



## **2018 State of the City Address**

### **Mayor Joe Kelsey**

As Mayor of the City of Woodburn it is my duty to provide a statement of the finances and general condition of the City to the common council at least once a year. This is otherwise known as the State of the City Address.

Since before January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, our City has been saddled with the burden of updating our WWTP due to the increasing demands of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management. For several years, Woodburn has been in violation of having too much ammonia that our current plant can't handle. Having no other alternative but to either upgrade our existing lagoon system plant or abandon the current lagoon system in favor of the construction of a much higher capacity mechanical plant, we chose the latter. This will give us the ability to handle an ever increasing industrial park and new residents moving to within the city limits and the surrounding areas. This has been by no means, an easy task to accomplish.

Costing several million dollars, we had to search for the best financing options to pay for this improvement mandated by the State. Having to borrow money required us to perform a rate study by a certified financial advisor to determine where our rates need to be in order to get approved. The first rate study we received back more than a year ago determined that we would have to increase our sewer rates by more than 101%. This was absolutely not acceptable to any of us and would bring our sewer rates over and above \$90.00 per month for what our average residents consume (4,000 gal), including me and for everyone sitting here.

We spent the greater portion of last year:

1. Trying to secure other forms of funding to lower the burden on all of our residents.
2. Working with our partner Commonwealth Engineers on value engineering in an attempt to reduce costs as much as possible.

We chose to use SRF (State Revolving Fund) as our financing platform because of their policy of allowing smaller communities to apply for debt forgiveness if the average rates go to \$65.00 per month and above. Knowing that our rates would have to increase (potentially to much higher than this amount) regardless of what benefit is received from SRF, in May of 2017 our City Council approved the increase to \$65.00 so that we can lobby for the debt forgiveness. After working with Jim McGoff and Bill Harkins from the State financing authority, we were able to secure \$500,000.00 debt forgiveness for the loan.

Later, after working with the Allen County Redevelopment Commission, we were able to secure a \$2,000,000.00 commitment from our TIF revenues to be applied towards the loan in order to further the relief from the massive rate increases our community was to be facing. After completing a final rate study we had to do another smaller increase to \$73.12 for average use. All in all, we were able to prevent our rates from spiking to over \$100.00 and beyond for average use.

Construction is to begin in March of this year.

Another very important part of our growth and economic development is the continued success and expansion of our industrial park. During the second half of 2017, we began the process of completing a comprehensive feasibility study to take advantage of the opportunity that has been given to us with the expansion of U.S.24 into a four lane divided highway. While currently working with the County Redevelopment commission, the Allen County Commissioners, and other development partners we are taking the steps to prepare this area for further Industrial and commercial development. We will be adding new streets, improving Maumee Center Road, and extending water and sewer services to accommodate the needs of more productivity and jobs for the residents of our community and the surrounding areas.

Improving the potential of new businesses is only one piece of the puzzle to keep our community growing. We need to continue to improve the quality of life of our residents as well. One of the most basic, yet costly, needs of any community is the constant maintenance and improvements of our roads, streets, and sidewalks. In fact, good roads and sidewalks are one of the top reasons people move to a community second only to good schools. With the help of the city's superintendent Ryan Walls, I set out to measure by width and length, and to analyze the condition of every section of road within our city limits in order to put each section in an INDOT approved Asset Management Inventory. This will enable us to apply for road improvement grants through the Community Crossings Program. After the daunting task of deciding which roads would be improved first and working with the cities contracted engineering consultants, we submitted 4 road improvement grant applications to INDOT. I am happy to report that the city was awarded \$393,000 to do over \$500,000 of road and street improvements which will begin this spring. Along with crack filling and rejuvenation, many streets will be resurfaced, and sections will have new curbs and sidewalks.

Along with the many infrastructure improvements mentioned so far, I also realized that our decades old zoning ordinance needed to be updated and modernized in order to accommodate a more sophisticated business environment and to align ourselves with Allen County, Fort Wayne and Hometown to better compete for jobs and housing within our community. We initiated the Allen County DPS to help us facilitate and improve our zoning ordinance. After having our first meeting in April of 2017 and spending many late nights and countless hours throughout the year with our ordinance review team, we successfully updated, repealed and replaced our outdated ordinance and set up our community for success for years to come.

In June of last year, we had several hundred guests, professional partners, and friends and family for the historic event of the dedication and official opening of the Woodburn Clock Plaza which is now a prominent focal point to our downtown and will attract many events and gatherings for several years to come.

Although we have had many successes in 2017 the challenges of our growing community will continue for many years to come.

We have an aging storm sewer network that is going to need to be addressed within the next couple of years.

Continued improvements to our downtown in order to keep attracting new business and entertainment is a vital part to the strength of our community.

The extension of Hickory Street connecting the area of Woodburn Rd. To the northern neighborhoods of Woodburn will drive new commercial and housing development as well as provide safer bus routes for Woodlan Schools.

We will work with New Allen Alliance to help facilitate the new OCRA Regional Stellar Communities program which will offer grant funding for parks and improvements to our shared path bicycle and walking trails system that will connect Woodburn to the rest of Allen County.

Our city is in good financial shape and we will continue to invest in the longevity of our infrastructure as well as the quality of life for our residents in our community and set us up for success for many years to come.

As a conservative leader of our city, I believe it is the purpose of Government to cultivate an environment friendly to business and the continued improvement of the quality of life of our residents and as your Mayor, it is my obligation.

This has been a year of progress and we will continue to do the hard work it takes for everyone to create their own life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Thank you,



Mayor Joseph Kelsey