

State of the City of North Ridgeville  
January 24, 2008

2007 was year of change in many ways as we tried to further many of the endeavors we had undertaken in the previous 3 years. We elected a new Council, we have a new school superintendent, and some of our projects suddenly went a different direction, the housing market slowed dramatically and the rate of growth of our economy slowed somewhat.

Let me first acknowledge my office staff, which has not changed, Denny Johnson, SSD, Sandy Hall and Robin Smith. These three keep me going in the right direction, ... most of the time. Andy Crites, City Law Director is also here today.

Many of our department heads are here today also. Would they please stand and be recognized. Truly, these are the people that keep our City functioning. Day in, day out these individuals make sure that the work gets done. Would you please give them a hand?

Of course, most of you already know our new school superintendent, Mr. Michael Tefs. Talk about hitting the ground running, Michael hasn't been here a year yet, and he is deeply involved in his second effort in trying to get a bond issue passed to update some of our City schools. I think Michael will be a great superintendent based on what I have seen so far, and I have really enjoyed working with him in the few short months he has been here.

I would also like to recognize the Council members for the 2008-2009 term that are here today. Council President Bernadine Butkowski, 1<sup>st</sup> Ward Councilman Nancy Buescher, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward Dennis Boose, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward Dick Jaenke, 4<sup>th</sup> Ward Bob Olesen, and Councilmen at Large Kevin Corcoran and Ray McLaughlin.

School Board members Marie Sycz, Robin Hrabik, Manny Dominquez, Bill Harnish and Frank Vacha.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I want to recognize my wife Beverly who keeps the home fires burning while I'm out having fun. Bev, would you please stand.

As I look back at some of our accomplishments, the first one that comes to my mind is I got re-elected! You may not all think that is a great accomplishment, but I sure do. And I want to thank everyone that gave me another term to continue working with our residents, employees and Council to move North Ridgeville forward.

Let me start early with a dumb criminal story taken direct from our own police reports. Sgt. Dietz was investigating an impaired driver complaint received from a citizen. The citizen, who was following the other vehicle, stayed at the scene in his own vehicle. When Sgt. Dietz was leaving the scene, he checked the citizen complainer's license plate as he was pulling away. Guess what. The citizen that called in the complaint on the impaired driver had no driving privileges of his own. His license was suspended. Sometimes they just make it too easy.

One of the biggest things to occur in 2007 was the beginning of the end of the old Ridgeview Shopping Center. When I first ran for Mayor in 2003, one of my objectives was to get rid of it. It took 3 years and 11 months to begin, but it is finally gone. All 7 buildings have been demolished including the 2 major buildings, the bank, gyro shop, mechanics shop, McDonalds building and the building behind the bowling alley that was sometimes a teen club, others times a bar. The current owners are working diligently on a financing plan to enable them to build a new shopping center at that location. We are currently having discussions on how to best make a Tax Increment Financing plan work to promote a new shopping center. But finally, that eyesore is gone and we no longer have to look at the vacant buildings.

Along with the old trailer park on Lorain Road and the gas station at the corner of Route 83 and Center Ridge, the removal of these eyesores has certainly made North Ridgeville look better.

Throughout 2007 we have continued our road improvement projects. We now have new traffic control devices at Lorain and Bagley and at Sugar Ridge and Route 83. This year, you will see new traffic lights at Stoney Ridge and Center Ridge Road.

Our 2007 OPWC project, the reconstruction of Lorain Road from Bagley to Root Road will begin in February or March depending on weather. And our 2008 project has been approved by OPWC which is the continued reconstruction of Lorain Road from Root Road to Honeycutt Drive. It is our plan to complete that

project from Honeycutt to Island Road the following year, then move to Chestnut for the section between Lear and Bainbridge in subsequent years.

In 2007 our own crews paved all or portions of 11 different streets, including Marsh, Drake, Spruce, Westfield, Cadet, White Oak Way, Shaw, Mitchell, Pitts, Downing and Breck Court. Our crews paved over 5 lane miles saving the City thousands of dollars and making quality repairs to roads that otherwise might not be repaired for years.

