

# **STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**



**Mayor Robert M. Eschbach**

**October 7, 2010**

**State of the City Address**  
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Again, is it a pleasure to be able to deliver the State of the City address. I thank the Ottawa Area Chamber for hosting this event and thank all of you for attending.

It is always difficult to cover all of the activities occurring in the city. What to talk about. What to leave out. Equally hard is deciding who to mention and thank. We are all in this together and everyone who cares about the city and contributes in any way to make it a better place deserves thanks.

Personally, I would like to thank all the members of the City Council for their dedication to their jobs as Commissioner. Commissioners Whitney and Eichelkraut who I have served with for almost twelve years, Commissioner Baxter who I have worked with for eight years, and Commissioner Aussem who I have worked with the past four years all bring unique skills and viewpoints to the table. Although these viewpoints aren't always the same, we generally can come to a consensus, and in the few cases we can't, we support the final decision of the Council.

I'd like to begin as I usually do by looking back at this past year to see what progress has occurred on the economic development front.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

While growth and economic development in the private sector has come to a standstill in many communities, Ottawa still had a very good year. In the past 12 months we processed over \$47.5 million in new construction permits, compared with about \$28 million in the same time period the year prior.

Some of the larger projects include additional work at **International Titanium Powder**, which is now expected to begin production of titanium powder in the next month or so, and bring over 60 new well-paying jobs to the community.

**Pleasant View Luther Community** has begun a complete renovation of its existing nursing care facility, and the construction of a 44 unit assisted living facility. This new \$12 million project is the first phase of a three phase project which will include up to 16 town home housing units.

Another very major project on the south side which we expect to commence in the next few weeks is the **Ottawa Pavilion** renovation and expansion project. This \$14 million project includes a renovation of the existing annex and the construction of a new building with 129 beds, replacing the older facility dating back to the late 1920's.

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In other new development, **Ottawa Regional Hospital** finished the expansion at its parking deck and additional work at the hospital facility, and now is in the process of a major addition to the recently acquired Ottawa Medical Center on East Norris Drive. That \$3.1 million project will provide upgraded immediate care and state-of-the-art lab services for the community.

Finally, a few months ago Ottawa Regional dedicated its new out-patient mental health facility. This project was made possible in part by a generous donation from the James Downey Endowment. This project is expected to obtain LEED platinum certification for its environmentally friendly and sustainable design and construction - the only such building in LaSalle County. This should surely be a source of pride for Ottawa Regional and the community it serves.

There were many significant developments on the north side of the city this past year, including the completion and soon-to-be opened **Good Will Industries** facility. This \$2.2 million project is expected to employ 40 people and is very green oriented, even providing recycling services for electronic devices.

Also, north of I-80 the **Bill Walsh Automotive Group** has commenced construction of a new 5,300 square foot **KIA** facility, which will reflect the style and architecture that solidified the KIA identity. When that project is complete, **Bill Walsh Ford** will be doing a complete facility renovation of its adjacent Ford and Lincoln facility.

Plans are also underway at the **Bill Walsh Honda** dealership. The footprint of the service department will be retained, but everything else will be brand new, essentially creating a totally new 17,000 square foot building.

In addition, north of I-80 we saw the new Rental Pros building on Dayton Road and the building of a new site for Cofoid Construction.

Also up north, on the south side of I-80 we've had some significant additions to the city, in particular the recently opened **Marriott Fairfield Inn & Suites**, a new 84 room hotel and suites facility which will offer visitors to Ottawa a new level of service and amenities, including a fitness center, pool and conference center.

Next door, **Culver's** recently opened what has turned out to be a very popular restaurant operation.

The **Sunfield Restaurant** opened this past year at the former Country Kitchen site and is now under new ownership. Across the street the long-vacant **Ponderosa Steakhouse** building is

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being redeveloped and it appears as though it will house another soon-to-be-announced restaurant facility.

Also in the same neighborhood, the **LaSalle County Emergency Management** building was completed. This \$1.5 million building houses county emergency management offices, communications and emergency equipment.

It is a joy to welcome **North Central Illinois Council of Governments** to Ottawa. The city works closely with NCICG which assists us with some of our grant applications and administers many of the grants we obtain. North Central is relocating its office and staff of eight from Princeton to a its new home on West Marquette Street. A special welcome to Nora Fesco-Ballerine and Kevin Lindeman from North Central who work diligently with the city on what seems to be an endless number of projects.

While we have seen significant new development at the Route 23/I-80 interchange, one of the most significant economic development challenges still facing the city is finding a productive use for the large vacant former Value City and K-Mart stores. I hope the new development around them will spur some interest. We have been involved with several potential renters or purchasers of those properties, but none of the projects has come to fruition. Sometimes the problem is as basic as the owner and potential buyer not being able to agree on a sale price. We will continue to make a special effort to find uses for these facilities.

### **CENTRAL SCHOOL**

This nearly \$48 million in new construction does not include the new Central Intermediate School being constructed on Ottawa's south side. And that is a project and story that I believe Ottawans can be very proud of. The story began with the flooding of Central School in September of 2008.

