

STATE OF THE CITY

October 1, 2015

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS



Mayor Robert M. Eschbach

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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 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 State to the Council, but also allows me to share that information with all of you.

I made a few changes in this year's presentation. First of all its shorter. Secondly I'm not even 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 off in this presentation.

I'd also like to begin in a different way. Sometimes when you live in a community for a long time, you don't see it with fresh eyes. I often have visitors pointing out unique features of Ottawa that I've either not noticed or forgotten, or taken for granted. But today all have an opportunity to see Ottawa in a way probably none of you have ever had. And that is through the eyes of a drone. Let's take a look at this clip.

That video was produced by Shannon Cantu and his company Provisional Shot. Thank you Shannon for sharing that with us.

A significant change from the last time I addressed this group is the make-up of our Council. Tom Ganiere is now on the Council and the rest of the Council that was reelected in April. Tom has a long history of service to the city in many ways and we welcome him aboard.

Commissioner Dale Baxter decided not to run for election after serving 12 years as a City Commissioner. We appreciate his hard work during his tenure on the council and I am sure he's enjoying the additional free time retirement affords him.

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One major change in the operations of the city is that last March the City Council changed the duties of three of the four Commissioners, in an effort to provide more efficiency in the day-to-day operations of the City.

Commissioner Dan Aussem oversees the Department of Public Property, which was changed to oversee the waterworks, sanitary sewers, storm sewers and the ongoing combine sewer overflow project; previously this department also included the Parks Department.

Commissioner Tom Ganiere oversees the Department of Public Health & Safety and now is in charge the Fire and Police Department, which previously was comprised of only the Fire Department, with the Mayor overseeing the Police Department.

The Department of Accounts & Finance, which Commissioner Wayne Eichelkraut oversees, was unchanged.

Commissioner James Less now oversees the Department of Streets & Public Improvements, which now incorporates Parks and Streets; previously this department was comprised of just Streets.

As Mayor I am charged with providing oversight on all city operations, having specific control and supervision of the city attorney, city engineer, the department of community development and offices and officers not otherwise assigned to another commissioner.

CITY OF OTTAWA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Overview: General Economic Stability

The local economy seems to be going through a period of stability tempered with modest growth.

Pilkington is continuing a multi-million dollar investment in the updating and replacing of some of its 78 year old facilities – a welcome sign of its commitment to Ottawa. This year's project is the construction of a new batch plant. All of these improvements were made possible by the City's decision to annex the Pilkington property to the City several years ago and to provide water and sewer service to the plant.

The technical products produced at the Ottawa plant makes Pilkington a global competitor.

Cristal Metals has advanced its product development efforts to the point of being able to ramp up its titanium powder production before the end of the year.

SABIC Ottawa on Canal Road has recently completed a major expansion of its production capabilities. SABIC Ottawa's team continues to be a stable employer and most efficient producer of its product in the industry.

The **Ottawa Dental Lab** is a third generation, family owned business now in its 78th year of operation. Building on its deep foundation in Ottawa, during the past seven years the Ottawa Dental Lab has expanded to new locations in

Bloomington and downtown Chicago. This expansion has generated more clients and resulted in a significant increase in the number of employees at its Ottawa

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location. In fact, in 2015, employment at the Ottawa Dental Laboratory reached an all-time high – indicating a very bright future for the company.

One of the better ongoing Ottawa business success stories in recent years has been the steady advancement shown by **MBL**. MBL invested more than \$1.5 million in its Ottawa facility this year – primarily in new state of the art manufacturing equipment. Some of the original equipment installed when the plant opened in 1988 will be replaced next year with an investment of more than \$2 million.

2015 saw the Grand Opening of new and state of the art **Bill Walsh** Honda dealership at the corner of Route 23 and Stevenson Road. Completion of this project marks the eighth straight year the Bill Walsh Group has built and expanded in Ottawa. Expected to be completed later this year will be an upgrade of the Sierra Motors facility at Guion and Norris Drive. The Walsh Group is currently hiring technical and sales staff.

During the past year, **HR Imaging Partners** has expanded its Midwest photography operations into Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska. It continues to add new publishing products to complement its traditional portrait products. The vast majority of all the items produced by HR Imaging Partners are created at its lab in Ottawa on Dayton Road.

Earlier this year **Grainco FS** constructed a large staging and loading area along with a sophisticated packaging plant inside. They now produce 50 pound bags of lawn fertilizer on a large scale. With over \$1 million invested Grainco has created 6 new full time jobs.

