

# **2020 Annual Report of the Mayor to Cortland City Council**

## **April 20, 2021**

### **Introduction**

What a year! One could not have anticipated the COVID-19 pandemic beginning for us on March 16, 2020. However, thanks to the foresight of former Mayor Jim Woofter and City Council, ECMSI was hired in the fall of 2019 to update computer and phone systems. This enabled the City administrative staff to work from home the day after the declaration of the pandemic, with the Finance Department rotating one person in the Administration building each day. The Fire, Police, and Service unions and personnel agreed to modified schedules to minimize the spread of COVID within the City. Protocols were put into place to keep our team safe. It was truly a team effort to keep the City running efficiently, but safely!

Next, our residents benefitted from no penalties on their water bills and no water disconnections due to non-payment. A hold was placed on all unnecessary purchases.

Then, decisions were made regarding different facilities within our parks, changing frequently based on guidance from Gov. DeWine. The Splash Pad did not open summer 2020, which also allowed repairs to be made to its surface.

Further, all unions agreed to one (1) year contracts due to COVID and the unknown ramifications of the pandemic.

The City completed the year with continued financial solvency. We did not experience the significant reduction in income that many communities saw during the pandemic, due in large part to the fact that we do not have a city income tax.

### **Administration**

The City Charter is reviewed every ten (10) years. This year the Charter Review Commission recommended two (2) amendments to the Charter. Amendment 1 established that the Planning & Zoning Commission can set the schedule of meetings at their reorganizational meeting in January and can cancel meetings when there is no business to be conducted. Amendment 2 established that the Municipal Election shall be held with the general election in the fall. Both amendments were approved by the voters in November.

A Strategic Planning Committee was formed to review the City's Comprehensive Plan originally compiled in 1999 and Strategic Plan developed 2002-2004. A Strategic Plan is in the process of being updated utilizing information from both documents. We will utilize public opinion surveys, stake holders, City staff, and City residents to determine what is important to the people of Cortland and propose a Strategic Plan update to the residents of Cortland and City Council sometime in 2021.

A Facilities Study is also taking place to evaluate the current condition of our buildings, as well as to make recommendations for improvement or new construction. The potential capital improvements could be significant, which is why we wanted to have an outside expert conduct the study.

The Drug-Free Workplace Policy, initiated by former mayor, Jim Woofter, was completed and accepted.

A new LED community sign was installed at the point, at the intersection of High and Mecca streets which was paid for with Cares Act funds.

A Feral cat program was started in conjunction with TNR of Warren to address the feral cat issue in the City.

## **Finance Department**

Finance Director, Patti Gibson, was busier than usual this year due to receiving, documenting, and reporting COVID-19 funding. The City received \$ 374,684.39 in Corona virus relief funds. Purchases made with these funds include: For the entire City: PPE, hand sanitizer and dispensers, disinfecting wipes, sanitizing equipment, touchless thermometers; for Fire: P100 air respirators and related mask equipment, firefighter helmets and boots, turnout gear and lockers, a Lucas chest compressor, respirator fit tester, SCBA air compressor fill station, mask voice amplifiers, and service bench; for Police: a 2021 Police Interceptor Sport Utility Vehicle, tasers, and accessories; for Service: a 2021 Ford F250 crew cab and pump station life; for Parks: water bottle fillers.

## **Fire Department**

The Fire Department continues to effectively obtain and utilize grant money. In 2020, \$63,250 grant money from OH Division EMS and FEMA purchased ballistic vests, a SCBA fill station, and medical PPE. In the past six (6) years, Captain Price has obtained \$405,533, and in the past 20 years, Cortland Fire has received \$1,096,239 of grant monies!

The Fire Department continues to generate income through the education program and ambulance billing. The department did see a decrease in billing and in educational programming due to COVID.

Thank you to the residents for their support of an additional 1.5 mill capital improvement levy. As a result, the department was able to purchase of new pumper mounted fire truck from Sutphen Corporation to replace a 28-year-old truck. Future revenue from this additional levy will be utilized to likely construct a new building and other capital expenditures.

