


TO: Mayor and City Commission

FROM: Kathie S. Grinzinger
City Manager 

SUBJECT: Status Report – December 2007

In late January or early February we will publish the City's Annual Report looking back over the successes and challenges of the past year. The Annual Report will be distributed to each of the Commissioners, our friends at the local media outlets, and the rest of the community via the website. I hope to share the highlights of that report in individual meetings with all employee departments as well so we can continue to review how each department is tied together in meeting the overall goals of the organization and the community.

Knowing that a full wrap-up is just weeks away, this month's communiqué will hopefully be brief and painless.

1. This Week at the Borden Building

Greg Baderschneider provided the Commission and the public with this month's update on the progress of work on the project site at the Commission meeting of December 10th. Hunting season, Thanksgiving, Michigan weather, and the Christmas holidays have and will continue to slow the pace of activity on Broadway for a few weeks. Once methods are put in place to seal and heat the structure, activity will pick up again but will not be as noticeable to passersby. We will attempt to work with the owner/developer in the near future to set a time for Commissioners to visit the site and see the progress for themselves.

While the trucks have slowed down we are concentrating on a few other tasks that can be done around an inside table. City employee representatives are meeting with furniture suppliers to select colors, fabric and surface materials that will be used throughout the offices. Others are working with lighting supply companies to find economic solutions to adequately light the new public parking lot in a way to blend with the downtown streetscape.

2. The Street Department and the Story of Leaves and Snow

The leaves were late in falling this year. It seemed to make sense to give homeowners an extra week to get their lawns clear and pile fall's remains into the streets. But, as sometimes happens in Michigan, the snow didn't realize we were not quite finished with our autumn chores. Two crews worked overtime to remove the remnants from our 74 miles of roadway before the next major snow came through. We agree in part with our "Sound-Off" friends...it may not have been pretty, but it worked well in the end.

Mt. Pleasant began its battle against the Emerald Ash Borer in 2006 when we inoculated several hundred right-of-way trees. Michigan's data now shows that the best chance to save urban ash forest is through the regular (bi-annual) inoculation of healthy trees using a specific pesticide treatment.

Three more of our heavy equipment operators are attending classes at Michigan State University this week to become certified in pesticide application. By training and certifying our own employees we will be able to provide the second treatment to city-owned trees at the lowest possible cost this spring. While we have not uncovered any infestation in any trees we treated previously, EAB was discovered on a residential city lot this fall. To protect the urban landscape for all of us in the most effective and efficient way, we are investigating the possibility of offering treatment throughout the community in 2008.

Speaking of our friends in the Street Department, the long-awaited backhoe is scheduled to arrive on December 18th. With all the work the employees put into learning about life-cycle costing and preparing their joint recommendation to the Commission, I am expecting this piece of equipment to be met with balloons and trumpets!

3. Year-End in the Assessor's Office

Only three parcels went to the Board of Review for correction at its December 11th meeting. (The local Board of Review will meet again in March which is generally a busier three-day session.)

The Assessing Department has already turned its calendar to 2008. Preparation of the 2008 tax roll is already in progress and pre-planning for 2008 special assessments is underway. Dave Rowley will meet with the Downtown Development Board shortly to discuss the options available to calculate special assessments in downtowns. There are a couple of alternatives that can be used and we expect the DDB to recommend one of those to the staff and the City Commission in time to conduct the calculations that are necessary.

Three other construction projects are planned for 2008 that are budgeted to be done through the special assessment process. In the spring the Commission will review the Assessor's work again as special assessment projects are proposed to construct sidewalk on Broadway Street, an alley behind Franklin and Lansing Streets, and street reconstruction on Williams.

4. Changes in the Ranks

We are welcoming one new employee this month and saying goodbye to one of our most valued employees. Crystal King is the new part-time Administrative Assistant in the City Manager's office. Crystal comes to us from Phoenix with a background in architecture and interior design administration. She will assist in coordinating wedding schedules with the Mayor, managing Channel 26 government cable access, keeping airport leases

current, duplicating City Commission agenda materials, and scheduling both meetings and meeting space.

Tom Nothstine has provided exemplary service in the Engineering Department for 25 years. He has been intimately involved in designing the public infrastructure that the residents of Mt. Pleasant can easily take for granted every day. Tom has a long history of volunteer involvement in the community and may be best known by the hundreds of young men he has mentored through boy scouting. We will miss him as he takes a well-earned retirement on December 28th.

As is our standard practice following personnel changes in a department, we have completed a workload and time study of the Engineering Department. Based on the changes in technology available to us and our expectations for the next few years we are not expecting to replace Mr. Nothstine with a new licensed civil engineer. Instead, we will be reconfiguring responsibilities, amending job descriptions and searching for technical and field inspection expertise in our hiring.

Other temporary job assignments have been made in the last month as well. Nancy Ridley will be serving the Commission from the dais and assuming the record-keeping and publication duties of the City Clerk. Mary Ann Kornexl, City Treasurer, will assume the voter registration and election duties for the January primary and be responsible for the care and training of all election volunteers. Karen Humm, Human Resources Director, will assume responsibilities for managing worker's compensation. Other projects will be re-prioritized or assigned as necessary.

