

TO: Mayor and City Commission

FROM: Kathie S. Grinzinger



SUBJECT: Status Report – October 2007

This last month has been a whirlwind for us at the home office. I can only hope your entrance into Michigan's finest season was more peaceful. Both Mrs. Ridley and I attended professional development workshops this month and then will spend two days in Chicago trying to distance the City of Mt. Pleasant from the financial morass that is the State of Michigan.

We commenced formal public review of the 2008 Annual Operating Budget with a presentation to the City Commission. Over the next two weeks I will review the budget document with all of our employees and hopefully our cable television audience. During the final three days of the month each City employee will spend a day in "team excellence" training.

We are still here, however, to keep you updated about the municipal activities, projects and events that may interest you. If we have left questions unanswered, or if you need any further information, don't hesitate to let us know, but give us a chance to nap first.

1. This Week At The Borden Building

Mr. Baderschneider presented his monthly update on activities at the West Broadway Redevelopment site earlier this month. It is apparent the re-roofing and repair of the cupolas is nearing completion. This last week has been devoted to finalizing plans for the electrical installation in the concrete floor of the new commission chambers and the design of the audio-visual systems in that room. Most of the underground infrastructure is now complete.

Weekly construction and progress meetings are being held between the developer, the City and the various engineers and designers committed to this project. While we are counting on an October 2008 completion, the developer is hopeful the project will come in ahead of that schedule.

2. Fall Parks and Recreation Activities

While they do much to enhance the lives of area residents all year, our Recreation and Sports Department always seems to take another unexpected step up each fall. This year will mark the first of the every-other-year trade-off between the Haunted Forest and the Corn Maze. Partnering with Papa's Pumpkin Patch on Summerton Road, our recreation staff, supported by CMU volunteers and local sponsors, will open the Corn Maze to all comers for five days beginning Friday, October 26th. On November 2nd all

post-Halloween pumpkin carvers are invited to bring their aging gourds to the Mushy Pumpkin Massacre at Papa's Pumpkin Patch. Come join us as we fling pumpkins through the air on our very own trebuchet (French for *pumpkin hurler*).

Over 450 young people between the ages of 3 and 13 are enrolled in one form of soccer play or another. PEAK's enrollment hit 250 and, brand new this year, 40 mother and son teams participated in a riotous Mom & Son Amazing Race adventure challenge. The Amazing Race took 90 participants from Island Park, throughout the downtown area, and back to Island Park for "post-race storytelling", awards and a picnic. While the Ridley team did not win the grand prize, we were all very proud of their effort and not at all surprised by their sense of competition.

Two slides are being added to "Slide Land" this month for the enjoyment of our youngest residents. For those of us whose babies watched the Smurfs before they were in reruns on the Cartoon Channel, "Slide Land" sits atop the hill behind the Farmers Market pavilion in Island Park. There may be no better spot in the park than this when the maples are in full color.

Special Recreation Services, dedicated to bringing inclusive recreational and cultural activities to all residents regardless of their abilities, is receiving a face-lift. One of the oldest municipal programs of its kind in Michigan, SRS has been uniting volunteers, student interns and residents with differing abilities for nearly 30 years. Beginning this fall the program will continue to fly under the banner of Access Recreation.

Great progress, or at least great movement of dirt, is being made in Chipp-A-Waters Park as we prepare to extend our trail system through the Harris wetland with the help of the Kellogg Foundation and the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation. The Access Recreation Pathway is scheduled to open next spring and will include two bridges and interpretive aids.

3. The Street Department Reports In

With the leaf pick-up season half over, street crews will begin to prep for the snows that will surely show up at one time or another. Speaking of plowing...some of your neighbors whose shrubs or trees have grown so far into the right-of-way that they hang into the street may have gotten a visit from a Street Department employee. To better prepare the snow plow routes, employees are doing some judicious pruning and trimming in a few areas around town. They did a lovely job on my front yard berm last year.

All this season's primary street repair projects were completed on time and, in the case of the overlay project, under budget. Eleven residential roadways were overlaid last month at a cost \$24,000 below the budgeted estimate. Street crews also completed deck replacement on the Broadway footbridge edging Nelson Park, giving Mountain Town Station diners a lovely way to walk off their scotch eggs.

4. Changes At The Waste Water Treatment Plant

Bids went out this week for construction and equipment to supply the City's newest enterprise, the septage receiving station. In your wildest dreams, I cannot expect you would have ever heard me express unbridled excitement over septage, but here we are.

This project fills several needs: as a stabilizing revenue source for our plant and as an environmental protection measure for the entire county. The credit for this project goes to the seven-member team that operates and manages waste water services for the residents of Mt. Pleasant. These employees understood the financial forecasts facing their operation, took responsibility, researched options, created a business plan and will now oversee the construction and operation of this new business venture. We are very proud of Pete Boettcher, Steven Hein, Robert Keller, Tim Middleton, Kurt Adams, Darrin Beebe, Nolan Sapyak and Scott Zamarron.

