

NORTH RIDGEVILLE STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Mayor G. David Gillock

January 15, 2015

Thank you and welcome to my twelfth State of the City. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you and bring you up to date on the State of the City, how we fared last year and what you can look forward to in 2015.

Thank you Dr. Powell for again opening your facility and for all you do for our community.

First, I need to acknowledge several individuals that play a part in the success of moving North Ridgeville forward. Often the efforts of these individuals on a daily basis are overlooked and underappreciated for what they do, yet without them very little would be accomplished.

First, I would be remiss if I did not again recognize Dayle Noll for her outstanding career in leading the North Ridgeville business community. As CEO/President of the North Ridgeville Chamber of Commerce for the last 29 years, our businesses have been able to enjoy superior, stable leadership from their Chamber through ups and downs. Dayle has always been there for them and has been the impetus for many of our community events over the years such as Holiday on the Ridge, Oktoberfest, our community garage sale days, Business Pride Awards, and Discover the Ridge. For several years North Ridgeville was one of the first communities to celebrate First Night. As you can see, it has been a very busy career and we wish her well on her retirement.

And thanks to Marjorie Snyder for overseeing this event and welcome aboard. I am sure that the Chamber remains in good stead with their new leadership and I look forward to working with Marjorie in the future. You have some big shoes to fill, but I am sure the Chamber and the community will continue to enjoy one of the best Chambers in Northern Ohio. Welcome aboard Marjorie.

We have several elected officials here today that I would like to recognize. First, our City Council members, Dr. Ron Arndt, Dennis Boose, Bernadine Butkowski, Kevin Corcoran, Roseanne Johnson and Bob Olesen. Next, School Board Members Kelly McCarthy and Marci Saxon. Newly re-elected State Senator Gayle Manning. New County Commissioner Matt Lundy. Judge Gary Bennett. I would also like to recognize Tony Gallo from the Lorain County Chamber of Commerce. Caryn Candisky from Senator Rob Portman's office and Dallas Gerber from Congressman Bob Gibbs' office.

I also want to acknowledge our City employees that do a great job on a day in, day out basis. Always doing more with less, we have some of the best employees around. Just a few examples.

Although our police are often the recipients of compliments for a job well done, I want to relate a recent humorous event. This last Christmas morning, Patrolman Wilkshire and Patrolman Neff responded to an alarm at a local business. Businesses sometimes fall victim to break-ins during the holidays because burglars know there is no one there. Sure enough they find an open door.

"They entered and began clearing the building and found the culprit, a squirrel, which was making a mad dash for freedom. The squirrel was able to make it out the door and into the woods, where there were approximately 43 of his friends waiting.

"Because a positive ID is now near impossible, there will be no further investigation. You won this one, Squirrel. Well played. Well played, indeed." Those comments are taken from their own webpage. But what I want to point out that on Christmas morning while most of us were in our pajamas drinking coffee and opening presents, these gentlemen were doing what they do every day, keeping us all safe. With all the current news concerning police departments nationwide, I want to say here and now I support our police department 110%. They are the ones we call and depend on when in a crisis and they do a tremendous job keeping us safe. In 2014 North Ridgeville was once again ranked highly by a national rating firm as one of the safest communities in Ohio. We were ranked number five in the State by Movoto.com, a real estate website based on a review of the 2012 Uniform Crime Report from the FBI. Quoting from the report, "North Ridgeville had the fourth lowest property crime rate and the fourth lowest total crime rate", the report said.

Movoto.com stated that "locals here had a low one in 85 chance of being the victim of a crime, which is definitely something for North Ridgeville natives to smile about." Thank you North Ridgeville Police Department.

Our fire department also provides tremendous service to our residents on a daily basis. Just recently they saved a man's life, simply because he had developed a personal trust in our paramedics. Last October the fire department held a Fire Prevention and Health Fair at Station #1 and the public was invited into the building, to see the equipment and meet our firefighters. Two weeks ago a gentleman knocked on the front door of fire station #1 and said he wasn't feeling well and wondered if the paramedics could take a look at him. In layman's terms, the paramedics determined the individual was in the midst of a full blown heart attack. Because of their resulting treatment his life was saved without a doubt. As it turns out, the gentleman attended the Fire Prevention and Health Fair with his grandchildren and was impressed to meet some of our firefighters. He told the nurse that if he had been at work he would have ignored his symptoms and tried to work through it. He said that since he had come to the Fair and became familiar with the firefighters, he felt comfortable coming to their door and asking for advice. The nurse stated that she felt that this relationship and the efforts of our firefighters saved this man's life.