OSF St. Elizabeth Medical Center continues to improve and expand the health care services it provides to the Ottawa community through the opening of new medical practices for orthopedics and general surgery plus the addition of the STAR program –

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a comprehensive program addressing many different types of rehabilitation needs for cancer patients. OSF has been a strong community partner with its sponsorship of the Riverfest, the Starved Rock Country Marathon and Relay for Life.

THREE PRONGED APPROACH

As I discussed last year, the City of Ottawa has developed an aggressive and diversified three pronged approach to attracting new business and new jobs. We are focusing primarily 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.

Let me briefly describe our ongoing efforts in each sector.

Ottawa Industrial Park

The Ottawa Industrial Park on east Route 6 is one of Ottawa's most effective tools for attracting industry. Our goal is to have one of the most attractive industrial parks in the State of Illinois – one positioned to quickly supply prospects with all the necessary amenities and incentives. With this in mind, the City has completed a \$4.7 million project to further expand and upgrade the Park's infrastructure – including new roadways, rail service and utilities. This project was made possible by \$3 million worth of state and federal grants.

A major factor in making the area primarily along Route 6 and adjacent to the west end of the Industrial Park much more attractive to development was the success this

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year in convincing the Illinois legislature and the Governor to **extend the life of the East Tax Increment Financing or TIF District by twelve years**. Without this action, the 339 acre East TIF would have expired in just two years. Special thanks for this success goes to State Representative Frank Mautino and State Senator Sue Rezin for pushing this legislation through the Illinois General Assembly with the assistance of Jeff Toricelli, the City of Ottawa's lobbyist and government consultant. Here at home, Dave Noble, the City Engineer and TIF Manager, convinced all of the local governments and school districts to support the extension.

Retail Growth On Northside

Just three years ago, the north side featured three abandoned big box stores – the former Value City, K-Mart and Wal-Mart stores. The City responded to this challenge by placing the area into a new TIF – thus providing a significant development incentive to prospective investors. As you know, the former Value City is now the Bill Walsh Ford-KIA dealership while the old K-Mart has been transformed into the R.P. Lumber store and lumber yard. We are hopeful the next year will see an ownership change which will make the former Wal-Mart building more marketable.

New growth and development in this area includes:

- **Rosati's Pizza and Pub** in the strip mall will open soon and feature a Wrigley Field interior.
- **Serenity Wellness Center** on West Etna Road, featuring five cutting edge alternative health care treatments.
- **PharmaCannis Medicinal Cannabis Dispensary** on north Columbus – will have an open house on Saturday, October 3 from 11 AM – 3 PM.

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Gardens Gate Garden Center and Landscaping on Dayton Road has expanded into a new building which also features a new Stihl (pronounced Steel) dealership.

- Major expansion by the **Play and Stay Dog Lounge** on East Stevenson.
- Significant interior and exterior renovation at **Pomp's Tire** on East Norris Drive.
- Relocation and major expansion of **T&L Janitorial Service** to Bellevue Avenue.

It should also be noted that Ottawa has been successful in winning the Illinois Enterprise Zone Board's of approval of a **new Enterprise Zone** (awaiting Governor's signature). A few years ago, a new State law mandated the expiration of all existing enterprise zones in the State – followed by a State review of applications for a limited number of new enterprise zones on a statewide competitive basis. Again, Dave Noble – as the enterprise zone manager – and Jeff Torricelli deserve credit for this success. Like TIF districts, the availability of an enterprise zone is also an important economic development tool.

Downtown Ottawa

The City's commitment to beautifying the downtown through its Gardening and Botanical Arts Brand continues to pay-off through the creation of new businesses and eating places. The **beautification program** moved forward this year with the planting of trees and grass on the 1000 and 1100 blocks of LaSalle Street, the streetscaping of the City parking lot adjacent to the AT&T building on West Madison Street plus a number of smaller projects. Combining the beautification with the ongoing rehabbing of the historic commercial buildings in the downtown has created an ambiance in the downtown which causes people to want to visit, shop, do business and, increasingly, even to live in downtown Ottawa.

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We also remain very excited about the **Columbus Street streetscape** project which we are planning to see completed next year. This one million dollar project – 80% funded by a grant – will provide new historic period lighting, trees and landscaping on Columbus Street from Veterans Memorial Bridge north to Washington Park.

An essential part of the beautification effort is the corps of **volunteers** who take care of plant beds throughout the downtown and the City parks. I want to thank them for their time and commitment. Another reason for the downtown natural beauty is the vision and expertise of Stephanie Stacy, the owner of Garden's Gate Garden Center who serves as our horticulture advisor. She is responsible for the beautiful hanging baskets along with the planters on the street corners and on the steps at City Hall.

