

# **STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**



**Mayor Robert M. Eschbach**

**November 10, 2016**

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**Introduction**

I'd like to thank the Chamber for once again hosting this annual State of the City address. While much of what happens in our beautiful city is very visible, there are many very important happenings that are not quite so obvious. This event provides me not only the opportunity fulfill my legal duty to annually report the State of the City to the Council, but also allows me to share that information with all of you.

I'm not going to read all that's been written. You can go online or get a hard copy if you want some of the detail I may be leaving out in this presentation.

Before I go further, I do want to recognize the Ottawa Area Chamber on achieving 100 years of service to our community and in particular it's Executive Director Boyd Palmer, Assistant Executive Director Meg Skelly and Office Coordinator Kristal Ragan – and its Board of Directors which is more diverse and inclusive than at any time in its history.

**CITY OF OTTAWA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS**

**Overview of Business Community Economic Progress**

The major industrial project in Ottawa has the building of **Pilkington's replacement batch plant**. It is 155 feet tall and required a continuous pour of cement for 8 days, including being evacuated seven times due to lightning dangers. By the end of September, the project had consumed 72,262 man hours of work. This \$25 million investment signals the company's long-term commitment to be a continued presence in Ottawa.

Pilkington has a work force of 180 full time employees after hiring 19 hourly and three professionals during 2016.

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2016 was a key year for **OSF St. Elizabeth Medical Center** as it moved forward with a local major expansion by growing its health care mission to include the residents of Streator. To this end it opened the Center for Health – Streator and the transitioned to OSF HealthCare -- Ottawa South. In the process, OSF welcomed more than 180 new employees to its workforce. Additionally, OSF partnered with the City of Ottawa to provide NCAT transportation to meet the transportation needs of Streator residents coming to Ottawa for health care services at OSF Saint Elizabeth Medical Center.

Just to the south of OSF Healthcare – Ottawa South along IL Rt. 23 is the new home of the **Novak Veterinary Clinic** now under construction.

**Three Pronged Strategic Approach**

The City of Ottawa has developed an aggressive and diversified three pronged approach to attracting new businesses and new jobs. We are focusing on the following three general areas:

- A. The Ottawa Industrial Park and the areas set aside for industrial and distribution growth on the north side of Ottawa.
- B. Retail and hospitality growth on the north side – especially in the Interstate 80 and Norris Drive corridors.
- C. Downtown Ottawa and the Downtown Waterfront

**Ottawa Industrial Park**

The Ottawa Industrial Park on east Route 6 has become one of the most attractive industrial parks in the State of Illinois – one positioned to quickly supply prospects with very competitive amenities and incentives. Having recently completed a major upgrade of the Park, the City is now focusing on developing a plan to market its many attributes. A key part of the plan is an updated Industrial

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Park website. Other tools may include a marketing study, the use of an industrial real estate broker and the winning of Select Site status by the CSX Railroad which borders the Park to the South.

Our marketing efforts for the Industrial Park and other sites will be considerably bolstered by those of the new **Economic Development Corporation of North Central Illinois**. This new organization is pooling public and private resources from Bureau, Putnam and LaSalle Counties to market our region as never before. I sit on the board of the corporation, representing the City. I encourage the Ottawa business community to seriously consider investing in the EDCNCI.

**Growth On Northside**

Considerable progress has been made on the north side since it featured several abandoned big box stores a few years ago. A good deal of this growth has been supported by the placement of the area into a new Tax Increment Financing District or TIF.

Recent new growth and development in this area includes:

- **Rosati's Pizza and Pub** which has opened in the strip mall across from the Super Wal-Mart.
- **Holiday Inn Express** has benefitted from a major facility upgrade investment and looks very nice.
- **Gailey Eye Clinic** will be relocating next year from its current downtown space in the Carson Building to a beautiful new facility with plentiful parking which will soon be under construction on West Stevenson Road.
- **Verizon** is currently constructing a stand-alone retail store at the corner of Columbus and Etna Road.

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- **Dairy Queen Chill & Grill** will soon be building a new store just south of Hardee's on North Columbus Street.
- **CVS** plans to construct a new store next year largely on the site of the current Family Video Store which will be relocating.

**Downtown Ottawa**

The City's continuing commitment to beautify the downtown and preserve its historic commercial buildings continues to pay-off in the creation of new and unique places to shop and dine.

The beautification effort moved forward with the creation of tree and plant beds on Madison and Jefferson Streets, as well as bump-out beds with improved handicapped accessible crossings on LaSalle Street intersections with Madison, Jefferson, Jackson and Lafayette Streets.

The City parking lot just west of the AT&T building on West Madison Street continues to be developed into an attractive parking area.

The downtown was made especially beautiful last spring through the planting by Alan Howarter and volunteers of at least 5,000 spring bulbs during the previous fall. Alan tells me the spring of 2017 will be even more spectacular. Alan and his crew are also responsible for much of the downtown beauty we see throughout the growing season.

Speaking of volunteers, I want to thank those who donate their time to maintaining the flower beds in the City's parks and throughout the downtown. Special recognition needs to go to Stephanie Stacy, the owner of Gardens Gate Garden Center who serves as the City's volunteer horticulture advisor and mentor for our summer student workers. Stephanie is responsible for creating

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the beautiful downtown hanging baskets in both summer and winter, the planters at both City Hall and on streets corners and the City Hall flower boxes.