Our other departments also do an outstanding job from keeping our parks clean, our streets patched and plowed to the thousands of tasks they do every day. Would all our City employees in attendance please stand up. More about them later.

I also want to thank Jeff Armbruster, Safety Service Director and Andy Crites, City Law Director who help me get the job done, and done right.

Tissy Simon, Robin Mayda and Penny Smith complete the front office and have to put up with me on a daily basis and they do it well. Thank you.

Finally, I want to recognize my wife Beverly for all she does to support me. Being Mayor is a 24 hours/7 days a week job. I don't always leave my work at the office. She puts up with me, good days and bad and the value of that support is incalculable.

Last year the weather delivered us several blows that challenged the ability of many of our departments. On January 16th, when the temperature reached -13 degrees, we experienced a perfect storm of our own. On the west side of the City, primarily in the Waterbury development the natural gas supply failed. We had police going door to door to make sure people were safe or

transporting them to “warming centers”. On the east side of town, because of frazil ice which caused the Avon Lake water intake to freeze up, we had zero water supply. Our firemen ingeniously figured out a way to obtain a supply of water by connecting a large five-inch fire hose from one of our hydrants to a hydrant in North Olmsted, all legally of course. Remember, this is all occurring while it is -13 and it’s near midnight and dark out. Finally, while these two emergency events were underway, the pumps to our water tower failed requiring an emergency repair. All were handled competently and efficiently by our police, fire and service personnel without injury or property damage and, actually none of our residents lost water service.

We then went from a situation where we had too much road salt in prior years to having to ration our salt and “almost” running out because of the continuing severe weather. Sometimes I thought it would never stop snowing. And when it quit snowing, it rained. On May 12, 2014 North Ridgeville experienced a 500-year storm event that required rescuing people with boats through second floor windows. Our service department responded to over 600 calls for assistance and worked long beyond the normal workday throughout the next week to remove water damaged debris.

City Hall has long worked on flooding issues but this storm gave Council and the administration new political capital to do more to reduce storm and sanitary flooding issues. In July, Council passed legislation, which I signed, raising the sanitary sewer rates by 3% and increasing the base rate. These funds have already been put to use hiring an engineering firm to research how an equalization basin would help reduce sanitary sewer back up events. The administration will be able to review a draft plan next week that hopefully will lead to the creation of an EQ basin, as it is called, that will help reduce the incident of sanitary sewer backups by a significant degree. We have renewed efforts which began over seven years ago to dye test our sanitary sewer lines to eliminate infill and infiltration.

The City also expanded its storm water efforts which began years ago. For several years we have assigned two individuals that work almost full time cleaning ditches, (last year they cleaned over 5 miles of ditches), adjusting outfall weirs, and cleaning catch basins regularly. Last year we partnered with a local developer that needed fill dirt for a project. Over 4,000 cubic yards of dirt were removed from our Westfield Detention. That’s equivalent to enough water to fill one and a third Olympic size swimming pools, or about 40 residential swimming pools. That’s a lot of water that will no longer cause flooding. I would also like to point out that the widening of Center Ridge Road includes four new extended detention basins to control run-off from Center Ridge Road where there is now no control. Council authorized an additional \$11,000 in the design so that the detention areas that will be built meet our standards which are in excess of ODOT standards. This is huge storm water detention where none exists today.

In addition, we are currently working with a consultant to institute a Storm Water Utility. Over 100 Ohio cities now have Storm Water Utilities. We need a sustainable and well-funded program to address storm water flooding and we cannot do that using the General Fund and grants. Our Storm Water Utility will have three major goals.

- ❖ Flood Reduction Projects. We already have a flood reduction plan that is estimated to cost about \$4,000,000 not including land acquisition. This would allow us to significantly reduce flooding throughout the City, including the Pitts/Gina area and Highland Drive as well as other areas. The Storm Water Utility plan will be presented to Council this coming January 26th.

- ❖ Storm System Maintenance & Life Cycle Replacement. This includes a continuation of the cameraing of our sewer lines and repair as needed as we have been doing for years on an infrequent basis because of lack of funding.
- ❖ Water Regulatory Compliance is the third leg of a Storm Water Utility to make sure our system stays in compliance with EPA regulations.