The revitalization of the downtown continues with the establishment of these new businesses:

- **In Bloom** – a garden and culinary themed store on the 200 block of West Main Street.
- **Chic & Unique** – a new boutique at Main and LaSalle.
- The **Ottawa Bakery** on Court Street
- **Laurilea's Unique Junk** – expanded and relocated to Court and Main
- **Salt Tree Yoga** – featuring a new salt cave and located on the 300 block of West Main Street
- **Ottawa Millworks** – custom woodworking located on Canal Street
- **O'Nett Gaming Company** – a vintage video and arcade business which has expanded and relocated to West Washington Street.

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Downtown Businesses opening soon include:

- **Sports Express** – custom printed athletic apparel business which has expanded and relocated to West Madison Street.
- **A'Lure** – new restaurant on West Madison Street which will feature outdoor dining in a hidden courtyard with a beautiful mural painted by Laurie Ragan of Ottawa.
- **Mario Espinosa's** new Mexican restaurant with the southwestern U.S. themed façade on West Madison Street.
- Opening in a few months will be **DaSo Wood Fire Grill and Spirits** on Court Street in the former Margarita building.

In addition:

- **Corner 230** restaurant created a new dining room by expanding into the adjacent historic building.
- The **807 Building** is installing a new awning and façade improvements.
- The new owners of the building at **218-220 West Main Street** are completely rehabbing the façade of this historic building which will be retail space.

Special mention needs to be made of two downtown business projects which have the potential to make extraordinary differences to downtown Ottawa.

The historic **Ottawa Boat Club** has been purchased by Larry and Karen Kiest. They are in the early stages of investing in a remarkable effort to preserve and rehab the Boat Club while creating a brew pub along with an upscale restaurant and banquet facility. The project also calls for the beautification of the area of Fox River shoreline from Main Street to the confluence of the Fox and Illinois Rivers.

Another remarkable project is the complete rehabbing of an historic commercial building on LaSalle Street which will house **The Lone Buffalo** – a state of the art,

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upscale brewpub. Owned by Peter Limberger and Inga Carus, The Lone Buffalo – when it opens later this year – is sure to be a major regional draw for the downtown. Part of the project is a tasting room located in the adjacent Carson Building which is expected to open in the near future. With the recent opening of Radium City, another local craft brewery, it is clear that Ottawa is positioning itself to be a downstate craft beer brewing center.

Speaking of the **Carson Building**, it has recently been sold to a local entrepreneur now making plans to fill this large building with a variety of new businesses.

Without a doubt, the greatest disappointment in the downtown was our failure to save the **Little City Building**. As I reported last year, despite having in place a very viable plan to rescue the building and return it to commercial usage, its rapidly deteriorating structural integrity and asbestos contamination made the building impossible to save in the end. As a result, given these safety issues, the City was able to convince the U.S. EPA to demolish the building. In recent days the City gained ownership of the now empty lot and hopes to find a developer to build on the site.

Perhaps recalling the fate of the Little City Building while recognizing the value of returning empty historic buildings to commercial usage, the City has been more aggressive in **rescuing historic buildings** in the downtown that are seemingly abandoned or threatened by demolition. These include the Margarita building at 616 – 618 Court Street and the building at 218-220 West Main Street. The Court Street building was obtained by the City through the abandoned building legal process and will soon be sold, rehabbed with a new façade and opened as a new restaurant. The City purchased the threatened building on Main Street and then sold it to an entrepreneur who is now entirely redoing the two storefront façade, retaining an existing business and creating space for a new business in the other half.

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America In Bloom – Planting Pride

Closely tied to the downtown beautification and revitalization is Ottawa's entry in the national America In Bloom competition. As you know, Ottawa won first place in its population category last year. The results of the 2015 competition were just announced a few days ago at the AIB national symposium in Holland, Michigan. I am pleased to report that while first place in the population category went to Fairhope, Alabama, Ottawa did very well – receiving a maximum “Five Bloom” rating and winning three top awards:

- Special recognition award for Heritage Preservation
- The National Outstanding Achievement Award for Community Involvement
- Special National Award for Most Dynamic Transformation of a Downtown Streetscape
- The City also received a Special Mention for its Flood Control Initiative.

By the way, ten Ottawa area residents were able to attend this year's three day symposium in Holland, Michigan due in large part to the generosity of Mick Rowe of Grand Rapids Enterprises, who paid for all registration fees.