The revitalization of the downtown continued this year with the establishment of these new businesses:

- **Fiesta MX** – A Mexican restaurant with a southwestern facade on the 200 block of Madison Street featuring a menu of completely homemade food items.
- **A'Lure** – is also located on Madison Street just two doors down from Fiesta MX. In addition to delicious food, A'Lure offers outdoor dining in a courtyard featuring a beautiful mural painted by Ottawa artist Laurie Reagan and features Ottawa's first "aquarium bar."
- The long-awaited opening of the **Lone Buffalo** brewpub and upscale farm to table restaurant on the 800 block of LaSalle Street occurred in March and is already drawing many new visitors to downtown Ottawa. As best I can tell, this \$6 million project represents the largest single project investment in downtown Ottawa's history. The parent company of Lone Buffalo, the **Tangled Roots Brewing Company**, with its adjoining tasting room, is in the process of doubling its downtown craft brewing capacity and developing its own bottling and labeling capacity.
- Of course, it was wonderful to see **Corner 230** survive its fire and reopen this summer.
- Ottawa is very fortunate to have its new downtown independent bookstore, **The Prairie Fox**, opening just a few weeks ago, at the location of its predecessor, the **Book Mouse**.

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- Offering a variety of upscale spa and beauty options, **The Beaute Bar**, opened in mid-year in the 807 Building.
- **Spaces**, which features a fascinating array of new home decorations, handmade and re-purposed items plus collectibles and antiques opened on Main Street in the former Gramma's Attic building.
- Just opened on the 200 block of Main Street is **Correct Hardwood** which specializes in restoring and installing beautiful hardwood floors.
- The **Farmers Insurance** business owned by Robb Hasty has relocated to the 200 block of Main Street in building Robb purchased and has renovated.

Coming soon to downtown Ottawa will be:

- **No Limits Nutrition** on the 200 block of Main Street. It will be a nutrition club serving herbalife healthy meal shakes, teas and protein bars, a fast nutrition meal on the go. Grand Opening is Saturday November 12<sup>th</sup> 11:00am to 3:00pm.
- **Heartland By Hand** will be located in the historic commercial building located at the SW corner of Main and Clinton. The building is in the process of being beautifully restored. It will feature a wide array of art related activities – custom framing and etching, original paintings and artisan works, art related gifts and supplies and much more – even studio space for artists.
- **Dig Doug's BBQ** – Coming soon to the former Carretto's restaurant on Chestnut Street.

That's over a dozen new businesses that just I've just described.

### Other Downtown Happenings

- The 5-story asbestos contaminated **Little City Building** has been demolished and is soon to be redeveloped. Thanks to the US EPA stepping forward to demolishing the structure as an emergency immediate cleanup project to protect the public health and safety. The City was then deeded the property and after taking proposals has sold the land to CL Realty. The new owner plans to build 3-4 story building with retail on ground floor and residential options on upper floors – and may include rooftop usage. This will be the first new retail building constructed in downtown Ottawa since the Carson building went up in 1961.
- The City also sold a historic commercial building at **616 Court Street** to Ron Yanke who has plans for some type of themed restaurant.
- The **Carson Building** has been sold to CL Realty, which is currently finalizing exciting plans for its future usage.
- Larry and Karen Kiest continue to rehabilitate the **Ottawa Boat Club**, having just completed the tuck pointing of its historic brick exterior.
- Tom Justice has purchased the former **Mr. Penguin** building on Clinton Street and is in rehabbing it for the Justice law office and multiple much needed retail spaces.
- The City is in the process of purchasing the **parking lot on the 200 block of Main Street** between the Spaces and In Bloom stores. The lot will provide additional public parking.
- I want to give some credit to the management of the **Roxy Theater** both for making significant façade improvements and new theater seating. The Roxy looks better than it has in years.

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Speaking of facades, let me give a quick update on the success of the **City's Façade Improvement Program**. This program is funded by the Downtown TIF and provides matching grants to building owners who are willing to invest in the improvement the facades of their downtown commercial buildings. I am pleased to report that downtown façade investment spurred by partnership with the City has increased steadily from \$95,000 in 2014-2015 to \$179,000 in 2015 – 2016 to \$187,000 in the current 2016 – 2017 time frame. With just a couple of exceptions (where we are in some areas working with the building ownership) the downtown building facades look pretty good.

- The final major downtown streetscape, this time on **Columbus Street**, is scheduled for construction next year. The City of Ottawa is using ITEP Enhancement Grant funds from IDOT for a \$1.0 MM streetscape and historic lighting improvement project on 5 blocks along Columbus Street from the Jordan block to Lafayette Street.

### **Downtown Waterfront**

Our exciting downtown Illinois River waterfront plan continues to move forward. This year, we took the following steps:

- Reached agreement on the basic coal tar clean-up plan with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the utilities – Nicor and ComEd -- responsible for funding the clean-up. We expect the excavation and removal of the coal tar deposits on the west side of the property to begin next year, clearing the way for development.
- Engaged in a lengthy review process – which is nearly complete – of the original plan with a focus on moving beyond the concept to produce a detailed final plan.

