Ridgeville for the past 2½ years as a Fire/EMS Dispatcher at the Westcom Dispatch Center. Kelsey is now attending the LCCC police academy and should be finishing up soon and hitting the streets of North Ridgeville.

Finally I would like to mention that the North Ridgeville Police Department play a huge part in the Cops & Kids program each Christmas season. This year they raised \$5,415 and were able to take 26 underprivileged children shopping just before Christmas. Each child was able to spend \$120 to shop for whatever they want or needed. Their families also received \$60 to ensure they could have a nice holiday meal. Our cops do a great job fighting crime but they serve our community in so many other ways.

This year we'll see improvements to the interchange at Lorain Road and I-480. Project includes reconstructing the median on Lorain Road to accommodate a new northbound left turn, replacing a traffic signal at the ramp to provide 4-way operation and installation of curbs and sidewalks. These modifications will provide Leppo Rents improved access to their facility while at the same time making parcels adjacent to their facility able to be developed. 90% of the costs of those improvements are being paid for by the Ohio Department of Transportation.

And of course, the long awaited reconstruction of Center Ridge Road will begin officially April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The contract has been awarded to Fechko Excavating who recently completed Performance Lane leading to Riddell. The Engineering estimate for actual construction was \$25,746,000 and Fechko's bid was \$26,874,800, 4.3% above the estimate and well within the 10% allowed by State law. Construction will begin on the east end with Lear Nagle to Jaycox to be completed this construction season, and Jaycox to Stoney Ridge next year. The pavement will be expanded to five lanes with a six-foot sidewalk on the north side and a ten-foot multi-use path on the south side. New storm sewers along with storm water detention will be installed where there isn't any now. A new waterline will also be installed as part of the project. This long awaited improvement will bring new economic development opportunities as we are already seeing a

new strip mall east of Advance Auto Parts and I'm sure residents and businesses alike will appreciate the reduction in congestion and safer traveling through our main business corridor.

North Ridgeville continues to lead the region, including all of northern Ohio in residential growth. The July 2016 estimated population for North Ridgeville according to the Census Bureau was 32,983 people. I'm sure we are well over 33,000 in population now because in 2017 there were 207 new homes built. We ranked 6<sup>th</sup> statewide in population growth behind Columbus and four Columbus suburbs. I believe people continue to move to North Ridgeville because they see so many new projects underway, especially considering our new Academic Center and a good school system. Our relatively new library, new medical facilities, new schools and continuous road improvements make North Ridgeville a very desirable place to live, work and play.

While we are on the subject of new construction, as previously mentioned, 207 new homes were built in 2017. In addition, there were 4 condos/apartments, 4 commercial new buildings, 128 permits issued for commercial alterations and 1,674 permits issued for additions and remodels. And, the Building Department conducted a total of 8,925 inspections last year. The building inspectors had quite a busy year!

In addition to the many commercial projects I have already mentioned, there are several other projects of note. First Federal Lakewood relocated to the corner of Lear Nagle and Center Ridge Road in a brand new \$600,000 facility. North Ridgeville CARSTAR on Center Ridge Road is currently completing a 6,422 square-foot addition at \$180,000 to their building. Our school district continues to move forward with an 8,916 square-foot addition and remodel of the North Ridgeville Education Center (aka Early Childhood Learning Community) behind Dairy Queen on Center Ridge Road. RGI Inc. on Mills Road is completing a 3,600 square-foot addition to the front of their building. Bistro 83 is again enlarging and renovating their facility and continues to be a premier restaurant destination in the area. And let's not forget the new Burger King on Lorain Road that will be opening for business in the coming weeks. These are just a few select and not all inclusive of the commercial projects North Ridgeville saw during 2017 changing the landscape of our commercial areas.

In 2018, there are several planned commercial projects in the works. First, RLG Cleveland, Rudolph Libbe Group, acquired a 44,000 square-foot industrial building on Mills Industrial Parkway. They are renovating the space to move their offices from the Cleveland area to their new location. As a result, 50 employees will call this new location home.