The bridge replacement on Mills road was completed right before Thanksgiving. A good example of regionalism, the City of North Ridgeville along with the City of Avon and Lorain County each contributed \$25,000 towards the total \$300,000 project, receiving an OPWC grant for the remaining \$225,000. We also replaced a small bridge on Chesterfield Drive.

Taylor Parkway was also reconstructed in 2007 helping to retain and attract good new businesses in that prominent industrial park.

We have also completed the Mildred Road extension opening up Forest Park and Mildred Streets to Jaycox Road. No longer are residents of that area and our safety forces dependent upon a private street for access.

As you can readily see, we are serious about improving our streets.

Other infrastructure improvements in 2007 included water line replacements on Deborah and Paula. Last week we opened bids for waterline replacement on Dorchester Ave, Highland Drive, Debbie Drive, Floraline Ave, Harris Drive and Taylor Woods which will be done in 2008.

We continued our sewer line maintenance and repair in 2007 with grouting in the Noll, Behm and Aurensen area. In 2008 we anticipate new sewer lines to be installed on Dyke Road and on the southern portion of Case Road. The City will pay for the cost of this installation and property owners will be charged a connection fee for access. The City is under EPA findings and orders to provide a sewer to the Dyke Road residents. Our analysis of the best way to do this, led us to a plan that includes putting in sewers South Case, and installing a lift station on Lorain County Community College owned property. In the long run, this will be the most cost effective way to provide sewers to all residents in that service area.

On Route 83 from Westminster to the Schneider lift station, a new sewer line will be installed and the cost of the installation will be borne by a private developer. This will enable the City to ultimately take the Schneider lift station completely out of service, saving us thousand's of anticipated repair and upgrade dollars and giving the residents served by the facility much more dependable service. The developer will recoup his costs during the building phase of the projected new homes.

Speaking of new homes, in 2007 the City issued a total of 273 New Dwelling permits and 16 New Condo permits. This resulted in almost \$2,000,000 in permit fees for the year. Once again North Ridgeville will lead the Northeast Ohio 7 County Cleveland Metropolitan area in new home starts. In fact, we are about double the second place City Avon which issued approximately 131 new permits.

Unfortunately, this did not correlate to an increase in our municipal income tax revenues. For the year 2007 the City of North Ridgeville took in total collections of \$7,500,772.11. This is a reduction from 2006 of \$1,458.35. I believe this is the first time in the City's history that we did not see an increase. While our resident's tax payments increased by \$91,556 our business net profit and withholding tax decreased by \$93,015. When you consider that we registered 30 new businesses in 2007, it gives you a good perspective on how difficult a year it was for our economy and our businesses.

Still, due to conservative budgeting, leveraging of our dollars and the outstanding efforts of our auditing department, Chris Costin and Donna Kiraly, who is retiring in 22 more days, we were still able to increase our surplus, even if only a small amount. Last year our carryover was \$1,080,000. This year our unencumbered carryover balance is \$1,208,000 a 12% increase. It is our goal to ultimately increase our surplus to approximately 25% of our general fund annual expenditures. We are about half way to where we want to be, but we continue to go in the right direction.

I anticipate the residential building to continue in North Ridgeville in 2008, but again to slow somewhat. We have 21 residential subdivisions currently under way. Meadowlakes continues to do well. Other subdivisions have slowed or in some cases stopped all together. The United States Commerce Department recently announced new home construction in 2007 nationally was down 24%, the biggest drop in home construction in 27 years. And although the Feds report our economy continues to grow, although at a slower rate, unemployment is now up around 5%. All of this combined with a strong possibility of a recession convince me that 2008

will be another year that the City has to remain conservative in its budgeting. We have done very well over the last 4 years in turning our finances around but we are not where we want to be.

