



TO: Mayor and City Commission
FROM: Kathie Grinzinger
SUBJECT: Status Report – September 2006

This is but my third report on the status of projects, issues or concerns that we are researching, anticipating, or otherwise pondering since moving to the City Manager's chair. While the list seems to be growing longer, it should not be assumed to mean that less is getting done, but that more is to yet come.

We continue to be proud to serve you and the residents of Mt. Pleasant and we are particularly looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that face us in the upcoming months.

1. Construction Projects

Nearly all our construction projects for 2006 have been finalized. Even water main work on Mission Street should be nearing completion this week. Activity on Mission will be suspended on Monday, but will resume again later for an additional two days to finish valve abandonments. We expect all construction at the Airport to be completed next month.

While baseball season is long gone except in the Major League playoffs, activity is picking up again at Pickens Little League fields. We are starting a significant rehabilitation of the infield at Pickens and will be installing new fence and new chain link dugouts. The dugouts are being designed to allow for a mesh covering to be installed during the season to protect players from sun and rain but the units will be "transparent" when the field is not in use. Such a design is used to enable better observation of activities in the park and to discourage inappropriate uses.

2. Budget Process

The City Commission received copies of the proposed 2007 Budget at the first meeting of September. During the meeting of September 25th the Commission will be asked to consider setting a special meeting in mid-October to receive the public presentation on that document. We are hopeful we can demonstrate how this proposal meets the parameters the Commission set for the second year of the two-year process they began back in 2005.

We propose using one special meeting to introduce the highlights of all the budgets (General Fund, Enterprise Funds, Special Revenue Funds, etc.), so that we can spend work sessions throughout the rest of October and November targeting those areas on which the Commission may wish to have greater dialogue.

As in the past few years, we would hope to assist you in completing work on the operating budget by the end of November. One of the reasons for such an ambitious timetable is that we hope to have an approved budget in time to begin an orientation for newly-elected commissioners in December of this year. Orienting any new commissioner prior to their assuming a seat on the dais allows us to move up the goal-setting process and most importantly to attack the question of how we wish to tie goals and public input into creating a budget appropriate for our new reality.

As an additional note, you may already be aware that the State Elections Commission has ruled the initiative referred to as "Stop Over Spending" invalid. This effort, sponsored by an out-of-state privately-financed interest group, would have hamstrung local governments as it attempted to make a political statement at the state level.

3. Master Plan and Other Planning Commission Activity

With the Master Plan approval process moved to the City Commission's court, the Planning Commission is beginning research on a number of other issues. They have completed revising language on accessory buildings which will be presented to the Commission in the September 25th packet and will begin research into the potential of a contract zoning ordinance. The City Commission has expressed interest in such an option, and it is possible the Planning Commission may be able to present a draft for public hearing by November.

Once the City Commission formally adopts the Master Plan, it will be published and distributed to members of the City Commission, Planning Commission, City departments and divisions, the Chippewa River District Library and other interested entities throughout the community. The intention has always been to share a summarized version of the Master Plan with each household in the city as well. By providing the crux of the vision to residents, they can more accurately assume a participatory role in measuring the organization's actions against our words. We are not expecting such a document to be drafted until early in 2007.

4. Borden Building Updates

And not a day goes by....In the next two months staff will be concentrating on preparing to meet the final contingencies from the purchase agreement. Three primary activities are critical at this stage.

a) Plans and Specifications

The developer, architect and City representatives are meeting weekly to produce a detailed set of plans and specifications that will satisfy all parties including the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). We have received a preliminary draft of those plans and specs, which we have shared with building, fire and county inspectors for their review. Those plans, once scrutinized locally, will establish the details for SHPO review and will be included in any evaluation of eligibility for tax credits.

b) SHPO Part I Evaluation of Eligibility

Michelle Sponseller, Downtown Development Director, and City Planner Tony Kulick are working with J.E. Johnson to prepare all the application information that must be submitted to gain Part I approval of the project. Part I approval initiates the developer's eligibility to qualify for historic tax credits, making renovation economically feasible.

The City has several responsibilities as well, primarily related to the establishment of the Historic District, which must be completed in accordance with a strict state-mandated timeline.