At the southeast corner of Lorain and Bagley, Lemmon and Lemmon has proposed an assisted living and independent living facility. Danbury of North Ridgeville will be comprised of 106 units of assisted living and memory care. An additional 69 units, three-story building, will be dedicated to independent living. A total of 80 full-time equivalent employees are expected as a result of this project.

North Coast Architects representing Progressive North Ridgeville Real Estate LLC is proposing an 85,370 square-foot nursing home and rehabilitation center. The Avenue at North Ridgeville Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Center will be built on Lear Nagle Road, north of Washington. The plan includes 103 private resident suites and three court yards. The new facility will house approximately 100 employees.

Internally, the City will also see some personnel changes in 2018. Andrew Crites was the only Law Director I have had since I became Mayor. I never anticipated that when his wife Wendy

retired from teaching, that they would pull up stakes and move to Montana but they did! Andy gave us plenty of notice and I interviewed a number of applicants but finally found our new Law Director down the hall. Brian Moriarty has also been with the City since I was first elected, serving as Prosecutor and then Mayor's Court Magistrate. Brian expressed an interest and we realized that he was our best candidate so he was offered the position and I'm delighted to report he accepted our offer. We're really glad to have some consistency and continuity in the Law Department which the hiring of Brian gives us. That left the Magistrate position open which was offered to Allison Manning who is currently a Magistrate in Elyria Municipal Court. Allison accepted and took over as our Magistrate January 1, 2018.

The City will also hire a new Treasurer this year and we are actively looking and interviewing now. Tim Pope, who came to us in November 2014 has decided to retire, again. Tim had retired from the City of Middleburg Heights. Subsequently he became a Bond Underwriter for Fifth Third Securities where he helped North Ridgeville sell bonds in 2013. Upon learning North Ridgeville was looking for a Treasurer in 2014 he applied and was hired. One of Tim's major accomplishments, at least in my view was the re-investment of City funds. Prior to Tim taking over, we were stacking our funds in CD's over a year to a year and a half periods, overlapping so every month we were rolling over CD's. I told Tim I wanted to hire an investment manager to see if they could help us improve our return on investment. Tim interviewed several firms competent in this area and recommended we enter into a contract with Meeder Investment Management. Working with Meeder, Tim took our interest income on our investments from \$72,932 in 2014 to \$542,251 in 2017. About 20% of this is due to investments recommended by Meeder and the remainder is due to investments made by Tim in the highest rated Commercial Paper to the extent allowed by Ohio Law. In addition, Tim has documented the City's investment practices in detail. The City's Investment Plan will help his successor continue investing in accordance with our Policy and ensure Safety, Liquidity and Return in the City's Investment Program.

Tim has done a great job over the few years he has been with us and will be sorely missed but we wish him well in his re-retirement.

I would be remiss if I did not mention our new City Engineer. Daniel Rodriguez has been with us only three months but is already making a positive impact. His ability to effectively communicate, especially with our residents in a tactful manner, has already been recognized as a huge plus for the City. He has also brought a new level of compliance to our commercial applicants and has really brought sorely needed consistency to our Engineering Department.

Effective the first day of January 2016, the Ohio Legislature passed legislation overhauling our municipal income tax code throughout Ohio. In 2015 we collected almost \$10 million in income tax. In 2016 our collections were slightly over \$11 million. Last year we saw a very slight reduction in income tax revenues to \$10,904,745. The decrease can quite easily be attributed to House Bill 49 passed last year that set back estimated payment due dates from December to January. Several communities in Ohio have filed suit against the State of Ohio and Ohio Tax Commissioner Joe Testa in regards to House Bill 49. We believe these new state laws interfere with the authority of Ohio municipalities to administer, collect, audit and receive critical municipal tax dollars.

I am proud to say that in 2017 our workers compensation experience continued to improve. Our claims have decreased every year since 2014 and in 2017 we incurred 10 claims with only one being a lost time claim. I think with 208 full time employees that is outstanding and shows a

commitment on the City's part to educate our workers and to provide the necessary equipment to work safely.