Participation in the America In Bloom program has been 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.

I might also mention that the Public Arts sub-committee of the Ottawa is Blooming effort recently was able to install several new works of public art in the downtown area including a painter's palette featuring colorful flowers in the Jordan block, created by Susan Burton as well as a totem sculpture on LaSalle Street, which was donated by

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the artists. Plans are in the works for an additional totem pole, made possible through a grant from Omni Arts.

Ottawa Waterfront

Last year, I talked about the development of a very exciting concept plan for the 21 acre Ottawa Waterfront. I noted the progress towards site preparation with the former Central School having been demolished, grass seeding done and an innovative plan in place to remove the coal tar deposits discovered in a limited area through a program of environmental testing. Unfortunately, due to the unique underground geology of the area, the initial coal tar clean-up plan using a new burn-in-place technology was not successful. The City is now working with Nicor and ComEd – will cover the cost of the removal project – and are developing a more traditional plan involving excavation and removal of the coal tar.

At the same time, the City is moving forward with the next phase of planning the Waterfront development which involves reviewing the concept and beginning to add the necessary details – exactly how large should the proposed harbor be? How many wet slips are needed? What should the capacity of the entertainment venue be? And many, many more details.

National Disaster Resilience Competition

For the last six months or so, City staff have been working hard to file a very competitive application for a unique federal grant. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is making available on a nationwide basis one billion dollars in unused disaster assistance funding in partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation. The purpose of the grant program is to make communities more resilient to natural

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disasters – such as flooding. Ottawa is partnering with the State of Illinois in filing a grant application. In fact, the State approached Ottawa to participate, being familiar with our efforts and successes in flood plain management. After an initial project review phase earlier this year, the field of potential applicants was pared to just forty – although many of them are very large entities such as the City of Chicago and Cook County.

The project Ottawa is submitting involves the following key segments:

- Upgrading its ability to deal with major floods – which includes building a flood wall around the wastewater treatment facility and helping to provide ejector pumps to hundreds of Ottawa homeowners whose basements tend to flood.
- Spurring economic growth in downtown Ottawa by implementing the Ottawa Waterfront plan now being developed for the former Central School property.
- Utilizing the Harpers Farm property just up the Illinois River on the east end of Ottawa to compensate for the flood plain changes which will need to be made to raise most of the Waterfront above standard flood levels. If the project goes forward large areas of the Harper's Farm property will be developed into conservation areas with wetlands, savannas, prairies and hiking trails.

The application will be filed by the end of October with grant award notification in December. Being awarded any sizable portion of the approximately \$15 million the City is seeking will cut years off the projected implementation time for the Waterfront development while quickly strengthening the City's flood defenses.

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RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

The residential housing construction market continues to steadily recover in Ottawa with 29 new dwelling permits being issued during the last year – up slightly from the year before.

Permits for all types of construction in Ottawa during the past year totaled more than \$34 million.

Increased marketing and public relation efforts by **Heritage Harbor** have resulted in significant exposure for Heritage Harbor, Ottawa and Starved Rock Country in publications like Chicago Magazine, the Chicago Tribune, the Daily Herald and even Forbes. In addition to strong real estate sales, highlights of the year include the opening of the very successful Red Dog Grill; the 100% occupation of Heritage Harbor Marina; the building of the Pelican Landing Swim Club pool on the West Peninsula and the development or completion of a number of new product offerings. These include the Cottages at Pelican Landing and the Flite Series townhomes. In the final planning stage is the Harbor Town Development Project which will consist of a waterfront inn and a dry stack boat storage facility.

IFIBER DEVELOPMENT

Spurred initially by the City of Ottawa and carried forward by the North Central Illinois Council of Governments in partnership with Northern Illinois University, the installation of the \$69 million, 900 mile high speed iFiber broadband access network is now completed. The network blankets the City of Ottawa and includes all of the Ottawa City Hall communications where it has already saved tax payers tens of thousands of dollars in phone and data billings. The good news is the iFiber network is

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now available to area businesses through local internet service providers. For more information, contact the North Central Illinois Council of Governments.