We have worked with Bramhall Engineering for several years on storm water issues. Let me give you an example. It was often thought that the bridge behind St. Peter Church contributed to flooding by creating a bottle neck at that location. Using modeling techniques created by two Case Western professors, we were able to determine the bridge had no effect on flooding. That saved several thousands of dollars that might have been spent on replacing the bridge. And, we are currently partnering with the City of Avon to better understand flooding issues on a regional basis. Flooding is not just a local issue. North Ridgeville can have the best storm water system in the nation, but if the water cannot exit our community and get to Lake Erie it would all be for naught. In 2015, we will continue our efforts on even a more intensive scale to reduce flooding throughout our community.

Last year Council and the administration met several times to specifically identify the main issues of concern to our community and to prioritize those concerns. Flooding and the widening of Center Ridge Road were the overwhelming top priorities. Both priorities are being addressed aggressively and will occupy a large part of our time and efforts in 2015. The importance of these two issues was confirmed by a third grader named Gatty when Council President and I met with the Liberty third graders about two weeks after that May event, and I am paraphrasing as her letter was four pages long. “About the flooding I have never had my house flood. Do you know if they picked up all the trash? And my papas basement flooded last year, but lucky it did not flood this time. The bad thing my papa and grandmother their bedroom is in the basement. Anyway what about the road? Do you know when you’re starting on the roads? Did you go to Yale? I know most of the presidents go there.” Then later on in her letter, “I love what you are doing with the roads. They won’t be bumpy anymore because on the bus we hit bumpy roads.” Flooding and roads were the most popular comments after whether I had bodyguards or not.

Let’s talk a little bit about construction projects. In 2014, we replaced water lines on Manchester Circle and Root Road, and we are almost finished with the Bainbridge Road water line. That’s a new line that will provide a loop in our water system for added safety and a much more reliable water supply to the library. We completed another phase of the reconstruction and repaving of Chestnut Ridge Road from the turnpike to Bainbridge. Next year we will use our Ohio Public Works Grant to start the reconstruction and repaving of Jaycox Road. In 2015 it will be rebuilt from approximately Forest Park Drive to Liberty Elementary. The first several hundred feet will not be repaved as it is part of the Center Ridge Road widening. It is our plan then to complete Jaycox from Liberty to Mills Road in 2016.

A bridge on Sugar Ridge Road just west of Maddock was totally replaced.

We also completed a study of the Mills Road, Route 83 intersection. We are working closely with the City of Avon to determine our future direction for improvements at that location.

I would also like to commend our service department for their efforts in repaving many of our residential streets. Using our own crews and equipment the service department repaved Mills Road from Route 83 to Jaycox, Ridgeview Blvd from Center Ridge Road to Bernice, the entrance to Frontier Park, Pitts Blvd from Gail Drive to Wil-Lou Lane, North Lear Nagle from

Mills to Adele and Sugar Ridge Road just east of Bender Road and Lexington Way. Thank you gentlemen for a job well done.

In partnership with the Lorain County Community College University Partnership Ridge Campus, the area along the I-480 eastbound ramp will be getting a face lift this year. A portion of the aging fence has already been removed; the area along the fence line will be filled with top soil and graded to blend in with the existing adjacent contours. When weather permits, LCCC will landscape the area giving us a much more esthetically pleasing view at this entrance to the City.

We also completed construction of a 1.2-mile, 10-foot wide asphalt "Town Center Trail" which runs through South Central Park, North Ridgeville Middle School and St. Peter Church. Our project was recognized by the 2014 Greater Cleveland Trails and Greenways Organization as an exemplary example of a citizen-initiated project. Only 6 projects were recognized out of 31 submissions throughout Northeastern Ohio. The trail also received a Certificate of Excellence award from Lorain County Beautiful. The trail is getting a tremendous amount of use and is a great addition to our Park system.

2014 was also a good year for home construction. In 2014, the building department issued 228 new dwelling permits and 13 new apartment building permits containing 77 units.

And, if you use the turnpike you will notice new sound barriers at the turnpike entrance that display the North Ridgeville logo. These barriers were installed at no cost to the City of North Ridgeville by working closely with both the turnpike and the Ohio Department of Transportation. And thanks to Senator Manning and Councilwoman Johnson for their efforts and assistance in this project.

Finally, let me review where we stand on the widening of Lear Nagle and Center Ridge Road. Twice last year we submitted property tax levies for approval and both times they were narrowly defeated. There was no clear mandate for or against a property tax. We have decided to go a different direction than levying a property tax for both projects which included putting all facets of both projects in one funding mechanism.

We have unbundled the projects to address each of them separately, and even break out specific components of the projects for funding.