From almost the very first day the City partnered with the Ottawa Elementary district in helping to address various issues posed by FEMA, beginning with whether or not the Central School site was even in the flood plain. Then FEMA proposed flood compensation to the school district in the amount of \$1.2 million. At that point the City partnered with the school district in hiring the consulting firm of James Lee Witt and Associates of Washington, DC to help navigate the FEMA

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regulations, which eventually resulted in a FEMA award of \$10.5 million towards this project. That joint \$60,000 expenditure resulted in a great return on investment.

I would like to recognize the city staff who worked so diligently on the flood plain and FEMA issues, in particular Dave Noble, Reed Wilson and Mike Sutfin. Without them, I don't believe we would be in the position we are today.

This whole effort involved many partnerships and many groups working together, including not only the school board, administrators, and the City Council, but Senator Durbin's office, Representative Frank Mautino, Senator Gary Dahl, Congresswoman Debbie Halverson, the incredible campaign team that helped pass a referendum that provided the framework for all of this to happen. Particularly to be congratulated are the people of Ottawa who, despite the naysayers, placed their children first, and trusted their elected officials to do their best. And, indeed, with the determined effort of Representative Mautino, the State of Illinois came through with a \$15.5 million commitment from the Capital Development Fund. The result will be a brand new state-of-the-art school - high and dry - at almost no cost to local taxpayers. Congratulations to you all. This really is an incredible example of "we the people" working together to make government work.

## **GRANTS**

I'm going to talk a little about major city infrastructure projects, but I think it's important to understand how our aggressive approach to soliciting grants makes much of this possible.

## **Stimulus Funding**

The City leverages its own funds to best effect by aggressively soliciting grant monies whether they require a local match or not. This past year the City was able to take significant advantage of the federal stimulus programs designed to put people back to work. Under the American Relief and Recovery Act (ARRA), for example, the city received \$570,000 for street resurfacing.

Ottawa also received about \$7.35 million in 0% loans for the continued rebuild of our wastewater treatment plant. Of that amount, about \$1.8 million was forgiven, in essence an outright grant to the city. Because the remaining stimulus loan is interest free, the city will save over \$1.5 million in bond payments over the next 20 years. Interestingly, this project was delayed because of

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the slow response we were getting from the IEPA in approving our original request for 3% loan funds. However, good things sometimes come to those who wait (or are forced to wait), and we ended up with a much better result at a total savings to local taxpayers of \$3.3 million.

Another economic stimulus project program the city took advantage of involved Recovery Zone Bonds. With the cooperation of LaSalle County, the city was able to utilize \$2.5 million of those bonds allotted to this area to extend water and sewer throughout the Heritage Harbor project to its eastern edge. This will allow for full development of the project and also provide water and sewer to the Ottawa Industrial Park for future development. Under the program, 45% of the interest on the bonds is repaid to the city. Heritage Harbor Ottawa and the city agreed to split the cost of the bond payments, with Heritage Harbor conveying the entire Jordan Block to the city in compensation for the city's involvement.

Incidentally, almost all of the contractors and sub-contractors for these major projects were local, and I truly believe that Ottawa provides an example of where the stimulus funding worked.

### **Brownfield Grants**

Aside from the economic stimulus program, we continued to make use of other grant programs, including a \$350,000 USEPA Brownfield Assessment grant. These are funds that have already been allotted to the city that we are able to use for projects to identify and clean up environmentally contaminated areas and put them back into production and on the tax rolls. These brownfield funds have been used for projects at the IVCC Ottawa Center, the Jordan Block, Lincoln Place Parking lot, and the Rich Gaul property which will become a neighborhood park. We expect to do more work in the west Marquette Street corridor and the Advanced Asphalt property, and we are applying for a clean up grant for the former Jimmy John's property.

### **Other Grants**

Another grant funded project you may have noticed is the sidewalk work recently completed around local schools. That is a direct result of a Safe Routes to Schools grant, a 100% grant worth \$440,000 which allowed us to install about 4,600 lineal feet of new sidewalks and install 29 new sidewalk ramps near all of our elementary schools.

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Two IDOT grants we received include almost \$250,000 for the East Dayton Road widening project, necessitated by the development of Clover Technologies and the new Kohl's Distribution Center. The other is a \$338,000 IDOT Transportation Enhancement Grant to plant trees along the entryways and gateways to the city. That project is being engineered now and we hope to plant those trees in the spring.

The city also received \$75,000 from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation in connection with the LEEDS element to the IVCC satellite campus.

We also received a \$56,000 grant to hire Peoples Economic Development Corporation to work with downtown property owners which I will talk about later. We also received a \$12,000 grant to complete an eastside historic building survey, handled by our city's Historic Preservation Commission.

Finally, I am happy to announce that the city just received notice of a \$350,000 CDAP grant to build a new watermain on Center Street, from State Street east to the U.A.W. complex. This will provide additional water pressure and fire protection for that entire section of the city, and will enable Ottawa Pavilion to have the fire protection needed for its new facility.

### **Pending Grant Applications**

All of the above grants are either approved or have been received. At the same time, we have about a dozen grant applications pending, including \$2.5 million in Illinois Transportation Enhancement Grants (ITEP) for projects including downtown Ottawa streetscaping on the side streets, the rewatering of a portion of the I & M Canal, a pedestrian bridge over the canal at Heritage Harbor and a bike/pedestrian trail near Peck Park, safely linking McKinley School to Adams Street.