This project is also the very best way to say goodbye to Pete Boettcher. Pete came to the City of Mt. Pleasant in 1994 as the Assistant Superintendent and was promoted to Superintendent in 2003. He left us this month to work in water operations in Helena, Montana and to join his wife Lisa who has been working with the state's Department of Mine Reclamation since early this summer.

5. Customer Service and Business Initiatives

As part of our continuous improvement process, employees regularly monitor citizen concerns and requests and evaluate our own processes for ways to progress. An integrated team of staff members has been studying the potential of offering credit card payment to users of services for some time. Several roadblocks presented themselves not the least of which is the credit card companies' requirement for fees and pesky municipal financing recommendations.

After much negotiation we believe we have hit on a viable solution and have issued a request for proposals to companies to process credit card charges for the City. We are hopeful we will be able to offer this option to residents within the next few months.

To keep an organization our size running as smoothly and efficiently as possible, our internal customers can be just as important. After several years of limping long with a financial software package that no longer has technical support, could not integrate with other systems nor allow for ease of use by other departments, we are reviewing proposals for an entirely new system. The analysis and recommendation for purchase and installation of a new package will make its way to the City Commission for review shortly. A multi-disciplinary group chaired by Treasurer Mary Ann Kornexl has done an excellent job preparing specifications that should increase our ability to serve customers on both sides of the desk.

Another joint effort by City and County employees will fill a needed gap in Isabella County and provide a great economic development tool. As reported earlier, Mt. Pleasant and Isabella County have investigated ways to combine GIS systems to offer a web-based

tool for individuals and companies looking for land and buildings to spur new development. Using already loaded GIS maps will allow searchers to easily track address, location and available utilities.

Six hundred residents celebrated Fire Prevention Week with our firefighters earlier this month at the Open House held at the Station. Budget restraints over the last few years dictated that we rethink our outreach efforts. The Open House gives us an opportunity to teach residents about prevention, safety and response face-to-face and replaces other more costly community programs like our appearances at the Homebuilders Show.

6. The State's Creativity and Local Impacts

Like the energizer bunny the State of Michigan and our noble elected officials continue to give us new issues to tackle at warp speed. We are currently reviewing and attempting to discern all the implications of the new Michigan Business Tax on local communities. From our initial reading it appears that local economic development tools such as TIFAs, DDAs and LDFAs may take some substantial hits under the new law. The state is not prepared to provide us with a great deal of counsel on these "unintended consequences" yet, but hopefully we will have the answers we need before our budget process comes to a close.

While we have no new news on State Shared Revenue or Fire Reimbursement funding, the Michigan Legislature has launched a very creative move to siphon dollars from local residents in HB 4222. Under this bill the tipping fee for disposing of solid waste will go up by another \$7.50 per ton raising \$150 million from local communities or residents. The promise is that these funds could be used to prop up sagging revenue sharing dollars which could then be removed from the other pocket, we suspect.

Above our protests last year the State reduced local control once more through the passage of the Uniform Cable Franchising Act but assured us that competition would increase greatly, new technologies would be offered unimpeded by local regulation, and services to local residents would not decline. We have yet to see the new competitors or the new technology, but we have seen our local cable provider move to take full advantage of the new law. Charter Communications has determined that they no longer need to comply with our local franchise and have notified us that they are intending to switch out portions of our local rules for the state's version of an agreement.

We have convinced Charter that they should at least come to the table with representatives of the 11 members of the Mid-Michigan Cable Communications Consortium. We have begun discussions with Charter this month and negotiations, such as they will be, may stretch on for another few months.

We will be taking an opportunity this week to meet with Representative Bill Caul while he is in town to continue to assert the need to maintain the revenue sharing that rightfully belongs to local communities.

7. For Your Calendar

Time will be devoted during each City Commission meeting in November and December for discussions leading to the eventual adoption of the 2008 Annual Operating Budget. Work sessions have been tentatively set on several topic areas to give the Commission open time for debate and review. At this time the tentative schedule looks something like this:

November 12	Work Session	Economic Development Recap Proposed Zoning Text Changes Report on PEAK demographics
November 26	Regular Meeting Work Session	Public Hearing on 2008 Budget Review Water and Sewer Rates and Policy Decisions
December 10	Work Session	Remaining Issues
December 17	Regular Meeting	Approval of Balanced Budget

In the midst of this special fun the Commission will also receive a recommendation on the second budget amendment of the 2007 fiscal year.

November 6th is Election Day and two candidates are running for the two open seats on the City Commission. Four candidates have declared for the two open seats on the Mt. Pleasant Board of Education. The last day to declare as a write-in candidate is October 26th.

The only other issue tempting voters to the polls this fall will be that of the conditional rezoning ordinance on the Broomfield Crawford corner. The City's newsletter Connections contains an article on the issue and includes a drawing of the two plans being considered by the voters. The League of Women Voters has scheduled a forum on the ballot question at City Hall on October 25th at 7:00 p.m.

Feel free to check friends and neighbors for their "I Voted" sticker.

City offices will be closed to the public on November 12th in recognition of Veterans Day. Employees, however, will report to work to complete various projects or engage in training that may have suffered for lack of available concentrated time.

KSG/je