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- The City of Ottawa was very pleased to be awarded the prestigious 2016 Daniel Burnham Award for Outstanding Comprehensive Plan at the State Conference of the Illinois Chapter of the American Planning Association in Chicago. I am particularly proud of this recognition named after the famous planner Daniel Burnham, who, as I quoted in my first State of the City Address in 1999, is famous for saying “I Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir a man’s blood.” The award recognized the value of the City of Ottawa’s far-reaching Comprehensive Plan which was updated in 2014. The riverfront concept is a key part of that plan, and I think, as the APA concluded, “it shows the City remains steadfast in its commitment to bold plans that will shape the future of this beautiful and historic city.”

**Festivals**

An increasingly important part of our marketing efforts to attract more visitors and shoppers to downtown Ottawa is the annual schedule of Ottawa festivals. Of course, the festivals are also a lot of fun for Ottawa residents and our friends throughout Starved Rock Country.

- Midwest Morel Fest – This very unique event built around the seasonal hunting of morel mushrooms is held in early May. The 2016 Fest was especially successful due to a bumper crop of morels found locally. The home brewed beer portion of the event continues to grow.
- **Ottawa Two River Wine & Jazz Festival** – Hampered by intense and very unseasonal heat on the Friday and Saturday parts of the three day event, the Festival nevertheless attracted approximately 4,500 paid attendees mostly from the Chicago-suburban area. In addition to 17 wineries from across the State, the 2016 festival offered craft beer brewed right here in

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Ottawa and featured outstanding “ladies of Chicago jazz” vocalists. The Ottawa Noon Rotary also served a record number of lobster dinners.

- This year’s **Riverfest** celebration was a great success. The festival was cut back to three days, and for the first time an entrance fee was charged. Over 7,000 guests enjoyed three evenings of great music, food and company.
- **Scarecrow Festival** – Bolstered by beautiful weather and dozens of very creative scarecrows scattered throughout the downtown, the Festival filled the downtown with children and families having a great time. Thanks to the Ottawa Downtown Merchants for sponsoring and organizing this wonderful family event.
- **Oktoberfest** – This traditional German celebration of beer, brats, polkas and much more is a personal favorite. Thanks to Ottawa First for sponsoring this very enjoyable event.
- **Chris Kringle Market** – I am pleased to announce the establishment of a new Christmas Holiday event – the Ottawa Chris Kringle Market. Closely patterned after the popular chriskindlmarkets held in European cities – and in Chicago and Naperville - we are holding the first market on the weekend of December 10 and 11 (Saturday, December 10 from 10 AM – 9 PM and Sunday, December 11 from 11 AM to 6 PM).

The event will feature ten authentic German huts filled with everything from traditional German holiday food specialties, baked goods and beverages to a wide variety of handcrafted gifts and works of art. A special Holiday ambiance will fill the downtown with music, beautiful decorations, horse drawn carriage rides, hot, roasted chestnuts, Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus, ice sculptures and more. (We are still looking for a

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handful of vendors who offer unique handcrafted gift items. Interested vendors should contact the Ottawa Visitors Center for an application).

**Residential Startups**

On the residential side we are finally seeing building starts comparable to those before the recession of 2008.

Between October of 2007 to October, 2008 we had 28 new residential units (including duplexes) for a total of \$7,247,700.

Between October 2015 to October, 2016 we had 34 new residential units (including duplexes) for a total of \$6,584,800.

**ISO Rating**

I am pleased to announce that just a few days ago the City was notified by the Insurance Services Office (ISO) that the City's ISO rating for Building Code Effectiveness was upgraded from a 6 to a 4 rating in both residential and commercial properties. Thanks to the City Council for updating our building codes and to Building Official Mike Sutfin for his enforcement efforts – both cited as the reason for the upgraded rating.

**Heritage Harbor Ottawa**

After surviving the terrible Great Recession years, it is wonderful to see Heritage Harbor regaining its growth momentum. Thus far in 2016, Heritage Harbor closed on 25 sales – a record – and the buyers are new to the area, joining the Heritage Harbor family.

The first phase of the Cottages at Heron's Landing development on the Illinois River at the SE corner of the property was planned for 27 cottages, and only is one left to sell. A second phase of cottages is in the final planning stages.

There are now 11 cottages currently in the rental pool with rental demand continuing to increase.

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Even with 12 boat slips added this year for a marina total of 143, the slips are full.

Heritage Harbor plans to continue its growth with an announcement in the near future of new residential offerings. We very much appreciate Heritage Harbor's partnership with City festivals and its ongoing strong and creative marketing of Ottawa – particularly downtown Ottawa. Some of its new residents are already investing in the downtown.

**North Central Illinois Transit (NCAT)**

On January 1, 2016 NCAT entered into a new partnership agreement with Bureau-Putnam Area Rural Transit (BPART), transitioning from the previous agreement with LOTS (Lee-Ogle Transportation System). BPART is the reservation center for scheduling rides, in addition to providing administrative support.

Federal and state grants, in addition to fares collected, fund the day-to-day operations and administrative expenses to provide over 60,000 rides annually throughout LaSalle County, the second largest county in Illinois, covering over 1,100 square miles. NCAT took over operation of the City's mini-bus system. Although the City contributes to NCAT, we do so at substantial savings compared to the cost of running the stand-alone City system.