We also have pending a \$600,000 USEPA grant for brownfield assessment and clean ups, over \$100,000 in grants in connection with the IVCC project, and nearly \$900,000 in applications for funding from IEMA and DCEO to allow us to finish buying out flood-prone properties in Fox River Park, the area commonly known as the flats.

### **LASALLE COUNTY BROADBAND**

Perhaps the most exciting and potentially the most far-reaching project for our region is the LaSalle County Broadband Initiative or LCBI. While the City of Ottawa initiated this effort, we are

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pleased to be part of a LCBI coalition which now includes the North Central Illinois Council of Governments, LaSalle County and Northern Illinois University.

The LCBI is a public and private partnership which involves the laying of 190 miles of fiber optic broadband infrastructure across LaSalle County. This network will provide unrestricted, high speed broadband access to the schools, libraries, cities, villages, hospitals and emergency services of LaSalle County along with direct connectivity not only to each other but also to Illinois Valley Community College, Northern Illinois University and the world.

The LCBI also has a strong private sector component which will result in businesses and private residences having the opportunity to access high speed broadband at competitive prices. This access will result from local internet service providers which will be able to purchase bandwidth at wholesale prices from a number of different and very competitive vendors in order to serve the needs of their business and residential customers. It is the hope of the LCBI coalition that local entrepreneurs will start new internet service businesses to take advantage of this opportunity – thus creating new LaSalle County jobs.

We received great news just a few weeks ago when the National Telecommunications and Information Administration announced the LaSalle County Broadband Initiative would be funded with \$19 million worth of federal and state grants.

I would particularly like to thank the North Central Illinois Council of Governments and Northern Illinois University for their invaluable partnership in writing and filing the grant application along with LaSalle County for its strong financial support. We also received important cash pledges from Clover Technology, International Titanium Powder, Seattle Sutton Healthy Eating, the cities of Mendota and Marseilles, the village of Grand Ridge, Seneca High School, the LaSalle County Development Connection, the LaSalle County Farm Bureau, the Illinois Valley Contractors Association, the Illinois Valley Construction Industry Labor Management Program and the Illinois Valley Building Trades Council along with valuable in-kind support from the cities of Peru and Oglesby. I think these pledges show the importance of this project to local businesses, and they helped the LCBI to exceed the local non-federal match requirements and made its grant application more competitive.

There will be a great deal more information available about this exciting project during the months to come.

**CITY SERVICES**

**Fire Department**

The 30 employees of the Ottawa Fire Department responded to 2,500 medical calls per year and approximately 450 fire calls, members of the Department train both in the field as well as the classroom to enhance their skills and capabilities, each logging over 240 training hours annually.

All fire fighters are also emergency medical technicians. These EMT's are licensed by the State and maintain their training through Ottawa Regional Hospital and Healthcare Center. The Fire Department currently has 2 paramedics with another individual in paramedic school. The goal of the department is to upgrade all of the EMT's to paramedic level to further serve the community.

Ottawa Fire Department has been proactive in training its members to respond to County or Statewide emergencies as members of MABAS (Mutual Aid Box Alarm System). Three members serve on the Hazardous Materials Response Team and six members serve on the Technical Rescue Team.

The Fire Department participates in Fire Prevention and Education activities in the community which includes visits to the school and clubs. The OFD Public Education Programs extend beyond school age children and reach out to all members of the community. Fire and fall prevention programs for the elderly are offered at local assisted living facilities. Local businesses have capitalized on fire extinguisher and evacuation drill training.

The OFD makes regular appearances at local safety fairs and community events like Scarecrow fest, making contact with hundreds of children at each event. The Department is one of the few fire departments in the area to offer an Office of the State Fire Marshal Junior Fire Setters Program. This enables the department to address children who have been involved in behavior that not only endangers the child but our community as a whole.

This year the department took possession of a new fire truck. This unit was manufactured in Appleton, Wisconsin by Pierce Manufacturing, and is a 1500 gpm pumper with generator, light plant and all required equipment that is compliant with national standards. The new truck cost approximately \$400,000 and is in service at the South Station.

The department has also took delivery of 26 new air-packs. This purchase was approximately \$120,000, made possible through an AFG grant from FEMA funds. This will upgrade the air system to new technology.

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This year Bill Walters, a 25 year veteran of the department, retired. Chief Jim Duback will be ending a 26 year career when he retires next week. Jim's dedication and sharp wit will be long remembered and we thank him for his years of dedicated service and wish him the best. Deputy Chief Jeff Newbury will move up to the Chief's position as Jim steps down. I just learned that Jeff will be honored next week by the Office of the State Fire Marshall for successfully completing Fire Officer III certification, the highest level of certification awarded by that office. Congratulations Jeff.

**Ottawa Police Department**

Although little has changed during the past year in the general composition of the Ottawa Police Department, it has continued to adopt newer technologies, practices and tactics, all of which are intended to create a more professional, progressive and forward thinking police department

The result has been a number of services being offered that are far beyond what one might consider normal law enforcement services such as patrol and investigations. These include success-proven services and programs such as the Juvenile Peer Jury program, School Resource Officers, the Child Abduction Response Team, the Elderly Service Officers, the Emergency Response Team, and child safety seat installation and inspection services, to name a few.

In 2009 the Ottawa Police Department's sworn personnel stayed very busy, responding to more than 18,000 calls for service while the department's telecommunicators answered more than 113,000 telephone calls, nearly 12,000 of which were 911 calls.