NORTH CENTRAL ILLINOIS TRANSIT (NCAT)

The City of Ottawa continues to be one of the very few cities in the State of Illinois to administer public transportation for an entire county – let alone a county the size of LaSalle County – the second largest county in Illinois in area. During the last fiscal year, ending on June 30, NCAT provided nearly 60,000 rides utilizing a system wide fleet of 23 vehicles. While Ottawa is the recipient of the federal and state grants needed to fund NCAT, its partners in providing the actual transportation include Illinois Valley Community Hospital and Horizon House. Public transportation in LaSalle County continues to grow and is seemingly limited only by vehicle fleet size and budget availability. Looking to an uncertain budget future, NCAT will increasingly rely upon contributions from other local governments and entities being served by NCAT in order to provide the 35% local match needed to match its major state grant. It should be noted that while most NCAT riders are the disabled and elderly, anyone is eligible to use public transportation. A new NCAT feature is the development of a route from Streator to Ottawa to Illinois Valley Community College.

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IVCC OTTAWA CENTER

During the past five years, the IVCC Ottawa Center on West Main Street has provided hundreds of Ottawa and eastern LaSalle County students with outstanding educational opportunities while saving them thousands of dollars in driving expenses to the IVCC Oglesby campus. I am very pleased to report that earlier this year, we were able to negotiate another five year lease with the College. Recognizing the fiscal restraints facing IVCC, the new contract freezes rent levels while providing the Ottawa Center with a new computer lab enabling the College to add more courses. Unfortunately, following a State trend, enrollments at the College have declined sharply. Please let family members and friends planning to attend a four year state university know that by taking their first two years of general education courses here in town at IVCC and then transferring seamlessly to a state university, they can save tens of thousands of dollars in tuition and living expenses.

RIVER FLOODING

Over the past years, Ottawa has aggressively worked to prepare and be ready when river flooding comes our way. We have been very successful and have won national awards. At this point, when the rivers flood, Ottawa has minimal damage, but there do remain a few major projects on our list to accomplish:

1. Construct a flood protection wall around the Wastewater Treatment Plant to permanently protect it from the Illinois River.
2. Elevate Green Street above flood height, including a bridge to allow waters to flow through, so that East Side residents can always get in and out during floods

And projects by others that affect Ottawa residents include:

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3. At the I&M Canal Aqueduct, remove the debris and dredge the sand bar to protect the landmark structure and prevent upstream flooding at the hospital
4. Raise the Ottawa High School levee on the Fox River and get the levee re-certified, to formally get the High School out of the flood plain once again and protect the High School and East Side residents
5. Protect or relocate the YMCA so floods will not affect services to our residents

NEIGHBORHOOD FLOODING

As much as the City has been successful in combating river flooding, we now need to turn our attention to neighborhood flooding and basement flooding, together known as Urban Flooding. The people of our city now suffer from more severe flash floods. It seems like the rains come faster and harder than they used to. Old drainage systems designed to take the rain storms of the past are not enough to handle the cloudbursts of today.

1. To address the problem, the City is looking to launch an aggressive ejector pump program that will give grants to homeowners, especially those of low income, to keep sanitary sewers from backing up into their homes.
2. We are planning on a 2 or 3 million dollar rehabilitation program to the existing combined sewers to tighten them up to keep surface waters out.
3. We are planning a new South Interceptor that will redirect flows from three sanitary pump lift stations by gravity to the treatment plant, opening up much needed capacity in the south side sewers.
4. We are planning a downtown sanitary separation and storm sewer project to address downtown flash flooding and get storm water out of the west side combined sewers.

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All of this will take years and will require improvements by the City and also private improvements at individual properties. Our goal for our residents is that the time will come when heavy rains come and go and we are not damaged and life just goes on. Together, we can tackle this challenge.

NATIONAL SOLUTION SEARCH AWARD

Ottawa was nominated by the US Army Corps of Engineers for the national Solution Search competition. RARE, an International Nongovernment Organization headquartered in Washington D.C., sponsored the event—the first one ever in the continental United States. Ottawa was selected as the first place winner for our floodplain management efforts. The national first place prize to the City included a check for \$25,000.

A few other areas of concern:

EAB MANAGEMENT

As you know, the Emerald Ash Borer has already killed tens of millions of ash trees throughout the Midwest. Now, unfortunately, the EAB is making its way through Ottawa – killing thousands of beautiful and stately ash trees. This summer, the devastation has become much more obvious across the City. Originally, the City attempted to save some of its best ash trees through a program of regular treatment. I am sorry to report, though, that this approach has largely failed and the City is resigned to a program of dead ash tree removal and replacement with other varieties of trees. We expect to remove hundreds of ash trees on public property in the next six months.