In 2018 the City is offering a new alternative to our health insurance plan. Employees can remain in our existing plan or enroll in a Health Savings Plan with a high deductible. In addition, through our prescription plan, two new changes were instituted which include Step Therapy and Specialty Drug Management. With these changes our health and hospitalization premiums only increased 1% last year.

Our Grounds Maintenance and Cemetery Sexton Gary Teel also retired at the beginning of this year. We reorganized that department placing it under Parks and Recreation. John Schneider will remain as Asst. Grounds Maintenance Supervisor and will add the title of Cemetery Sexton. This gives the City better accountability and saves several thousand dollars by not replacing Mr. Teel.

The City will also be looking to add a Human Resource Director. This has been a need for some time, but in the last few years it has become more critical as issues have occurred that has cost the City time and money that could have potentially been avoided had there been a Human Resource Director. In addition, as new compliance issues arise periodically through the Affordable Care Act and other mandates it's time the City filled this very important position.

Mayor's Court remained busy during 2017 handling 4,206 new cases. The court is often referred to as a community court as it makes it easier for our residents to address minor offenses by handling them locally in the evening. Although one defendant from Collingswood, NJ apparently wasn't too happy with us. He did send us a check for his speeding ticket for \$163 and included a note "Please apply towards Mr. Gillock's next Cadillac Payment." Sorry, I'm a Ford man myself.

Parks and Recreation had a good year. Using a \$52,244 grant from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources the City's tennis courts were updated and resurfaced. This spring residents will have access to four tennis courts and 8 pickleball courts. Our recreation programs involved 3,620 participants and our special programming offered another recreational opportunity to another 8,438 people. As mentioned earlier, the Parks Department has assumed overall responsibility for maintenance of our parks eliminating a disjointed effort of two different departments trying to assure maintenance of our park facilities and providing a more seamless oversight.

I don't want to forget our Office of Older Adults. Once again, the Meals on Wheels program provided 8,409 meals to shut-ins providing them not only a meal but often a safety check and personal contact they might otherwise lack. A great program and we thank the VFW for their strong support of this program. In addition, the Senior Center provided over 2,500 trips for seniors to doctors' appointments and other needs and hosted over 11,200 visitors last year at various events and activities.

Through the Lorain County Community Development Block Grant Program the City applied for and received a grant for \$53,741 to be used towards a back-up generator for the Senior Center.

The Senior Center, through Seniors, Inc. also received a \$50,617 grant through NOACA for a new wheelchair lift van. Seniors, Inc., the Senior Center non-profit, will chip in another \$12,654 to complete the purchase.



Finally, I wanted to comment on where the City ended 2017 financially. All of our accounts ended up in the black as required by law. A key indicator for us is the amount of carry-over in the General Fund as a percentage of the anticipated General Fund expenditures for the year. A goal of 30% has been established as that number is an indicator to the financial rating services and will help us retain our bond rating which is currently Aa2. Last year in 2017 the anticipated carryover was \$4,073,000. This year our 2018 General Fund expenditures which have been appropriated are \$14,739,700. Our anticipated carryover this year at the end of 2018 is \$4,361,000 so we are right where we need to be. Our Auditor Jeff Wilcheck has given the City conservative estimates looking out for the next five years which is extremely helpful in our planning process. We do recognize that we have challenges ahead of us, including renewal of several levies Ambulance/EMS; Police; Streets; and Fire in the next couple of years so it is imperative that the Administration and Council continue to work together to keep the City solvent as we have continued to do for the last several years, even though we still have only a 1% income tax, the lowest in the State.

On that positive note, I want to thank you for joining me today. 2018 is shaping up to be a very busy year as we enter into the next phases of many projects. I hope you are as excited as I am about all of the good things that the future holds for our great city. Thank you for allowing me to be your Mayor and for taking this journey with me.