Another notable accomplishment of the Department has been the successful start of the Ottawa Police Department's Citizen Police Academy.

Following more than two years of planning, the Department held its first Citizen Police Academy this past spring. The Academy is a program intended to establish and build upon the relationships between police and the citizens they serve by providing education about all aspects of the police department and the jobs performed by its personnel.

The program is held one night a week for 12 weeks and delves deep into patrol, investigations, 911 telecommunications, K-9 handling, evidence, narcotics, police records, and tactical "SWAT" response, a few of the many functions of the department covered, and the laws affecting these functions.

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Officer Brenden Donahue, an officer heavily involved in the education of our children through the DARE and GREAT programs, facilitates the academy.

More than 20 people attended and graduated from the first Academy and all gave high reviews of the program as well as strong recommendations to others who might consider participating in the future. Because of this success, a second Academy started last month and is currently in progress. Anyone wishing to attend future Citizen Police Academies should contact Chief Zeilmann or Officer Donahue.

It's no secret that tough economic times often bring with them sharp increases in crime. The Ottawa Police Department braced for the worst as the economy spiraled. Thankfully, the relationship between the economy and crime has seemed nonexistent in Ottawa.

In 2008, Ottawa's crime rate, as recorded through the Illinois State Police Uniform Crime Reporting statistics, dropped by more than 20 percent to a low never seen in any of the statistics currently available to the department. 2009 saw only a one-half percent increase from 2008, resulting in the second lowest crime rate seen in these statistics. And I'm happy to report that current trends for 2010 seem to be following the previous two years' low levels.

Logic would suggest that a lack of law enforcement in society would surely result in runaway crime. The same logic would also suggest that these all-time-low crime rates are a direct result of having a force of proactive, well trained police officers making Ottawa a safer place to live, work and raise a family.

Although crimes rates and arrests have shown drops in the most recent statistical data, drug related arrests made specifically by Ottawa Police Narcotics Detectives have shown a 58 percent increase.

This statistic in comparison to the other crime statistics suggest that times are not getting worse, but enhanced enforcement in this area is paying off.

Every year, during National Police Week, the Chief of Police recognizes one of his officers by presenting the Officer of the Year . This officer is selected by his supervisors and peers alike as having an outstanding work ethic and dedication to the preservation of the well-being and safety of the City of Ottawa and its citizens. This year the award went to narcotics officer Marc Hoster.

In 2009 the Ottawa Police Department joined the ranks of many pharmacies, hospitals and police departments across the nation by becoming a prescription pill and drug drop-off location as

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part of the Prescription Pill and Drug Disposal program, known as P2D2. The Ottawa Police Department was the first to establish a P2D2 drop-box in LaSalle County.

The mission of the program is to provide communities with a proper method of pharmaceutical disposal that effectively reduces the effect on the environment.

To date, the Ottawa Police Department has collected over 800 pounds of prescription medications, both controlled and non-controlled. That is 800 pounds of medication that was kept out of landfills, waterways or drinking water through improper disposal.

**Parks, Playground and Recreation**

In 2009-10, the City's Playground and Recreation Board took on new responsibility, forged ahead on existing projects, and looked into the future at the recreational needs of the City of Ottawa.

For the first time, the Ottawa Recreation board took on the responsibility of overseeing Riordan Pool. The board immediately commissioned a study of the facility to begin to plan the pool's future. It is the board's intent that Riordan Pool remain a vibrant recreational resource in the City of Ottawa.

The board also took another step toward completing the long-term improvement plans for Lincoln-Douglas Park. New playground equipment and new sidewalks were installed on the West end of the park. Utica Drive was closed and a family friendly area with a shelter, walkway, and attractive landscaping were installed at the east end of the park between Masinelli and the American Little League diamonds. New parking was also created on the East end of park. The area east of Masinelli field will soon see construction of a second high-school sized baseball field and a soccer field, and construction has already begun on new shelters and new landscaping between the adult softball fields. And soon, work will begin on new tennis courts at the south end of the park (FEMA). All of these improvements, together with the pool, make Lincoln Douglas park a destination where a family can spend an entire afternoon and evening.

The Playground and Recreation Board also oversaw a typically active program of quality recreation offerings. Winter recreation opportunities included the senior tea dance, adult men's basketball league, and winter recreation activities at Marquette Academy. This last summer, over forty-two programs were available to children and adults. Over the last year, more than 3,500 children and adults, more than ever before, participated in the popular and affordable Recreation

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Board programs, including Ottawa's unique park programs. Recreation summer and fall adult softball gave 1,800 men and women players the opportunity to compete in the largest recreational softball league in the area. These programs make Ottawa unique among cities in the Illinois Valley.

The Playground and Recreation Board is looking to create recreational opportunities for underserved areas and populations. They are planning bicycle trails and routes around and within the city, and are moving ahead to develop a new park on northwest side of the city. The Playground and Recreation Board intends to insure that quality recreational facilities and programs remain a part of our community.

### **CITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

The city remains committed to maintaining and improving its infrastructure. Much of this infrastructure, particularly in water and wastewater, are underground and not seen by the general public. This year, however, major above-ground projects advanced in both these areas.

#### **Wastewater Treatment Plant**

The city's wastewater treatment plant project continued this year with phase II of the project. The total project cost of \$9.2 million, including engineering, is funded largely through the ARRA stimulus grant .