**Blight Reduction Program**

**Residential demolitions.** There are about 25 abandoned houses in Ottawa where the owners have disappeared. Many of these houses have deteriorated beyond the point of repair and need to be demolished. Some can be rehabbed. The City is acquiring title to many of these properties, taking advantage of a blight reduction grant. So far 7 houses have been or are about to

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demolished. In two cases we were able to find buyers to rehab the houses, and we have two more under contract for rehabilitation.

**Ash Tree Removal**

The tremendously sad loss of hundreds of beautiful ash trees due to the infestation of the Emerald Ash Borer has become much more evident in Ottawa during the past few years. The City identified 931 ash trees on public property which need to be removed. Thus far, 617 trees over a two year period have been removed. It is hoped the final 314 trees can be removed during the coming year – perhaps starting later this winter.

While it will take many years to fully replace these losses, the City has begun to do so at rate of 50 or so new trees per year with plans to greatly increase that number in the next few years. Of course, a number of different tree varieties are being used in order to minimize the impact of any future tree plagues.

**Radium Superfund Cleanup on Canal Road**

The clean-up of the remaining Radium Superfund sites in Ottawa took a major step forward this year with the remediation of the State owned site along Canal Road. All of the radium contaminated soil was excavated and transported to a special out of state disposal site. The contaminated soil was replaced by clean fill supplied by the City of Ottawa per a settlement agreement with the USEPA which greatly limited the City's exposure to cash radium clean-up penalties.

Now only one of the original 14 clean-up sites remains near the Route 6 and 71 intersection. That is the largest site and it will likely be many years before that site is remediated.

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**Flood Management**

Dealing with the ever present threat of serious flooding continues to be a high priority of the City.

- You may recall that just a few years ago, it took an intensive sand-bagging effort by many volunteers to save the waste water treatment plant from major flood damage. This should not happen again as the City has completed the building of a \$1.5 million sea wall around the plant designed to handle flooding up to the level of a 500 year flood.
- The City is aggressively seeking a federal grant administered by the State which will be used to protect Ottawa Township High School from flooding. The funding will support the construction of a levee along the Fox River to the north of the high school. Thanks in part to the extra grant application review points received due to Ottawa's participation in the Illinois Valley Flood Resiliency Alliance organized by State Senator Sue Rezin, Ottawa's application has made it to the second round of consideration with final notice perhaps as soon as December.
- The Ottawa Flood Commission continues to work towards the high state and federal flood readiness levels which will further reduce homeowner's flood insurance premium. Already, these efforts have resulted in a 25% premium reduction.
- The City hopes to receive funding in the spring from FEMA needed for participation in the High Water Mark Campaign. This program is designed to promote flood risk awareness by placing markers in the Fox River and Allen Parks which show just how high past floods have been. The Allen Park marker is likely to be placed at the 12 foot level.

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**Police Department**

The Ottawa Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Brent Roalson, continues to maintain its long-time standing as one of the most professional and progressive law enforcement agencies in the area. This is done, among other things, through the continued support of established, successful programs such as the Peer Jury, aimed at keeping young, first time offenders out of the juvenile court system, and the Department's Child Abduction Response (CART) Team, intended to create quick, structured investigative and search process meant to bring endangered children home safely. Most recently the Ottawa Police Department has created and implemented a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT). All employees will be trained in CIT by the end of 2017. This training better equips officers and telecommunicators in handling the calls for service dealing with the mentally ill and helping start a process in developing long term plans for those in need of additional services.

Last calendar year the Ottawa Police Department responded to well over 15,000 squad car calls.

**Promotions & Recognitions**

On September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Officer Robert Nilles a 16 year veteran of the Ottawa Police Department was promoted to the Rank of Corporal. Corporal Nilles upon promotion was assigned to a shift as a patrol supervisor.

On October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016 Officer Brenden Donahue a 16 year veteran of the Ottawa Police Department and the City's DARE officer for 13 years, was promoted to the Rank of Corporal. Corporal Donahue upon promotion was assigned to a shift as a patrol supervisor.

The Ottawa Police Department also continues to show its greener side through the continued successful support of the Prescription Pill and Drug

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Disposal program, or P2D2. The program is intended to educate the public about the dangers of disposing these drugs either in the garbage or by flushing them down the toilet, and to provide a site where they may be dropped off for safe disposal, no questions asked. To date, the department's P2D2 drop box has collected **more than 10,000 pounds** of prescription medications from the public; medications and chemicals that otherwise may have ended up in our landfills, groundwater, waterways, and eventually, drinking water.

**Fire Department**

The goal of the 29 sworn members of the Ottawa Fire Department is to be recognized by our community as a model of excellence in delivering fire protection, Advance Life Support EMS and other services the department provides.

Under the direction of Commissioner Tom Ganiere, Fire Chief Steve Haywood, and Deputy Chief Andy Borkowski, the department continues to be dedicated to improvement in every detail of service. In 2015 Ottawa Firefighters completed 4,740 hours of training. Our training calendar continues to be full of opportunities for not only our Firefighters, but those of neighboring communities to expand on their skills. This training aids the very favorable low ISO (Insurance Services Office) score of 3 that the City recently received. The lower the number the better the score. The fire department ISO rating has steadily improved, from a 6 in 1999, then later to a 5, and now a 3.