- *On September 9, 2006*, the local Historic District Study Committee transmitted their report and recommendation regarding the Borden renovation and reuse project to the Michigan Historical Commission, the State Historical Advisory Council, and the Mt. Pleasant Planning Commission.
- The Planning Commission will have the report on their *October 5, 2006* agenda and again on *November 2nd* if necessary.
- City Commission receives report *October 23, 2006* and sets public hearing for comments.
- *On November 8, 2006* the Mt. Pleasant Historic District Committee will hold a public hearing and send their comments to the City Commission.
- *On November 13, 2006* the City Commission will hold a public hearing to consider the Historic District.
- *On December 13, 2006* the City will send its final paperwork complete with affidavit to the State Historic Preservation Office.

c) Michigan Economic Development/Michigan Economic Growth Alliance

The final part of this preparatory phase is the completion of all Brownfield District Plans impacting this project. The City Commission will hold public hearings at their first meeting in October on the Brownfield Plans for the Borden (Parcel A) properties, the contiguous properties including the current City Hall, Parcel B, and Island Park. The City Commission will also

consider and approve Brownfield Plans at other locations that will help pay the bonds for the Borden Building project. Once approved locally all Brownfield Plans must be submitted to MEGA for tax capture approval.

MEGA has three meetings left before the end of the year: November 5 and 21, and December 12. MEGA approval needs to be obtained at one of these meetings.

5. Downtown Activities

Congratulations to downtown guru Michelle Sponseller, Committee Chair Lois Breidenstein, and the many volunteers for the most successful Mardi Gras in recent history. Special thanks as well to the lovely young artists whose mask-making artistry added extra publicity to the effort!

As was mentioned earlier, much of the Downtown Director's time recently has been devoted to assisting with the West Broadway Revitalization Project, particularly in the realm of managing the historic significance of the project. However, substantial progress is being made in several other sectors.

An in-depth review of parking amenities has been undertaken, and several recommendations will be presented to the City Commission at Monday's work session in an attempt to create a more user-friendly atmosphere in the Central Business District. The new special assessment formula should be ready for discussion with the Commission in late October or early November.

Downtown continues to upgrade its advertising and marketing activities and has successfully added the existence of Wi-Fi to its catalog. (In fact, City Hall has begun to receive calls and, on at least one occasion, we have lent out our Water Plant Superintendent Malcolm Fox as "tech support".) We anticipate the service will be highly prized by the district's apartment dwellers.

6. Project 2000 Tax Appeal Case

We have finally received word from our attorney that our appeal on the taxation of Project 2000 will be heard by the Michigan Supreme Court during the first week of October. I and other staff members including the Finance Director and City Assessor can be expected to reschedule our days to be in attendance at the court proceedings. We will notify you immediately when we receive final confirmation of that date and time.

We are a bit concerned because Mt. Pleasant's case has been combined with another from the Municipal Employees' Retirement System regarding land they purchased for investment. Not only do we see the facts of our case to be very different from that of the MERS action, our attorney is afraid joining the cases will significantly reduce our presentation time.

7. Public Information and Involvement Opportunities

Fire Prevention Week is observed throughout the country each October. This year the Mt. Pleasant Fire Department is inviting all Mt. Pleasant residents to an Open House on October 8th at the Public Safety Building for a day of fun, food and fire prevention education. More details will be published shortly and City Commissioners are invited to meet the firefighters, greet the citizens and help spread the message.

Great strides continue to be made in our attempt to deliver information directly to our residents that will help them conduct business in their busy schedules. Through the efforts of our Information Technology staff and the City Assessor's office we are now uploading tax information to the website at the close of business each day and updated assessing information each Friday.

We are also looking at on-line options for the City's surplus property auction. City Clerk Rob Flynn, working with an in-house ad hoc committee, is investigating several web-based tools including eBay as a way to maximize the return from our surplus property.

As a final note to our techie friends who can't make it downtown, our IT staff hopes to stream video of the demolition of the Borden chimney when that event occurs.

8. Temporary Traffic Control Order

Per your request, we try to notify you whenever a temporary Traffic Control Order nears expiration. The following Traffic Control Order will appear on the October 9th City Commission agenda for your consideration:

#4-06: Replace "NO PARKING" signs with "LOADING ZONE" signs in the alleys in the Central Business District.

KSG/je