The project includes a new sludge dewatering and handling facilities, expansion of the grit removal system, a new final settling tank and an increase effluent pumping system.

Also the project provides for improvements to the excess flow storage and treatment ponds, and modifications to the pumping system to allow the use of treated wastewater for nonpotable uses.

We are also replacing a 55 year old electrical, aeration and flow control system that was well past its useful life and without replacement parts available.

A new control building will provide improved lab facilities, and add a central remote control system for the plant and all remote sewage pumping stations. Also included is a new electric generator for power back-up in the event of emergencies.

A second major project completed this year was the rebuilding of the city lift station near the YMCA. The lift station was raised out of the floodplain and has an all new electrical system with a

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wireless link to the wastewater treatment plant. This sewage pumping station is our second most critical station, handling all wastewater from north of I-80 and the Etna Road and Champlain Street areas. The total cost of that project was \$670,000 and was funded by the wastewater department budget.

Three new pumps replaced all of the old pumps, two of which long ago failed. One pump is coupled with a natural gas engine for operational continuity in case of power failure.

The new flood protection wall around this building should eliminate the type of flooding that occurred in 2009 when all of the pumps, motors and electrical systems were under water.

### **Water**

Water Department Projects this past year include the rehab of the well house north of Lincoln Douglas Park. This building was built in 1973 and needed tuckpointing, new windows, doors and roofing.

In April the North standpipe was drained, cleaned and painted inside and out for first time in twenty years.

The city partnered with Heritage Harbor of Ottawa to extend a water main to the east end of their property which prepares the city to bore under the I&M Canal to connect to the Ottawa Industrial Park eventually boosting the water supply.

The Chapel Street water main replacement is about 50% complete at this time. The large diameter watermain will replace an 80 plus year old main and will increase water capacity for development to the east. Lead water service lines are being replaced with copper to increase flow and help eliminate leaks.

Construction on the west side elevated water storage tank will start in November with the underground piping and foundation. Steel construction will begin in the spring. This one-half million gallon tower will increase the above ground storage for the City and improve fire flows for the West Side.

The water department has been busy this year. Along with normal duties, water employees assisted in the street project on 800 LaSalle St., tree planting and the installation of watering hydrants for the Girl Softball Diamond at Peck Park.

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Future projects we are looking at include painting of the south standpipe on State Street, and the rehabilitation of the north booster pump station located at the north standpipe on Meadow Lane.

**Streets**

The City had a very aggressive street improvement program this summer. Included was the complete reconstruction of West McKinley Road from Adams Street to Peck Drive. A total of 2,000 feet, or four blocks, of an open ditch road was replaced with storm sewers, new curbs, paving and sidewalk.

Similarly, we are completing the concrete pavement widening of East Dayton Road, which also is about a four block long project.

In addition, almost 60 blocks of city streets were resurfaced, and brick restoration work was done on two blocks, all totaling over 29,100 feet, or about 5 1/2 miles of roadway.

**Floodplain Management**

For the past two years the city has been working with Homeland Security's Insurance Service Office to be accepted into the Community Rating Service (CRS) for floodplain management. It is now official, the City of Ottawa has been formally accepted into the CRS and our rating is a Class 5. Only four other communities in the State have reached this classification, and Ottawa has the highest accumulation of points of any city in the State of Illinois. Dave Noble and Mike Sutfin are both now certified flood plain managers, and administer our floodplain ordinance as required to allow citizens to qualify for flood insurance. In a nutshell, all of this translates to a 25% premium discount to every citizen of Ottawa that has flood insurance. As we continue our efforts to better manage our floodplain we hope to expand on this success and gain further discounts of up to 45% for our citizens.

This year the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced a significant change in the floodplain maps. An aggressive and proactive approach by our Community Development Department has greatly improved our information data base regarding the floodplain. Errors that were discovered in the FEMA maps have been corrected and will be reflected on the new maps. Although this sounds relatively simple, it was a monumental task that required hundreds of hours of work, dozens of public meetings and special meetings with owners of floodplain

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properties. I commend the citizens of the community for embracing and supporting this effort. Many neighbors along the rivers actively banded together to hire surveyors to obtain elevation certificates and maps, which were then shared with the city. Without their cooperation we would still have substandard information and inaccurate maps.

The City of Ottawa's Flood Commission will soon report to the City Council with a new upgraded Flood Warning and Response Plan. The Commission has worked very hard for the last year in developing this plan. We are far better prepared for a flood event that we ever have been in the past.

One related concern has been protecting the wastewater treatment plant from river flooding. We are planning to construct a flood protection wall around the plant and are in the process of getting the permits at this time.

### **IVCC OTTAWA CENTER**

Ottawa, Illinois – A College Town – doesn't that sound great?

After nearly 18 months of effort, the Illinois Valley Community College Ottawa Center opened for business on August 18. The College is housed in the former Ottawa Post Office and Centru Banking Operations Center on West Main Street. The building was purchased by the City of Ottawa, renovated to meet the educational needs of IVCC and then leased back to the college with a five year agreement. The purchase and renovation by Vissering Construction were paid for by the City's Enterprise Fund – an account created for the purpose of economic development by setting aside fees paid by the new wind farms in the southeastern part of LaSalle County in exchange for access to the Ottawa Enterprise Zone.