The Ottawa Fire Department provides Paramedic Service for EMS calls and also provides emergent and non-emergent transfer service for Ottawa and the surrounding area.

The Fire Department continues to be the busiest and most proactive department in the County.

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In 2015 the department responded to 3,406 emergency calls and provided 605 inter facility transfers. This year, as of October 1, 2016 the department has responded to 2,328 emergency calls and 503 transfers.

The Ottawa Fire Department has been a member of MABAS (Mutual Aid Box Alarm) Division 25 since its inception in 2000. Currently our department has 4 members on the County Hazardous Material Response team and 9 members on the Technical Rescue Team. We also house the MABAS 25 fire department dispatch and the emergency generator and light plant. The Ottawa Fire department has responded to and provided aid to Utica, Grand Ridge, Marseilles, Seneca, Streator, Serena and Sheridan.

The Fire Department participates in Fire Prevention and Educational activities in the community which includes visiting the schools in the fall. The Fire Department Public Education program deals mainly with Pre-K thru 4<sup>th</sup> grade children. Our Fire Safety House visits the schools in the spring to reinforce the safety message that was taught in the fall. The Fire Department makes regular appearances at local safety fairs and community events, such as National Night out, LaSalle County Safety Fair, Scarecrow Fest, and other events throughout the year. The department also uses on duty crews to provide fire extinguisher training to local businesses and will meet with local businesses to assist with evacuation drill training and hazardous materials related issues.

**Public Works – Wastewater Division**

The City of Ottawa bonded and has constructed a new \$1.5 MM **flood protection wall** around the wastewater treatment plant. The flood wall was set at 5 feet above the 100-year flood elevation of the Illinois River. This will help keep the river from flooding the plant, which could cause \$4 or \$5 million dollars of damage per flood.

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Other improvements at the wastewater treatment plant includes lift station control panel upgrades, SCADA Control upgrades, upgrade control systems and preparation for fiber optic telemetry, and sludge removal and lagoon dewatering.

Soon to be completed projects include plant entrance gate automation and west fence gate install and tree removal along the south property line.

This summer the City constructed a \$500,000 **Field's Hill Sanitary Sewer project** to serve existing Field's Hill subdivision residents with failing septic systems. Those properties being served by the new sewer will be annexed into the City in the coming months.

With local funds, the City completed a \$1 million **downtown sanitary separation project** in several downtown blocks and in the process eliminated a major flash flooding problem. While torn up streets causing some inconvenience, a street resurfacing project was piggy-backed to the sewer project, resulting 10 blocks of new street surfaces in the downtown area.

**Public Works – Water Division**

With local funds, the City completed a \$600K **looping of north side water mains** so that two neighborhoods only served by small water pump stations now have consistent water pressure from the overhead tower, and have looped redundant feeds.

The City also bonded local funds and is constructing a \$2 million **sanitary sewer** to relieve sanitary backups and flooding on the city's south side. Five lift stations (at Deer Run, James Court, Dairy Lane, Pembroke and Luke Street) will be eliminated as part of the project. Construction is underway and will be completed in 2017.

## **Public Works - Streets Division**

### **Resurfacing and Curb Replacement**

The City resurfaced 14 streets and 5 alleys, totaling 42 blocks at an estimated cost of \$1,204,000.00.

3,650 feet of curbs were replaced, including 56 sidewalk ramps. This includes total reconstruction of two intersections with concrete pavement on the east side and total reconstruction of alley with concrete pavement currently under construction (alley behind Bianchi's Pizza). The estimated cost of all those projects is \$412,000.

### **Madison Street Curb Replacement and Landscape Beds**

As part of the CSO project on Madison Street, 760 feet of new curbing with 13 sidewalk ramps were installed from Walnut to Clinton Street, at an estimated cost of \$105,000. Excessively wide sidewalks were cut back to allow for grass tree and plantings in front of storefronts

### **Fire Station Driveway**

Approximately 600 square yards of concrete replacement; included 164 feet of curb replacement with two sidewalk ramps were installed at an estimated cost of \$67,000.

## **Parks Division and Playground and**

### **Recreation Board**

This past year, following its motto Everybody Plays, the City of Ottawa and the Playground and Recreation board have worked to identify recreation needs and move to develop needed facilities.

In 2016, the board continued to move forward with more improvements to city recreation facilities. The board continued to improve the **Lincoln Douglas Complex** in several ways. There were continued improvements to Ottawa's

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newest baseball field, Whitney Field. Also, phase one of the new **Inclusive** Playground with handicapped accessible play equipment was installed on the west side of the complex and dedicated a few weeks ago.

The board, along with Ottawa Girls Fast Pitch, continued work on a fourth field in the Peck Park Softball Complex.

The Recreation Board reaffirmed its commitment to safety by installing weather safety signs at all parks and supplying weather radios to all the youth leagues.

This past summer the City's **Riordan pool** was open all possible days improving its attendance over last summer. Riordan also hosted many community events such as the All-city swim meet and a city-wide open house as well as many private rentals.