Thank you to Chief Rea, Captain Price, and Firefighter/Paramedic Van Kanegan for their leadership and work with the Trumbull County Incident Command Center in response to COVID-19. Chief Rea served as Director of Operations. Captain Price served as the EMS

Division Liaison, and Firefighter/Paramedic Van Kanegan served as the North Division Liaison. Paula Rea and Bill Brewer joined the others to administer vaccinations for points of distribution throughout Trumbull County, as well as specifically for the Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities and shut-in residents within our community. This collaborative effort benefitted the entire county in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many thanks to Firefighter/Paramedic Todd Metzendorf for serving two (2) deployments on the Disaster Medical Assistance Teams/DMAT through the US Department of Health and Human Services.

In addition to the COVID work, the department was still able to complete their annual Toys for Tots campaign, pre-school education programs organized by FF/Paramedic Scott Bower, business and construction inspections conducted by FF/Paramedic Dan Jaros, and firefighter continuing education. The department participated in numerous drive-by birthday parades this year due to COVID.

Run totals experienced a slight decrease in 2020. Mutual Aid with our Squad or EMT experienced a slight increase. Mutual Aid for fire also experienced a slight decrease.

The department continued to strengthen our partnership with Lakeview Local Schools, with the donation of repeater radio equipment to Lakeview Local Schools to increase the level of communication between staff, administrators, buses, and first responders to ensure the safety of our Lakeview students. They also continue to build stronger alliances with surrounding communities, particularly Bazetta, Mecca, Fowler, Howland, Champion, Bristolville, and Johnston.

Civil service testing was done, and a new full-time firefighter, Cody Smith, was hired.

## **Police Department**

The Police department also continues to obtain and utilize grant monies. A \$6,171 grant was awarded from the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services to cover COVID expenses incurred by the department; ours was the only department awarded in Trumbull County. An OCJS JAG LE grant for \$4,500 was awarded for the purchase of MDTs/Radios for the cruisers. In-car vaults were purchased through a \$1,000 grant through PEP.

The sale of a 2010 cruiser generated \$2,009 on Municibid added to the department's revenues.

Thank you to the residents for their support of an additional 1.5 mill Police levy. As a result of the anticipated revenue, there was a change in manning ordinance to hire a new full-time officer, Julie Bevilacqua, resulting in a reduction of overtime hours. Officer Bevilacqua also provides valuable service to the Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force. New cruisers will be purchased according to a new long-range purchasing plan.

There was an additional staffing change, taking current staff member, Robin Yartz, from part-time Administrative Assistant to creating a new position as full-time Administrative Clerk to support both the Police and Finance departments.

The department was certified by the Ohio Collaborative as meeting the requirements of the federal “Safe Policing for Safe Communities” Executive Order issued by President Trump.

The Cortland Police Department continued our partnership with the Lakeview Local Schools through our two (2) School Resource officers, Jason Smith and Brandon Rice, at their facilities for the 2020/21 school year.

The Department continued their community policing activities this year: participating in the Lakeview 2020 Senior class parade, youth interaction and providing a positive police presence at Willow Park during tennis matches for the Lakeview High School by Steve Orslene, participating in drive-by birthday parades, attending the Veteran’s Memorial Ceremony, participating in Cortland Christian Church’s safety meetings, assisting with the Lakeview Schools K-8 Christmas parade, assisting the Lion’s Club in honoring one of their members with a “drive-by” ceremony.

## **Service Department**

Thank you to the residents for their support of a renewal levy for the purpose of current operating expenses in the General Fund.

Service Director Don Wittman resigned in March 2020, after 16 years of service to the City to take a job with ODOT. Kimberly Blasco was hired at the beginning of May as the new Service Director. Kim came to the City with vast knowledge and experience, most recently with the Trumbull County Sanitary Engineers office.

Superintendent Russell Masaitis retired in June after 26 years of service to the City. Chris Minor replaced Russell as the new Superintendent. Chris has been with the City for 18 years and is also the operator-in-charge of our water system.