The IVCC Ottawa Center will provide many more Ottawa and eastern LaSalle County residents with the opportunity to further their educations and thus improve their chances of success in life. Its downtown location will also assist the efforts of the City to promote economic development in downtown Ottawa.

I want to thank and congratulate IVCC President Jerry Corcoran and the IVCC Board of Trustees for their vision and concern for the students of the entire IVCC district. With us today are President Corcoran and Trustee Mike Driscoll.

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I also want to thank the Ottawa City Council for supporting this project during tough economic times and helping to launch what will be a partnership with IVCC which will grow in value to the City of Ottawa and its citizens with each passing year.

Just as a quick example of the potential of the IVCC Ottawa Center, the City of Ottawa was proud to host last spring President John Peters of Northern Illinois University. While visiting Ottawa, President Peters announced a new IVCC/NIU partnership which will provide IVCC nursing students with the opportunity to earn bachelor degrees in nursing from NIU – with much of the coursework done at the IVCC Ottawa Center. We hope the new NIU presence at IVCC and in Ottawa will only grow over the years.

Incidentally, the IVCC Ottawa Center building reconstruction was overseen by building official Mike Sutfin who became the eyes and ears of the City making sure that costs were kept down while the quality was still put into the project. The designs of the parking lot, landscaping and coordinating with adjacent building owners involved almost all of the Community Development staff. Bill Boettcher became the City's "site superintendent" coordinating the contractors and city workers to get the job done on time and saving money.

## **DOWNTOWN OTTAWA**

The heart and soul of every city is its downtown. A city with an unattractive and declining downtown area will find it more difficult to attract new investment, new growth and new jobs. On the other hand, a city with a good-looking and vigorous downtown provides visitors and potential investors with a positive perspective of the city and makes them confident about the future of the city.

With this in mind, during the past year, the City of Ottawa has made improving its downtown a priority. I believe this effort is beginning to pay off and would like to highlight some of these efforts.

Early last year, the City Council reviewed and approved the recommendation made by Roger Brooks and his Destination Development, Inc. organization in 2008 to make Gardening and the Botanical Arts the official Brand for Downtown Ottawa. The purpose of the Brand is to encourage over time the economic development of the downtown by attracting more businesses and shoppers.

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An early step in this process is working to make the Downtown more attractive to shoppers and visitors by beautifying it with plant beds, flowers and trees. While many of these plants and trees have been concentrated in the 700 and 800 blocks of LaSalle Street, the beautification efforts have spread throughout the downtown – to the Courthouse square, the parking areas, the Jordan block, city street corners and more. Many of the downtown businesses – encouraged by the work of President DeWayne Cronkright and the newly energized Ottawa Downtown Business Association – have added very attractive planters to their storefronts.

Our Community Development department oversaw the landscaping of the 700 and 800 blocks which included Arnie Bandstra designing the hard-scape and getting IDOT permits, Tami Huftel planning and coordinating landscaping and Bill Boettcher directing all construction activities along with Mike Sutfin providing advice on building issues. This along with assistance during construction from public works employees resulted in significant savings for the City.

Credit for this effort also goes to a number of wonderful volunteers. These include the Master Gardeners and members of the Ottawa Garden Club who take care of the 700 and 800 block streetscapes. Can you believe that a volunteer gardener has stepped forward to maintain every single plant and tree bed in these two blocks? They take care of these beds as if they were in their own back yards.

Alan Howarter and the crew of community service youth under his charge are responsible for the beautiful flowers around the Courthouse, the Jordan block, the south parking areas, the River Walk and more – in fact, I am having trouble keeping up with them.

For years, Anna Mattes and her volunteer crew have been responsible for the great and growing beauty of Washington Park – one of the truly special places in Ottawa.

Across from the Park, the grounds of the Reddick Mansion provide an especially beautiful setting for this historic crown jewel of Ottawa. This beauty is largely due to the skill and hard work of Twila Yednock.

Finally, the tragic loss by fire of one of Ottawa's prominent downtown historic buildings was greatly eased by the development by Mike Godfrey of the Broomhill Gardens on the site of the destroyed Green Mill Restaurant. Thanks to Mike and his family for their commitment to making downtown Ottawa a beautiful place to visit.

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And, you know what, it seems to be working! I have received more compliments this year about the appearance of the downtown than about anything else during my years as Mayor. And many of the downtown merchants have told me the visitors and pedestrian traffic seem to have increased – good news in the light of overall economic conditions.

Our efforts will continue next year with the streetscaping of the 600 block already being planned. We will also be announcing a number of special downtown events for next year which we believe will attract even more visitors and shoppers.

Downtown Ottawa also has a wealth of wonderful historic architecture. We believe this asset, when combined with beautiful plants and flowers will produce the kind of ambiance attractive to many potential downtown Ottawa visitors.

Given this belief, another major Downtown improvement effort was the launching of an aggressive historic restoration effort through the partnership of the City with the Peoples Economic Development Corporation or the PEDC. This is a relatively young business headquartered in Springfield which focuses on using historic restoration as an important economic development tool.

In addition to providing a number of direct restoration services, the PEDC is in the process of developing the extensive application needed to win designation by the U.S. Department of the Interior of Downtown Ottawa as a Historic Commercial District. In addition to the national recognition, the designation makes owners of historic downtown buildings eligible for federal income tax credits to be applied against the cost of restoration of their buildings. The PEDC consultants believe Ottawa has a very strong chance of winning this valuable federal designation.