First, Lear Nagle. The project continues to move forward. There are 92 property acquisitions needed, but no total building takes. All parcels have been appraised and an offer made to the property owner. 61 of those offers have been accepted. 29 of those remain in negotiations and 2 have been submitted for appropriation. Let me explain the appropriation process a little bit as it is often misunderstood. It is not unusual for negotiations for purchasing properties to not reach a successful agreement. The two mentioned above are good examples. In the first example, the amount in contention is really small, only a few hundred dollars. But, because one of the owners passed away and the property never went through probate we can't close on the property. Thus, we need to go through the courts to acquire the property. In the other case our appraisers offered a fair market value of \$6,000 for a small piece of property. The property owner countered with an offer of \$57,000 which we declined. Since we could not reach an agreement on the purchase amount we filed an appropriation, or an eminent domain proceeding. This keeps the project moving and on schedule as the property needed is immediately acquired. It is simply left to the courts to determine how much the City should pay for the property.

After breaking out the Lear Nagle project we still need \$2,525,665 in funding. \$799,000 of this will be funded using the water fund to install a new water line and the remaining \$1,726,665 will come from the street levy for the near future. It is still hoped that ultimately we can provide new funding rather than dilute the street levy but can fund it in this manner.

Center Ridge Road also continues on time for an October 2016 bid date. As an alternative to a property tax levy I have submitted legislation to Council to increase the license plate fee by \$5.00 per vehicle per year. Many feel that this is a more appropriate method to provide funding than a property tax as it applies to those that are using the road. The \$5 fee per vehicle will generate about \$140,000 per year that can be used to pay the debt service on our remaining obligation of about \$2.5 million. Again, by unbundling the various parts of the project, it is our intention to fund \$857,368 through the sanitary sewer fund to install new sewers in the project area where needed. Originally we were obligated to fund \$400,000 for a new water line however; we have been able to get the water line included in the project using Federal Funds. Therefore we only have to fund about \$75,000 for the water line which we can do through the water fund.

The demolition contractor began work last week. The first building to go, which has received all approvals is the building on Ridgeview that years ago was occupied by Armario Heating and Cooling. Encroachments and signs are starting to be moved. By June 15th, it is anticipated that most of the buildings slated for demolition will be gone.

I want to point out that the total cost for widening Center Ridge Road is \$54,583,526 based on latest estimates. North Ridgeville will ultimately pay \$4,787,613 of the grand total. Keep in mind many items have already been funded which is why we still only need about \$2,500,000. But my point is, I sometimes hear people say why don't others that use the road have to pay? My response is they certainly do. We are getting \$49,795,913 in State and Federal tax dollars. That's other people's money. For every \$1 we spend we're getting \$10 from others. I would say that is excellent leverage of our tax dollars.

About two years ago it was discovered that our radio tower behind the service garage was beginning to structurally fail. After discussions with Verizon and their representative TowerCo, they agreed to assume the cost for a new tower. That tower was completed last year and is located behind City Hall. Transfer of equipment from the old tower to the new is almost complete. This year it will be determined what it will cost to dismantle the old tower.

Finally, we also used \$70,000 in Community Development Block Grant Funds to enlarge and repave a portion of the Senior Center parking lot.

In 2014 our fire department responded to 2,436 EMS calls and 603 fire calls for a total of 3,039. Our fire Marshall also performed 220 inspections of businesses. The effectiveness of these inspections is evident by the fact that we did not have a single commercial fire in 2014. Some of our members also received specialized training in urban collapse rescue and Crude Oil Freight Train Disaster preparedness. Hopefully that training will never come in to play but with 70-80 trains per day going through North Ridgeville we need to be prepared.

In November I signed a contract with Lorain County to provide for the Wireless Emergency Notification System which will provide North Ridgeville and the rest of the county with a robust, cost-effective notification system. We will be able to provide weather alerts, evacuation warnings and Amber alerts by way of voice, text, e-mail, pager and social media. The equipment has been installed and next week our employees will be trained on its use. We can anticipate it

going fully functional in early February. More information will become available in the coming weeks on how to sign up to receive these notifications. The information will be posted on the City's website.

Our fire department also took possession of two "Lucas Devices" which are automated CPR machines. These machines are state-of-the-art and actually perform continual CPR on cardiac arrest patients. We are also looking forward to some other new equipment we will receive this year. In the next few weeks we should receive a new fire engine with many modern features including foam pump, generator and passenger safety equipment that has only become available in recent years. In March we are expecting the arrival of a new Medic unit. We are also expecting delivery on two new heart monitor/defibrillators which will also be state-of-the-art. Our residents can take comfort in the fact that we place a high premium on officer training as well as modern equipment to address their life threatening needs.