The City Service department continues to maximize funding by performing as many projects in-house as possible, which include constructing aluminum portable bleaches for the Tennis Court at Willow Park; remodeling locker rooms for the Police Department; clean up, grading, and seeding on the sled hill at Eastlake Park, to name just a few.

## **Water**

The N. Mecca Waterline Replacement project was substantially complete. The project replaced 3480 feet of 6’ waterline with 8” ductile iron extending from W. Main to the north. The total project cost was \$575,000 funded by a 0% loan.

The City received \$20,682 from the communication lease with T-Mobile for the use of the Willow Water Storage Tank as a telecommunications tower. This revenue was placed in a capital reserve account to be used for maintenance and improvements to the water system.

## **Sanitary Sewer**

The Trumbull County Sanitary Engineer awarded a contract for major capital upgrades to the Mosquito Creek Treatment Plant. The contract to A.P. O'Horo was more than \$31 million; of this cost, the City is responsible for +/- 22%. We have some money saved, and we are continuing to pursue additional funding to help offset this cost.

## **Streets and Roads**

The 2020 Asphalt program was completed with \$75,000 from OPWC and were able to resurface Huntington Trail, Leckrone Way, Ruby Lane, Terre Hill Drive, Bayview Drive (Delbert Ave. to eastern city limits), Deer Creek Trail (Fawn Lane to cul-de-sac), Turquoise Drive (Diamond Way to Ruby Lane), Wae Trial (Lakeview Drive to Terre Hill Drive), Whitetail Run (Fawn Lane to cul-de-sac), Aspen Place, Beechwood Drive (small portion), Brookview Drive, Greenbriar Drive (Gemwae Drive to Aspen Place), Oakdale Place, Spring Creek Drive (small portion), Thornhill Drive, and Vinetree Place, This represents approximately 8% of the total inventory, which is in line with the 10-to-12-year resurfacing cycle goal.

The Service Department performed crack sealing and striping of parking spaces, crosswalks, stop bars, and turn arrows.

## **Zoning**

The City saw permits issued for an estimated \$4.3 million worth of new construction and improvements, including three (3) new single-family homes, eight (8) duplexes, and one (1) tri-plex.

## **General Services**

The following services continue to be provided to our residents: curbside brush chipping, bi-weekly mosquito spraying, scrap tire recycling, Spring and Fall Cleanups, and weekly curbside recycling.

## **Plans for 2021**

The Administration will continue to work on the Strategic Plan, the Facilities Plan, and Policy Manual additions and updates. We will also participate in contract negotiations with our three (3) unions in 2021.

In 2021, the Finance Department will be undergoing an Ohio Fire & Police Pension AUP audit and the Ohio Financial Audit for the years 2019 and 2020. We will continue to take steps to move to monthly rather than quarterly billing.

The Fire Department is looking at establishing an equipment and vehicle replacement plan. Further, they will continue to upgrade their MARCS radio systems. The department is also looking for grant monies to replace aging fire hose and extrication tools.

The Police Department will complete the Lexipol Policy Manual and obtain Ohio Collaborative Certification. The department will continue the implementation of the new fleet purchasing plan, increase the use of online and in-house training, increase officer/employee wellness, and continue to evaluate the use of part time officers and their availability vs. overtime or additional full-time officers.

The Service Department will be continuing the annual resurfacing plan in 2021 as well as work on the Facilities Plan. The department will continue to plan for upcoming projects: Mecca Street resurfacing and intersection upgrade, a \$1 million project at no cost to the City; Fairway Drive Bridge replacement, which is a \$500,000 project for which the City will pay 5%. We will also be pursuing grant monies for a new restroom at Willow Park. We are also planning a lighting study at Willow Park and a Safety Town at Pearl Park.

In closing, I would like to say thank you to the entire City of Cortland team! I am fortunate to work with a highly motivated and dedicated team, and I appreciate their efforts daily. As I have said before, I would not have wanted to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic with any other team! I look forward to exciting things happening in the City during 2021.