Just as important as the facilities are the youth and adult activities sponsored by the Ottawa Playground and Recreation Board. This year Ottawa Recreation's **summer youth program** offered supervisors at eight parks, an Ottawa tradition unique among surrounding communities. The summer recreation program featured over forty-five special activities, camps, and clinics teaching skills from Art to basketball to bowling to photography to volleyball to tennis to wrestling. Overall, Ottawa Recreation summer activities served over 3100 of the youth of Ottawa and the surrounding communities.

Ottawa Recreation's long tradition of sponsoring **adult recreation opportunities** continued this year. Adult softball and kickball continued at June Gross and Roy Sanders fields. And in the winter, Ottawa Recreation continues to sponsor its adult basketball league. Again this summer, Jane and Rod Schomas volunteered their time to host dance lessons every Tuesday evening.

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With their help, Recreation sponsored the annual Harvest Dance, a favorite of our senior citizens, featuring Class Act at the Knights of Columbus.

The nine appointed volunteer members of the Ottawa Playground and Recreation Board, its pool director, its recreation director, and Commissioner Less, take their responsibilities to the city of Ottawa seriously and continue to add to its legacy of providing outstanding facilities and programs for the citizens of Ottawa.

**Dayton Bluffs Nature Preserve**

Three years ago, The Conservation Foundation purchased 253 acres of farm and wood land between the Fox River and Illinois Route 71 NE of Ottawa for conservation and native restoration purposes. Named the Dayton Bluffs Nature Preserve and including a full mile of Fox River shoreline, the City of Ottawa partnered with the Foundation to lease the Preserve for twenty years at a minimal rate and annexed the property to the City. The Foundation has spent almost three years pursuing an aggressive program of restoration and elimination of non-native species.

In the spring of 2017, responsibility for operation of the Preserve will pass to the City. In preparation, the City along with the Conservation Foundation and local volunteers are at work creating a master plan governing the Dayton Bluffs ongoing conservation efforts and development of passive recreational activities such as hiking and bicycling. This planning process is being led by Upland Design, a Chicago based firm with great experience in conservation property planning. A Grand Opening of the Preserve along with the unveiling of the master plan is planned for May, 2017.

**Projects “In The Works”**

**Route 23 Pedestrian Bridge over Interstate-80.** Ottawa has a very dangerous situation where pedestrians and self-powered wheelchairs cross over Interstate 80 in the vehicle lanes of the State Highway Rt. 23 bridge. A pedestrian bridge is needed to prevent fatalities. The City applied for and has received a \$2,000,000 ITEP Enhancement Grant to construct this much needed bridge. The grant announcement was made just this past month. Construction is expected in 2019. While design of the bridge has not yet begun, here are few design ideas we have passed by IDOT. (Photos)

**High School Levee.** The Ottawa Township High School levee was de-accredited by FEMA due to the higher Base Flood Elevation (BFE) which was recently adopted. A plan to raise the levee has been approved by IDNR and the US corps of Engineers. The City of Ottawa is partnering with the High School in an application for FEMA funding for this levee project.

**I & M Canal Rewatering Project**

In my first State of the City address in 1999 I shared a vision of a stretch of canal passing through Ottawa, filled with clear water about 3 feet deep and 80-foot wide and over a half mile long, where kids can learn to canoe and kayak in safety. Imagine visitors from Starved Rock stopping in Ottawa to rent paddle boats in the canal. Imagine kids having model powerboat racing events. Imagine ice skating for blocks on end just like in days gone by. Well, it's now 17 years later and the I & M Canal in Ottawa is still a dry ditch. But progress is being made.

Volunteers are stepping forward to work on many aspects of the project. In addition, we are working with the Illinois National Guard Engineer Battalion for

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them to do the earthwork to re-contour the canal bottom at no cost to the City in the summer of 2018 as part of their training exercises.

US Silica can supply the continuous flow of clean water from what they are already pumping out, allowing us to reclaim and reuse that water and not waste it.

A special thanks to the Canal volunteers and especially Arnie Bandstra for all their volunteer efforts.

### **Tourism**

Ottawa continues to be strongly positioned for significant tourism growth. In fact, boosted by Ottawa's nearness to the Chicago area, the natural beauty surrounding Ottawa and our beautiful downtown filled with unique shopping and dining opportunities - not to mention our proximity to Starved Rock State Park -- one could easily make the case that tourism is now Ottawa's fastest growing industry. Tourism industry figures supplied by the Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau show that in 2015, tourism expenditures in LaSalle County reached \$190.25 million (up 5.1% from 2014), with 1,390 tourism related jobs (up 6.2%) while generating \$34.31 million in payroll (up 10.2%). This tourism activity produced \$3.63 million in local tax receipts (up 8.3%).

### **Ottawa Visitors Center**

Now under the new leadership of Curt Bedei, the Ottawa Visitors Center continues to play an important role in promoting Ottawa tourism. Examples of its creative marketing initiatives include the current "Live Buffalo – No Bull" campaign which is attracting considerable social media attention and the selection of Ottawa for a "Travels With Darley" program. "Travels With Darley" is a popular web series which can now be seen on PBS. The show's host, a young woman by the name of Darley Newman, takes viewers to unique and interesting

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travel locations all across the Western Hemisphere. The program places special emphasis on involving local perspectives and people. Darley was in Ottawa a few months ago to tape a show to appear on PBS probably in the first half of next year. According to Curt Bedei, Darley and her production crew were quite impressed with Ottawa. A few of their comments about Ottawa -- "Blew our expectations away", "There are a lot of gems." And "Ottawa, Illinois... who would've thought." I am sure the OVC will let us know when the "Travels With Darley" Ottawa program is scheduled to air.