5. In Response to Popular Demand . . . New Ways to Pay

Plans are now in place to accept credit and debit card payments for parks and recreation fees and charges. As Recreation and Sports Director Chris Bundy and City Treasurer Mary Ann Kornexl document in the enclosure, these plans are the result of repeated requests from citizens and extensive discussion among staff.

6. For Your Calendar

The last meeting of the City Commission for 2008 is scheduled for December 17th. If a balanced budget is passed that evening it will remain the last meeting of the year.

December 18 is the last day for citizens to submit their applications for board and commission appointments for the terms beginning in 2008. There are several crucial vacancies that must be filled on boards that execute the vision for the entire community. Applications have been slow in coming to date so it is vital to encourage our friends, neighbors and colleagues to volunteer.

All current and new members of the Commission are invited to join all City employees at our recognition and holiday luncheon from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Public Safety Building on December 19th.

City Offices will be closed to the public on December 24 and 25 as well as January 1, 2008. I will be out of the office for a few days during the week between Christmas and New Year's Day to visit Terry's children and grandchildren in Texas. I am reachable at all times by cell phone, and Jana and Nancy Ridley will be available at City Hall to assist you in my absence.

The first meeting in January is set by Charter for the first Monday of the month at 8:00 p.m. and will occur January 7, 2008. At that meeting two new Commissioners will be sworn in, elections held for your 2008 Mayor and Vice Mayor, and appointments made for commission committees if possible. The meeting schedule for the year will be set at the inaugural meeting as well. For the last many years the Commission has meet each second and fourth Monday of the month. We will be recommending that same schedule be instituted beginning in February. Because of the way Mondays fall this January, meeting on the 7th and 21st is much more conducive to doing business and paying bills than waiting until the 28th for the second meeting of the month.

Orientation of newly-elected Commissioners is set for the afternoon of January 3, 2008. Any and all senior members of the council are welcome to assist in providing information to new colleagues and assisting them in settling into their new roles. Please let Mrs. Ervin know if you expect to attend.

The first full-day retreat of the City Commission and senior administrators is set for February 13, 2008. More details will follow as soon as they are firmed up.

Initial information has been emailed to Commissioners regarding training opportunities offered through the Michigan Municipal League's Elected Officials Academy. These sessions have proven to be very helpful and are highly recommended. Funds have been set aside in the Commission's budget to assist in the training and education of members. Please contact the City Manager's office if you have an interest in joining other elected officials around the state in the Academy. Classes are offered several times in several locations throughout Michigan.

The first state-wide meeting of local elected officials will occur in Lansing on April 2nd. We encourage as many of our Commissioners to attend this informative legislative update session as possible. Please let Jana know as soon as possible if you wish to reserve that date. Last year, we put together an opportunity for Commission members to meet with our state elected officials and carry the City's message about the importance of certain issues. Once the election of Mayor for 2008 takes place, we will review our lobbying strategy and determine the desirability of repeating that effort.

KSG/je

Enclosure

MEMO

TO: Kathie Grinzinger
FROM: Chris Bundy and Mary Ann Kornexl
DATE: December 11, 2007
SUBJECT: Credit/Debit Cards for P&R Services

As you are aware, the Recreation staff regularly receives requests and questions on the issue of accepting credit/debit cards as payment options for shelter rentals and recreation program fees. Because of the many requests, the Parks and Recreation Department has been investigating offering this payment option to our citizens. The Parks and Recreation Commission also supports this endeavor in an effort to increase customer service with the ultimate goal of accepting online registrations in 2009.

Currently the City accepts credit card payments through a third party via an online interface with the City's website. This process assesses a fee directly to the payee for this service. This type of system works best for the Treasurer's office payments but is not conducive to Parks and Recreation transactions which are usually small in nature and change from season to season. Due to the significant amount of fees that would be charged to accept credit cards for all City receipts, we are planning to keep the current system in place for taxes, utility bills, building permits and parking/civil infraction ticket payments and will be using the new process for Parks and Recreation fees and charges only.

Since this summer, the Recreation Department and the Treasurer's office have been working together to create a balanced plan for customer convenience with an eye on budgetary impact. The Treasurer's office has sent out RFP's to credit card service providers and has selected Fifth Third Bank as the credit card service provider. We are planning to begin processing credit card payments of Parks and Recreation fees and charges beginning in January and will be covering the start-up equipment costs and first year processing fees within the existing Parks and Recreation budget at a cost of approximately \$3,000. This first year we will process only in-office swipes of credit/debit cards and evaluate the process for the 2009 budget and incorporate any ongoing cost into planned 2009 fee increases. As I mentioned earlier the overall goal for 2009 is to accept online registrations for parks and recreation programs and facility rentals.

We are confident that these planned steps will provide citizens with the option they have been requesting and increase access and convenience to Parks and Recreation services within the community. If you have any questions on this topic please don't hesitate to ask.

CB&MK/lmw