As of the end of November our police department answered 32,729 calls for service. They handled 570 traffic crashes and made 166 DUI arrests. 50% of those arrested had prior DUI convictions. Our humane officers answered 852 calls for service. As you can tell, our police and fire departments are both very busy and do a great job.

Turning to our Senior Center almost 10,000 Meals-on-Wheels were provided in 2014 and 2,578 transportation rides. Many people in the community depend on Meals-on-Wheels for their daily contact with any outsider and serves as a safety check on their well-being. Over 150 volunteers provided over 5,500 volunteer hours, but we are always looking for more volunteers, especially to deliver Meals-on-Wheels.

Other interesting tidbits or facts concerning the City: Love is in the air, by the end of 2014 I had performed 298 weddings. Last year our Cemetery Sexton performed 22 burials. Our Mayors Court handled approximately 4,780 cases, we had 15 water main breaks (down from 21 the year before) and we hosted North Ridgeville's first ever Cleveland Stache Dash with 345 participants (not bad even in miserable weather).

Let me now turn to City finances. First, I would like to talk about RITA, the Regional Income Tax Authority that we joined two years ago. Overall, the process has gone very well. Collections for 2014 were up slightly. We anticipated collections of \$9,000,000 and they actually came in at \$9,300,000. Some of that is due to a special Delinquent and Subpoena Program. RITA identified over \$291,000 in outstanding liability, penalties and interest due and so far to date, has collected \$83,591. An additional \$219,346 remains outstanding that they are still working to collect. In addition, their personnel visited North Ridgeville last March to work directly with individual taxpayers. This year the RITA Taxpayer Assistance event, where they provide free municipal income tax preparation will be held March 3, 2015 from 1:00 pm to 7:00 pm. This is on a first-come first-serve basis.

I would like to mention that North Ridgeville received an Award with Distinction from the State Auditor's Office for the presentation of our Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, prepared by Chris Costin and his staff. We also hired a new treasurer last year, Tim Pope who comes to us with 33 years of public finance and accounting experience. Between these two gentlemen and their staffs we have an excellent handle on the state of City finances.

When we look at our Cash Position in 2015 compared to 2014 it has decreased but not to the extent anticipated. Although income tax collections were up about \$300,000 more than anticipated we were able to put \$400,000 in our Payroll Reserve Fund for future retirement liabilities. I always look at our Street Fund, State Highway Motor Vehicle License Tax and the Street Levy to really get a good look from year to year. Those three funds declined by \$238,757. Therefore, adding all these funds together show an overall decline of about \$300,000. However, at the beginning of the year \$880,000 was moved from the Capital Expenditure Fund to the General Fund to balance appropriations. The end result is we continue to eat into our reserves. An income tax increase was placed on the ballot to resolve this issue, but was soundly defeated. That means it will be another tough appropriation process this year with continued budget cuts for capital expenditures. Employee increases were held to 2%, which barely keeps them up with inflation, and all employees are now paying 12.5% towards their health insurance. Last year, at Council's request I cut \$1,000,000 in expenditures to balance the budget, mostly by delaying projects or purchases that we need but were not critical. This year is shaping up to be similar. But, this year we have three property tax levies that are up for renewal. These three levies together generate almost \$4,000,000 in taxes to the City. The three levies are the police levy, fire levy and street levy. The police and fire levy are used for operations as well as capital expenditures. The street levy generates the necessary funding for resurfacing and repairs of streets, road and bridges and cannot be used for salaries. It is obviously imperative that we renew all three of these levies. There are no increases so it is not new taxes. Repeat "No New Taxes". All have been in place for many years and have always enjoyed tremendous support. But, we are not taking anything for granted and will be campaigning strongly for their renewal. Remember, No New Taxes!

The State of the City remains excellent. Although our finances are extremely tight and we can't do all the projects we would like, we do balance all of our accounts. Kudos are to be given to our employees for their frugality and ability to do more with less. The City continues to grow and we continue to meet the needs of the public.

I want to close with a couple more third grader letters. Just to prove that we can't please everybody; Olivia wrote "Dear Mayor Gillock, I liked when you came in and told us all about yourself, but you didn't read my card. So I was sad about that. But I still think you're awesome." And finally, and this is my favorite, Hailey wrote "Dear Mayor Gillock, thank you for coming to our school I loved the assembly! I think it was the sweetest assembly all year. I really like the magazine and map and I found my house on it! I think you are the sweetest most kindest most loving Mayor I know."

As people often tell me, I love my City! Thanks for listening.