The Ottawa Visitors Center and the *Brush with History* mural committee worked diligently this year to complete the City's 9<sup>th</sup> mural, *Open for Business* on the south wall of the First National Bank on Madison Street. The mural was created to fit within the turn-of-the-century stone bank façade which was removed from an old bank building in Ransom, transported and later reassembled on the First National Bank building in downtown Ottawa. Thanks to the folks at First National Bank for their support of this project.

In addition, the OVC is working with the mural committee to perform routine maintenance on the existing murals.

**Starved Rock Country**

Although now under different management, the effort to build a Starved Rock Country Brand continues to move forward. With Starved Rock Park already attracting an estimated 2.8 million visitors in 2016 and already possessing extremely high levels of awareness throughout the Chicago area and the Upper Midwest, encouraging visitors to explore the area within a 30 mile radius of the Park only makes good economic sense. This area will be the heart of the Starved Rock Country Brand as it is home to a great many attractions as well as unique places to shop and dine.

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As the Gateway to Starved Rock, Ottawa stands to benefit tremendously from supporting the Starved Rock Country Brand program. It should be noted this effort is aimed at not only attracting visitors but also at convincing some of these visitors to move to Ottawa and Starved Rock Country. For example, it appears many retirees in the Chicago area are deciding to flee the quality of life challenges in Chicago and suburbia. An unfortunately large number of these retirees are leaving the State of Illinois, taking with them their talents and financial resources. We strongly believe that if these retirees were better informed about the quality of life in Ottawa and Starved Rock Country, many of them would decide to enjoy their retirement years here.

Economic development is not the only benefit of tourism. The new attractions, shops and restaurants supported by tourism also enhance the quality of life for the residents of Starved Rock Country. Not only does this enhanced quality of life makes retention of our young people more likely as they now have more to do, it will also bolster the efforts of local business and industry to attract badly needed talented professionals and their spouses.

**American Duchess River Cruise**

I am very happy to be able to announce that Ottawa will become a cruise ship destination next year.

The *American Duchess* will be making six stops in Ottawa in August, 2017. This 166 passenger luxury cruise ship was formerly the *Isle of Capri* – the Quad-City gaming boat. It has been purchased by the American Queen Steamboat Company, which is headquartered in Memphis, and is now undergoing a major retrofit. The original hull and powerplant – including its Caterpillar engines – will be kept. Added will be a new, three-deck hotel wedding cake type superstructure comparable to that of the pictured American Queen. The American Duchess will

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be a bit smaller at 100 feet wide and 320 feet long but will feature only upscale suites plus a grand dining room capable of seating all 166 passengers at once. It will have a crew of 83. It will dock at the western end of Allen Park, just downstream from the historic railroad bridge which, at 48 feet, is too low to accommodate the American Duchess' 55 foot air draft.

A key part of this new river cruise experience will be very attractive on-shore excursions in downtown Ottawa and Starved Rock Country. More details will soon be available. However, it should be noted the Ottawa stops of the American Duchess provide the possibility of introducing nearly 1,000 new shoppers and diners to downtown Ottawa.

**America In Bloom – Planting Pride**

Closely tied to the downtown beautification and revitalization is Ottawa's annual entry in the national America In Bloom competition. Last year, Ottawa was awarded a Special National Award for Most Dynamic Transformation of a Downtown Streetscape. This year, I am pleased to report that while first place in our population category went to Holliston, Ma, Ottawa again did very well – placing a very close second and receiving a maximum "Five Bloom" rating. Ottawa also received a **Special Heritage Preservation Award** – in part for its practice of purchasing endangered historic buildings and reselling to new owners intending to rehab them and put them back into commercial use. An additional Special Project Award was received for the Ottawa Is Blooming Committee's efforts to create a garden at Central School for children with special needs. The Ottawa Is Blooming Committee is our local America In Bloom campaign committee.

These awards were announced at the America In Bloom national symposium in California's central coast. Attendance at this event was made

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possible for a number of Ottawa volunteers through the generosity of Mick Rowe of Grand Rapids Enterprises who paid for airfares and hotel expenses.

Participation in the America In Bloom program continues to be very beneficial for the City as it has accelerated progress in each of the six AIB judging categories – Floral Displays, Landscaped Areas, Urban Forestry, Environmental Efforts, Heritage Preservation and Overall Impression – plus has proven to be a very affordable means of marketing Ottawa to the national horticulture industry. By the way, I hope in a few years that Ottawa will host the national America in Bloom symposium.

Let me also note the continued work of the Public Arts subcommittee of the Ottawa Is Blooming Committee chaired by accomplished mosaic artist Susan Burton. Thanks to Susan's work, another totem pole sculpture was added to LaSalle Street. Susan's mosaic art work also enriched the Wine Festival. Susan also needs to be recognized for her chairing of the very successful Wine and Art Walk held in downtown Ottawa a few weeks ago.