Also in 2008, we will be looking at water and sewer rate increases. We have not raised our water rates in several years. Last year, all of our suppliers indicated they were going to raise our rates from 8 to 10%. The City needs to not only address the rate increases our suppliers have indicated, but we have two other issues we need to tend to. The high pressure water line from Avon Lake to Medina, ELT2, has limited capacity. We need to reserve additional capacity right now to meet current as well as future needs. It is our intent to purchase an additional 3.2mgd additional capacity while it is available. We currently use about 2.6 mgd and our water tower has a capacity of 2mg. We also need to start replacing over 11,000 water meter modules throughout the City. About 10 years ago, the City started upgrading water meters with a new module that let the meter readers read the meters without actually going in the house. They could be read by a vehicle simply driving by the house. The battery's in those modules were projected to last 6-8 years and are now starting to need replacement. New technology will allow us to replace those modules with units that will last 20 years, and will send a signal to a City Hall computer giving us the readings. They will also tell us if the resident has a leak, if the unit has been tampered with and save us all money in the long run. As an example of what can now happen, we had several cases last summer of residents getting bills in the hundreds of dollars. Sometimes they were leaks they did not know about and sometimes they were due to excessive use to water new lawns. But in both instances, residents received bills of over \$800 and sometimes \$900! Not only that, by the time the resident received that bill, another 2-3 weeks were due. This usually resulted in a claim by the resident that our meter had to be wrong, we were gouging them, etc. The new units will check usage 4-6 times per day, and will send us a signal if usage is excessive. We can immediately contact the resident and let them know they have a problem. We will be presenting to Council resolutions to consider a water rate increase of approximately 10% and a sewer rate increase of about 3%.

Also from our utility department, our recycling program continues to reap huge benefits such as the \$107,378 we received last year. It was our 15<sup>th</sup> such grant and largest ever. But, it was an interesting year as the LCSWMD came out with "Pay As You Throw", a new program to encourage recycling. Frankly, I believe it is the way of the future. But we're not there yet. Our current contract with Waste Management runs through October of this year, and we already have interest from competitors. We will be instituting a pilot program this year for 900 homes to test

the program. This will preserve all of the grants and incentives we receive under the current program.

In my first 4 years as Mayor, I conducted 138 weddings. Some were fairly elaborate with limos, brides in beautiful dresses and grooms in tuxes, singers, candles, the whole bit. For some, the celebrants appeared to have been working around the house, and during a break decided to go get married. And you never know how they will work out. However, last February 1<sup>st</sup>, we conducted a wedding that first, the groom called early in the day to find out what time the wedding was to be. Not a good sign. During the wedding, at one point the groom rolled his eyes at some of the vows, and the bride tapped him on the chest, and ordered him to "Look at me." On February 7<sup>th</sup>, less than a week later, the groom called the office, and said and I quote, "It's not working out. What do I need to do?"

Moving to our Parks, a new Splash Pad was constructed at South Central and was an immediate hit. Our Council President was one of the first to give it a try and obviously found it a refreshing experience. The water playground features sprayers, geysers, and water cannons that were extremely welcome in those hot August days when we first turned it on. We also replaced one pavilion and added a bridge between the 2 lakes at South Central. The other parks also received improvements with a new storage facility at Shady Drive, new water and sewer lines, an expanded parking lot and water and sewer lines at the Soccer complex, and new drainage at Frontier. This brings us to our new Softball complex. It is our plan to build the road this year so that play may begin in 2009. We are also in discussion with another party to use the remainder of that property, that portion that is not used by Softball World, for soccer fields. When finished, we will have a tremendous facility that can host both softball and soccer tournaments that will be an incentive for future development in the Lorain Road corridor.

Now let's talk a little bit about our safety forces. Recapping our police department statistics, traffic crashes were up 3.8% and DUI arrests were up only .06%. Our alarms were up 2.7% of which 99.7% were false. This may be something that we need to look at this year, to introduce legislation to help reduce the number of repeated false alarms.