The two year contract of the City with the PEDC was made possible by a grant which covers 75 percent of the cost of the contract.

Let me pause at this point and make it clear the federal status will have absolutely no impact upon the ability of owners to control the use of their property. Only if a building owner should decide to seek the restoration tax credits will federal regulations come into play in the form of an approved restoration plan.

The combination of the PEDC assistance and several existing City of Ottawa programs, including TIF benefits and our facade improvement program, has allowed us to put together an attractive package of incentives designed to both encourage existing owners of downtown historic

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buildings to restore the facades of their buildings and also to attract investors to purchase historic buildings and then be used for commercial purposes.

This effort seems to be working as we have seen during the past two months a definite increase in the interest of potential investors in historic buildings available for sale in downtown Ottawa.

Within just the past two weeks, several downtown buildings have been sold and will house new businesses, and several more are being seriously considered for purchase.

Of course, the poster child for this program is the historic building at the corner of Madison and Clinton being restored by David Rabideau. Not only will this be a beautiful example of restoration, it demonstrates the commercial value of restoration as the space in the building has been leased to new tenants almost as quickly as it has become available. A doctors office, beauty salon and new tapas-inspired restaurant occupy the first floor. Apartments closed off for 45 years once again serve downtown residents. Thanks to Dave for his commitment to downtown Ottawa.

## **SPECIAL EVENTS AND TOURISM**

### **Programming**

The Special Events Committee continues to support some of our community's favorite annual events including; Cruise Night, the Music in the Park series, the Founders Day Picnic and Scarecrow Festival. New events they helped sponsor this past year were the Green Fete Festival in June and the Downtown Merchants Ice Odyssey last December.

This year for the first time, the Committee is taking on the task of organizing the annual Festival of Lights parade. With the retirement of Don and Betty Gillette of Gillette Parade Products earlier this year, this committee is committed to keep alive Betty Gillette's vision of having a parade "for the kids" with entries being only non-commercial and non-political. Admittedly our holiday parades over the last twenty years have been beyond compare and will not be able to be duplicated, but the committee invites members of the community to step forward to offer entries and their support in keeping this annual tradition alive.

The "Music In The Park" summer series again offered a total of 7 Saturday nights of live musical performances at Washington Square. Due to the extremely hot weather, the groups playing in August set up inside the park rather than on Jackson Street. The bands and the

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audiences all seemed to enjoy the “new” venue and have suggested it be a permanent move. Anyone interested in offering names of groups to perform in the 2011 series, or having ideas for events is encouraged to drop a note to the Committee’s attention at City Hall.

**Ottawa Visitors Center**

The Ottawa Visitors Center has moved toward promoting events rather than putting them on. It was realized that the change of focus would allow a greater impact and allow the Visitors Center to assist more groups in doing what they do best. From Scarecrow Fest to body building to Jeepsters, the Visitors Center promotes a wide variety of activities and groups.

Also implemented this year was the rotating billboard campaign. By committing to a two year contract, tourism dollars now provide some anchor events with something they could never previously afford, a billboard in the suburbs. Every thirty days a new image goes up promoting Ottawa and its events at no cost to the event planners - another example of how tourism dollars are used to provide assistance to local groups while encouraging visitors to the city.

**Radium Girls Memorial Campaign**

The story of the Ottawa radium girls is one of the most tragic in the history of our city – yet it is a story which needs to be told. It is the story of many young Ottawa women unknowingly exposed, largely during the Depression years, to the deadly effect of radiation while painting the dials of luminous clock faces with pure radium. This exposure resulted in many of these women suffering horrendous and oftentimes deadly health problems.

Yet, the efforts of some of the victimized young women to publicize their plight and seek appropriate compensation gave rise to the passage by Congress of legal protections such as the creation of OSHA which now protect the on the job safety of American workers.

The City of Ottawa in partnership with the Ottawa Visitor Center, Illinois Valley Community College, Laborers Local 393, Willeyworld Community Productions and Ms. Madeline Piller of Mendota and her family, has launched a campaign to ensure the Radium Girls story is told through the creation of a memorial on the site of the former Luminous Processing plant at the corner of Clinton and Jefferson Streets in Ottawa – a site now owned by the City.

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The site will be beautifully landscaped and will feature a life-sized original bronze statue of one of the Radium Girls along with the appropriate interpretation telling their story.

To accomplish this goal the City and its partners are working to raise \$40,000 in private sector contributions. Contributions may be made to the City of Ottawa

Two major fundraising events have been scheduled. The first will be a fish fry sponsored on the evening of Friday, October 29 at the Ottawa K of C Hall sponsored by David Raikes and Laborers Local 393 in Marseilles. Thanks to David for helping to put together the strong support of organized labor for this campaign.

The second event will be three performances on December 3,4 and 5 at the Ottawa Township High School auditorium of "These Shining Lives" a theatrical production which tells the moving story of the lives of four Radium Dial workers from Ottawa. This production – including the set and performers -- is coming to Ottawa straight from the Rivendell Theater in Chicago where its performances last year received strong reviews from the Chicago media. Tickets are available through the Ottawa Visitor Center.

If you have a place to display a theatrical poster advertising "These Shining Lives", please pick up one on your way out. I encourage everyone to honor the memory of these young Ottawa women.