**Historic District Signage**

A few years ago the City's Historic Preservation Commission, was successful in gaining federal approval of a new historic district which takes it almost all the structures on the east side and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This year the Commission is arranging for the placement of historic period street signage in the district, drawing attention to, and instilling pride, in this historic neighborhood.

**Reddick Mansion**

The Reddick Mansion continues to remain the crown jewel of Ottawa's historic architectural heritage and a "must-see" for many visitors. The Reddick

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Mansion Association through a lease agreement with the City has lovingly restored and tended to the Mansion for decades.

Last year I reported that the City and Mansion Association were working to finalize a new lease. Since then the old lease has expired and the parties are continuing to negotiate.

One proposal the City made was to essentially gift the Mansion to the Association and commit to an annual contribution to the Association for the continued upkeep and restoration of this building. As of this date an agreement has not been reached.

**City Finances – FY 2016 and 2017**

- The City of Ottawa does not have excessive surpluses, but operates in adherence to its budget, effectively deploying collected revenues and grant funding
- Tax revenues comprise approximately 70-75% of total General Fund Revenues (the City's main operating account)
  - Approximately 13% are from Property Taxes
  - Approximately 35% are from Sales Taxes
  - Of total budgeted General Fund Revenues for FY 2017 of \$15.8 million (nearly identical to FY 2016)
- When considering all City Funds, Property Taxes account for a larger portion of overall revenues.
- The Equalized Assessed Valuation (EAV) forming the basis of Property Tax revenues is projected to increase this coming year for the second year in a row after the 5 prior years of successive modest declines.
- Sales Tax Revenues have increased each year for the past 5 years

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- The City is now receiving about \$250,000 annually from State-authorized gaming machines in the City.
- The City has effectively utilized Tax Increment Financing Districts and Enterprise Zones incentives to encourage new business development
- The City has prudently managed the resources available to it, stayed within its budgetary projections, proactively sought grant funding, and effectively utilized debt for financing necessary projects.
- I am pleased to report that more than 150 participants in the City's self-insured health plan will not see an increase in their 2017 premiums. Active City employees fund 20% of the premium, non-Medicare retirees fund 25% of the premium with the City funding the remaining. In addition, the City's Medicare supplement plan will see an overall premium decrease of 9% for 2017.

**Boards And Commissions**

From serving on the Civil Service Commission to the Zoning Board of Appeals the City is extremely fortunate to have over 150 volunteers serving on various Board and Commissions.

This year I would like to recognize the City's Board of Fire and Police Commissioners. This Board oversees testing and hiring of new police officers and firefighters and oversees promotion in rank in the police and fire departments.

Current members are Ken Brown, Cliff Espevik and Dr. David Manigold. One of these dedicated volunteers will be retiring at the end of the year. Cliff Espevik has honored the City with twenty-five years of service on the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners; originally appointed November 5, 1991, and serving as secretary of the Commission for most, if not all, of that twenty-five

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years. Cliff is here with us today. On behalf of this City Council and previous administrations, I want to express our sincere gratitude to Cliff for the many, many hours of volunteer service.

**Retirements**

Unlike the previous few years, the City has had only a few employees retire this year:

Appointed Staff: Bob Shull, 14 years of service

Tom Katrein, 8 years of service

Police: Al Hite, 20 years of service

I thank them for their service and wish them all a happy retirement.

**Starved Rock Country Community Foundation**

Finally, I'd like to say a few words about the Starved Rock Country Community Foundation which this past year became a reality after years of planning. The new Community Foundation is moving ahead quickly under the leadership of its President, Pamela Beckett. The Foundation matches people who care with causes that matter. It builds financial capacity throughout LaSalle, Bureau and Putnam Counties which results in grant making to charitable organizations across Starved Rock Country. Although hardly a year old, the Foundation has already achieved the following:

- Grown to 13 Board members from across the region with public support of over \$413,000 I am pleased to be one of the Board members along with Tom Heimsoth, Boyd Palmer, Tom Justice and Larry Windsor from the Ottawa area. The Foundation is headquartered at 718 Columbus Street.
- Established 14 new funds – including three scholarship funds -- led by the Dick and Carol Janko Scholarship for Promising Entrepreneurs.

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- Launched the Women’s Giving Circle under the auspices of the Women Inspired Network (WIN) which has been created in partnership with the OSF Foundation.
- Started the Youth in Philanthropy organization to educate youth ages 10 – 12 about philanthropy.
- Stepped up to preserve the Starved Rock Country Marathon and made it profitable for the first time. It has now transitioned management of the event to a local group called Run Starved Rock Country.
- Largest endowment fund thus far created by Sharon Eschbach Coleman and her late husband Ken Coleman – the Robert M. Eschbach Legacy Fund – for the purpose of positively impacting Ottawa over the years to come.

The Foundation has a website under construction and an operational Facebook page. Please learn more about this organization which has potential to help raise our quality of life throughout Starved Rock Country.

**Conclusion**

So that, in a nutshell, sums up the current State of the City of Ottawa.

I continue to feel it an honor and a privilege to be Mayor of a community on the move. I continue to be amazed at the number of citizens who step up to the plate and volunteer their time or resources to make great things happen. And I’m appreciative of my fellow elected officials, and of my staff and our great group of hard working city employees. Thanks to all of them and all of you here working to make Ottawa a more livable and lovable city.