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BLIGHT REDUCTION PROGRAM

Ottawa is moving aggressively to deal with blighted and abandoned residential properties across the City. In March, the Illinois Housing Development Authority awarded \$280,000 in funding to the City to help address the blight problem. The City's partner in this effort is the Starved Rock Homes Development Corporation, a not for profit organization affiliated with the Housing Authority of LaSalle County. The funds are being used to purchase and demolish abandoned residences with the intention of making the properties available for eventual reuse or redevelopment. At the moment, there are 18 properties on the blighted list with seven being rehabbed or demolished outside the program. This program will allow the City to protect neighborhoods from blight and preserve neighboring property values.

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CITY SERVICES

POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Ottawa Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Brent Roalson, has continued to maintain its long time standing as one of the most professional and progressive law enforcement agencies in the area. In 2014 the department responded to 14,564 calls. The department continued to support established, successful programs such as the Peer Jury, aimed at keeping young, first time offenders out of the juvenile court system, and newer programs such as the Child Abduction Response (CART) Team, intended to create a quick, structured investigative and search process meant to bring endangered children home safely.

Promotions & Recognitions

On August 1st, 2015 **(officer) Garry Johnson** an 18 year veteran of the Ottawa Police Department was promoted to the Rank of Corporal.

Corporal Jeff Bangert a 15 year veteran was promoted on August 1st, 2015. Corporal Bangert was promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

The Ottawa Police Department also continues to show its greener side through the continued successful support of the Prescription Pill and Drug Disposal program, or P2D2 which has since its inception collected **more than 9,000 pounds** of prescription medications from the public that otherwise may have ended up in our landfills, groundwater, waterways, and eventually, drinking water.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The primary mission of Ottawa Fire Department is to provide a variety of services designed to protect the lives and property of our customer base, the citizens of Ottawa and surrounding area from adverse effects of fire, sudden medical emergencies or the

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exposure to dangerous conditions caused by man and nature in an efficient, professional and well trained manner. The department provides fire suppression, rescue, public education and Advance emergency medical services. Our firefighters accomplished approximately 4000 hours of training this year. Along with firefighting and Advance Life Support our members are trained in water rescue, ice rescue, technical rescue and Hazard Materials Operations. The department also provides emergent and non-emergent transfer service for Ottawa and the surrounding area. Under the oversight of Fire Chief Steve Haywood, Deputy Chief Andy Borkowski manages the operations of the busiest emergency service in the County. In 2014 the Ottawa Fire Department ran 3891 calls out of two stations.

Our department has a class 3 ISO rating. There are 2541 fire departments in Illinois and only 65 communities have a higher ISO rating. The Ottawa fire Department remains a strong presence in the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System Division 25. Currently OFD has 4 members on the County Hazardous Response team and 9 members on the Technical Rescue Team. As a member of MABAS 25 our firefighters have responded to Tornado disasters in Sublett, Rochelle, and Coal City. In the past year OFD has given Mutual Aid to Utica, Grand Ridge, Naplate and Wallace. We continue our Pre-plan Inspection Program of Commercial, Industrial, Education, and Health Care Facilities.

Last month Captain Andy Borkowski was promoted to Deputy Chief. Andy Borkowski is a 22 year veteran of the department and he has a Bachelor of Science degree in Fire Science Management and an Associate of Science degree in Fire Science. Lt. Jason Schneider was promoted to Captain and Firefighter Adam Wampler promoted to Lieutenant. In addition, the department has a new firefighter paramedic.

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In February of this year the department took ownership of a new ambulance. The 2015 Chevy ambulance replaces a 2005 Ford that had over a 100,000 miles. With the purchase of this ambulance we are able to maintain 4 advance life support units. This new Medic unit will be used for transfers and emergency response.

This year the department applied for and received an Illinois Plan for Radiological Accident (IPRA) Grant. The \$20,000.00 grant was used to purchase computers for front line apparatus.

The Fire Department participates in Fire Prevention and Educational activities in the community which include visits to schools. The Fire Department Public Education program had approximately 1000 contact hours to approximately 4000 children and adults. The Public Education program deals mainly with Pre-K thru 4th grade children. The Fire Department participates in National Night Out, LaSalle County Safety Fair and other events throughout the year. The OFD provides fire extinguisher training to local business and will meet with business to assist with evacuation drill training.

We continue to strive to provide our citizens the best possible service we can.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

PUBLIC WORKS – WASTEWATER DIVISION

We have just finished a half million dollar contract with National Power Rodding to clean and televise the City's combined sewers. This information is put on software program called T-4 Spatial Underground, which becomes a powerful tool for management, maintenance collaboration and regulatory compliance.