**Allen Park Sculptures**

One other art related project pending involves the weathered, steel sculptures in Allen Park. These sculptures were fashioned from pieces of the old Hilliard Bridge by the late local artist Mary Fanning. The sculptures were intended to represent a man and a woman lounging on the hillside. Over the years one of the sculptures was relocated, maybe like many couples they became estranged.

In any case, a group of citizens has banded together with the goal of restoring and relocating the sculptures to the near original positions. Peg Breslin has agreed to head a steering committee to accomplish that task.

After the sculptures are repainted and repositioned, the goal is to provide appropriate interpretation, documenting their meaning and significance, and commemorating the legacy of Mary Fanning.

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**FINANCES**

The city's total budget this year was about \$50 million. The general corporate budget, which basically is the fund that runs the city, with the exception of the water and wastewater departments, was \$15 million. Almost one third of that revenue comes in sales taxes. As of today, we appear to be on target with our sales tax projections, as well as our other revenue sources.

Last year at this time I told you how the City Council had asked city employees to agree to a pay freeze. That did not happen. The city was in negotiation with all three of our unions, including two that have binding arbitration. However, the end result of raises in the 2% to 3% range were generally reasonable as collective bargaining negotiations go. Wages were frozen for City appointed staff one year, and adjusted the second year at rates comparable to unionized employees.

City has realized some significant cost savings recently. We project that we may save about \$100,000 on electricity next year through an agreement to purchase power with First Energy.

Continuing on the theme of energy savings, the Smart Energy Design Assistance Center of the University of Illinois has just completed a free energy conservation review of the City Hall building, the Police and Fire Station and the Reddick Mansion. When these energy conservation recommendations are received in the near future, the City will aggressively seek grants to implement them.

In another cost-saver measure, the Council also has not reappointed a Deputy Fire Chief following the upcoming retirement of Chief Duback. Similarly, we continue to operate the public works department with one less administrative position than in the past.

Two economic challenges we continue to be concerned about are funding of our employee pension plans and healthcare costs. To date the city has been able to fund the various pensions at the amounts recommended by actuarial calculations.

With respect to health care costs, this year the city was very lucky. Second only to salaries, healthcare for our employees and retirees is the most costly city expenditure. The City has administered a self-insured health plan for many years. Due to continued high claims, for several years the cost to provide this benefit increased drastically.

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In September, 2009 the City contracted with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois to administer the health plan and process claims, which allows access to the Blue Cross Blue Shield PPO plan. Even though Blue Cross Blue Shield will process claims, the City remains self-insured. While this change did increase the administrative costs of the health plan, utilization of the Blue Cross Blue Shield PPO discounts has provided better than expected savings to the overall cost of the health plan. For the 2008/2009 health plan year, net medical and prescription claims totaled \$2.4 million. For the 2009/2010 plan year, that total was \$1.9 million, a decrease of \$500,000.

In 2009 the city also took a major step in offering a Medicare Advantage program for our Medicare-eligible retirees. The retirees ended up with identical coverage at no personal cost to them.

Moving a large number of retirees from our pool, together with this decreased claim cost, appealed to several stop loss carriers, as for the first time in several years there was more than one carrier that was vying for the city's business.

While the numbers are not quite finalized, it is anticipated that the employees and City will see a DECREASE of about 8% in the monthly premiums.

By far the greatest financial concern is the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) problem the city faces.

You may have heard about CSO's in Ottawa. About one-third of the City has storm water and sanitary waste water flowing in the same pipes. This was "state-of-the-art" over 100 years ago when they were built. Most of time, this combined flow is directed to the sanitary system and is pumped to the treatment plant. However, during heavy rain falls, the pipes and pumps to the plant can't keep up and excess combined flow overflows to the rivers. These are "Combined Sewer Overflows" or CSO's.

US EPA has mandated that combined overflows to the rivers be severely cut back to help protect the quality of water in the rivers. We are about to finish a long term control plan, which is a study that tells EPA what we are going to do to fix the problem. Once this plan is submitted and approved by IEPA, we will have no choice but to follow the plan and build all the required improvements on a time schedule also approved by EPA. This "enforceable plan" is expected to require the City to spend between 15 and 26 million dollars over the next 10 or 15 years to bring us into compliance. We are studying and trying to find the least expensive and most effective way to

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do this. This is what some would call an unfunded mandate, and the City of Ottawa will have to absorb the cost. We will have no choice but to create new fees or taxes to pay the mandated costs. The Council is considering a surcharge to city sewer bills, maybe at about \$4.00 per month. This isn't minor, but even with the surcharge city sewer rates would still be among the lowest in the county.

Tonight at 7:00 in City Hall is a public hearing where the plan with all the options will be presented for public input. I would challenge anyone who is interested or concerned to attend.

**CONCLUSION**

Well, I'm about to conclude, and here I am talking about increased fees, clearly not following the rule that a speech should end on a high note. Let me just add that even though these are tough times I believe the city is doing well, probably better than most. I further believe that the strong City-Chamber partnership has played a role in our success. I also attribute much of our success to the sharp, bright, hard-working city employees that I have the pleasure of working with. And finally, so much of what has been accomplished could only have been achieved with the cooperation of an involved and engaged citizenry, many of whom are sitting in this room. And, as I said earlier, we are all in this together.