Arrests were up in all categories averaging around 10%. Parking citations were up 75% reflecting our police response to on-going citizen complaints. Even with the increase in arrests, it is interesting to note that traffic detail warnings and patrol

bureau warnings were up 33 and 24% respectively. So for those that say they never get a break, well, many actually do. I may have an answer though for the small increase in traffic detail arrests. In the Jan 3, 2008 edition of the Plain Dealer there appeared this Thankful Thursday comment from a North Ridgeville resident, and I quote. "I am thankful that traffic laws have changed so that you have five seconds after a light has turned red to go through it. It makes it so much easier to get to work on time."

Statistically speaking, the most dangerous day to drive in North Ridgeville in 2007 was a Friday, with the most dangerous time being between 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Our jail once again received a 100% compliance rating and saved our citizens \$96,300 in prisoner housing costs by holding them here rather than in the Lorain County Jail.

You might have recognized our auxiliary cars are now white with blue trim. These 14 members donated almost 3200 hours of service to the city through patrol, Mayors Court, parades, and other events. Besides repainting their cars, they also made changes to their uniforms drawing distinct differences between our sworn officers and our valued volunteers.

And we now have a K-9 patrol on each shift. Using donations from businessmen and drug seizure money from the county prosecutor's office we were able to add, at no cost to the tax payer, a 3<sup>rd</sup> K-9 team. We now have Duke, Sinta and Rambo. Recently, a home burglar caught in the act ran from the scene, and escaped in his car. He was chased to North Ridgeville where he crashed and then ran. The newspaper stated that the fugitive was now in the hospital being treated for accident injuries and dog bites. That was Duke.

Our force increased in size by 1 overall. Sgt. Abt and Sgt. Dietz graduated from the highly regarded Police Executive Leadership College and Lt. Mike Freeman is currently attending the college.

And our fire department was just a busy. They experienced a 7% increase in run volume, responding to almost 2700 fire and medical emergencies.

In 2007 the Fire Department upgraded their Dive/Rescue Team. We currently have a team of 8 Divers headed by Captain Joe Gavlak. An equipment trailer and Zodiac Rescue Boat were purchased, as well as a communication system that will

allow our divers that are underwater to communicate with crew members on the surface.

As mentioned in last years SOC, we began to “soft bill” insurance companies and Medicare for EMS service. That means that the insurance companies are billed and we accept whatever payment is made. The resident never receives a bill for EMS service. This resulted in a new revenue stream to the Fire Department of approximately \$400,000 per year. Those monies were used to fund the following:

The Fire Department used to operate its own dispatch office which was located at Fire Station #1. The dispatch office was manned 24/7 by a fully trained Firefighter/Paramedic. In November of 2007, the Fire Department turned over its dispatch operations to a regionalized dispatch center which is located at St. John and West Shore Hospital. This change has allowed us to put the Firefighter/Paramedic that used to dispatch back on the road where he can do more good for the community.

Using those same revenues generated by the soft billing, we were then able to hire three additional Firefighter/Paramedics. Combined with the three we freed up from dispatching we were able to add an additional emergency vehicle to the road 24/7. This is the first time we have added an emergency vehicle on the road since 1979, 29 years ago, all at no additional direct cost to our taxpayers.

As with our policemen, our firefighters volunteer tremendous hours and dollars throughout the community making North Ridgeville a better and safer place to live. We can't thank them enough.

Our Office of Older Adults continues to be a significant part of our operation. Meals-On-Wheels continue to serve 45-50 meals per day. In 2007 the Office for Older Adults received \$33,166 in grant funding that helps to cover the costs of our van driver's salaries and pays part of the salary of our Case Manager. Our vans traveled over 20,000 miles locally, assisting our senior population to medical appointments, grocery shopping, rehabilitation, cancer treatments, therapy, dialysis and so forth. We now offer transportation 5 days per week. Our case worker spent more than 450 hours directly assisting seniors with Supportive Services which really vary in what might be needed. One case, though, was really different from most. Our police department had come into contact with a gentleman in his early 80's. I believe he had run into a sign at a local gas station. He was from North Carolina, was a little bit confused and took a wrong turn, ending up in North Ridgeville. That's right, he was aiming for North Carolina and ended up in North

Ridgeville. All turned out OK thankfully, his daughter came and picked him up. In the meantime, City Hall employees helped by purchasing his load of melons and squash that he was selling, before they rotted, netting him over \$300. They actually figure he might be back this year since sales were so good.