This tool also helps in making accurate risk assessments, planning work to target problem areas, and mitigating potential CSO's (combined sewer overflows)

PUBLIC WORKS – WATER DIVISION

The City continues the annual hydrant flushing program, to test the hydrants for adequate flow and pressure, remove sediments from pipes to maintain water clarity and quality in the distribution pipes and to ensure that the hydrants are operable.

Also, last year the city completed a major rebuild of our water treatment plant with an investment of about \$1 million. One of the results is a safer water treatment process for our workers using a new anti-scalent in place of an acid-based product used in the past.

PUBLIC WORKS - STREETS DIVISION

The City continued to support a robust street improvement program, this year to the tune of about \$1.6 million.

Included in this year's program was the complete resurfacing of about 35 blocks of streets and 7 blocks of alleys, as well as the complete resurfacing to the Riordan Pool

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parking lot and entrance. We also installed over 5,200 feet of new curbing in 24 block areas, including 4 blocks where there was 100% curb replacement. This work is still in progress and should be completed within the next few weeks.

For the first time this season city crews utilized our new spray patch equipment allowing the city to extend the lifespan of asphalt streets a few more years before needing resurfacing, work that was formerly contracted out.

One thing we discovered when recently resurfacing Jackson Street was what good shape some of the underlying brick streets seem to be in. I've talked to Commissioner Less about this, and we want to determine what other dilapidated asphalt streets might have quality brick underneath, and explore restoring rather than paving over these streets.

PUBLIC WORKS - 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 2015, the board moved forward with more improvements to city recreation facilities, including Ottawa's newest baseball field, Whitney Field. Additionally, play equipment was installed and the sidewalk work at Hollywood Park was completed, bringing a much-needed public play area to a previously underserved part of Ottawa. The board is looking at how to best utilize the newly acquired Thornton Park area. And, the board, along with Ottawa Girls Fast Pitch, began work on a fourth field in the Peck Park Softball Complex.

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The Rec board continued its renovation of Riordan Pool. Throughout the summer, the pool fulfilled its commitment to be open all possible days and hosted many community events such as the All-city swim meet, a city-wide open house, and “Drool at the Pool,” a fundraiser for Pet Project.

Just as important as the facilities are the youth and adult activities. 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 running to volleyball to wrestling. Overall, Ottawa Recreation summer activities served over 3,100 of the youth of Ottawa and the surrounding areas

For adults, the long tradition of sponsoring outstanding adult softball continued this year at June Gross and Roy Sanders fields, but adult recreation does not end with softball. Again this summer, Jane and Rod Schomas volunteered their time to host dance lessons. This fall, the Playground and Recreation Board started an adult kickball league, the first in the area. A favorite of our senior citizens, the annual Harvest Dance featuring Class Act is scheduled for October 18th from 2-4 pm at the Knights of Columbus. And in the winter, Ottawa Recreation continues to sponsor its adult basketball league.

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. Through careful stewardship and foresight, Ottawa Playgrounds and Recreation will continue to add to its legacy of providing outstanding facilities and programs for the citizens of Ottawa.

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DAYTON BLUFFS PRESERVE

The Dayton Bluffs Preserve sets aside 253 acres along the Fox River on the NE corner of Ottawa. Last year, we annexed this property into the City while leasing it on a long term basis from The Conservation Foundation. The Foundation is very actively working to eradicate a number of invasive species from the property with the help of volunteers and monthly work days. The City will soon begin working on a development and conservation plan in partnership with the Foundation and will take over management of the property in 2017.

TOURISM

Driven by our proximity to the Chicago area, the beauty of our City and our rivers and a burgeoning awareness of Ottawa as an unique shopping and dining destination, tourism has become perhaps the City's fastest growing industry.

Ottawa Visitors Center

The ability of the Ottawa Visitors Center to promote and market the community to visitors and guests continues to grow. Much of the recent growth was accomplished under the leadership of Julie Johnson who retired earlier this year as Executive Director of the OVC. I want to thank Julie for her extraordinary commitment to building awareness far and near about the many outstanding and attractive features of our community.

Very few, if any, visitor centers in cities the size of Ottawa in Illinois feature an in-house graphic design team and full time social media marketing capabilities. As a result, the OVC has the ability to deliver high quality tourism marketing designs and advertising messages to specific demographic groups about Ottawa's events and attractions. Furthermore, the OVC's partnership with the Heritage Corridor Convention

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and Visitors Bureau has helped produce an increase this year in international visitors to Ottawa especially from places like France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The outstanding tourism attraction efforts on the part of the OVC continue to be recognized statewide. For the second consecutive year, the OVC won the award at the Illinois Governors Conference on Tourism for the Best Marketing Campaign in Illinois in the under \$700,000 marketing campaign budget category.