Mayors Court continues to be extremely busy handling over 5500 cases in 2007 and bringing in new revenue to the City of slightly over \$500,000. Keep in mind, these are only cases where the defendant pleads no contest or guilty, and saves them time and money by not having to go to Municipal Court in Elyria.

Looking more towards 2008 from an Economic Development perspective, we remain extremely busy. Working with Public Sector Solutions we have met with several large developers. PSS developed a marketing brochure that was mailed to over 400 local developers, 200 real estate attorneys, 500 Fortune 500 companies and 200+ property brokers. We also ran a full color ad in Crains Cleveland Business. We are beginning to see potential projects from those activities.

Also, besides the Ridgeview Shopping Center and the Softball World projects which I have already discussed, let me hit upon some of the other projects you may see in 2008.

We are currently working with a developer to expand Ridgeville Center, where the Ace Hardware is located. Collaborating with the school and the developer we are looking at a plan to more than double the size of that building bringing in new retail. The developer, Carnegie Management will be coming back to Planning with a plan that meets the City's goal of restricting access to Center Ridge Road and gives the school system the access they desire. It is our goal to bring a road straight south from the intersection of Center Ridge Road and Jaycox to Bainbridge Road.

The building on Center Ridge Road, known as Joe's Motor Sports has been sold to a developer that has indicated they will build \_\_\_\_\_.

Steve Ali has begun construction on a brand new 10,840 sq ft facility on Center Ridge to service high value, luxury automobiles.

Both the Lone Tree, operated by Alex \_\_\_\_ who's owns Alexanders in North Olmsted, and Aces Grill will be opening in the next several days. I think these are signs that development in the Lorain Corridor is starting to pick up. We anticipate other announcements regarding that area in the next few weeks, besides the fact we

have not one, but two motels opening in the area. We're all aware that Value Place will be building behind the McDonalds. But today, I am very glad to be able to finally announce that a Holiday Inn Express will be built on the property where the Sunoco station remains. That building will be demolished in the next several days to make way for a new complex at that site to include the Holiday Inn and several retail outlets to be named later.

Being Mayor is without a doubt a full time undertaking, and something I enjoy tremendously. Some things are more fun than others and visiting the kids in the school are one of my favorite things to do. Usually after a visit the kids write thank you letters reflecting on the visit. I'd like to share one of those letters with you now.

From Liberty School, "Dear Mayor Gillock, Thank you for coming! I'm happy that you told us more about you. I was the one with the short blonde hair. The second row to the right. I am also small. And I have blue eyes. Do you like the people elected to you? I wish you could answer all of our questions, though. Who knows we might meet, again. Thanks for the pencils! Well bye. Sincerely, Galey. P.S. I might call you, because the pencil has your phone number on it.

I wanted to share that with you, because often people say they wouldn't have my job for anything. Well, sometimes it is exceedingly difficult, but usually it's very satisfying. The people you get to meet and help, the exciting new projects, the feeling that you are making at least a small difference, and letters like this make it all worthwhile.

The City of North Ridgeville is doing great, and we continue to be headed in the right direction. We continue to be the city of choice for hundreds of new residents every year. Growing pains aside, which make it interesting, the state of the City is good and getting better all the time. Woodrow Wilson, who my Dad was named after, once said, "If you want to make enemies, try to change something." Well, I hope I haven't made any enemies, but North Ridgeville is changing and I think for the most part, it's all for the better.

Thanks for the allowing me to be a part of it.