Reddick Mansion

Reddick Mansion continues to be the crown jewel of our historic architecture heritage and a “must-see” for many visitors. The building has been lovingly cared for by the Reddick Mansion Association for decades. The City and the Mansion Association are now working to finalize a new lease agreement clearly defining the roles of the City and the Association to insure the preservation of this architectural masterpiece.

Starved Rock Country

Although only two years old, the effort to build a Starved Rock Country Brand already seems to be having an impact. An increasing number of the estimated 2.4 million annual visitors to Starved Rock State Park are beginning to explore the communities surrounding the Park. The City and Visitors Center are pleased to work with Starved Rock Country in promoting its major events held in Ottawa. A key event is the Starved Rock Country Marathon which this year began and ended in downtown Ottawa – bringing over 1,000 runners and visitors to Ottawa where they spent at least a half million dollars. In addition to sponsoring a concert series, 28,000 magazines are produced each quarter to promote Starved Rock Country.

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Festivals

Increasingly important to Ottawa tourism attraction efforts are the Ottawa festivals.

The **Midwest Morel Fest** in May has grown – especially its home beer brewing component -- to the point this year of needing to switch to a larger location at the Jordan Block.

Despite some rainy weather on Sunday, the **Ottawa Two Rivers Wine & Jazz Festival** set its fifth consecutive attendance record with just under 5,000 paying attendees – an increase of 19% from 2014.

An important factor in its growth may have been the addition of craft beer.

Blessed by nearly perfect weather, the **Ottawa Riverfest** was also well attended. The best received music performance seemed to be that of Silver Bullet STL – marketed as the nation's #1 Bob Seger tribute band.

Although considerably impacted by a major storm on Friday, the **Oktoberfest** nevertheless attracted a large crowd which enjoyed great German food, beer and music along with yodeling, beer stein racing and bags contests. I want to thank the Ottawa First organization for not only putting this event together but also for leading the effort every year to provide Ottawa with wonderful 4th of July fireworks.

Ottawa's traditional fall family event – the **Scarecrow Fest** – attracted huge and happy crowds last weekend to a downtown Ottawa decorated with all types of bright and colorful scarecrows. Thanks goes to the Ottawa Downtown Merchants for organizing this very successful event.

Plans are underway for our annual **Festival of Lights celebration** and a revamped **Ice Odyssey**.

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CITY FINANCES

The City's financial condition is sound. I note the impressive pie chart provided by City Treasurer Don Harris with a breakdown of City revenues. In particular:

- The City's main operating account, the General Corporate Fund was again balanced for the fiscal year ending April 30, 2016. Total expected revenues and expenses are each \$15,752,000.
- Total annual expenses for all city activities including all governmental activities, water and wastewater services, and other business activities are approximately \$29 - \$30 million
- The City covers these expenses primarily through charges for services, grants, taxes, tax increment financing, and investment income
- The City's debt has been refinanced when appropriate to take advantage of lower interest rates
- City employees and their collective bargaining units have worked effectively with the City to help to manage payroll and benefit expenses
- The City has continually and consistently funded its employee pension plans to their actuarially recommended amounts
- The City's important revenue streams appear healthy. Our **sales tax** revenues, dropped by over \$400,000 in the recession in 2009. That number has gradually worked its way up and we are now at a record level of annual sales tax revenues of about \$5.7 million (calendar year 2014).
- A similar drop in the **State Income Tax** revenues the City receives has also come back to an annual level of about \$1.8 million (calendar year 2014).
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- Our **hotel/motel tax** revenues have shown a steady increase in part due to the new Fairfield Inn & Suites, bringing in about \$300,000 annually, which supports our tourism and special event programs.
- Revenue from **video gaming** in Ottawa continues to grow. Although, the State budget crisis is preventing actual payment for the moment, through August of this year, Ottawa's share of video gaming revenues was \$146,000, or about \$200,000 annually.

RETIREMENTS

The City has again seen several long-time employees retire this year:

Appointed Staff: Gary Erickson, 44 years of service

Frank Franzetti, 27 years of service

Bill Boettcher, 10 years of service (now working part-time)

Public Works: Fletcher Wells, 41 years of service

Joe Lubshina, 23 years of service

Joe Terrones, 11 years of service

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CONCLUSION

So, all in all, I think things are going well in Ottawa. Collectively we've created a great vision for the community, a vision which we need to continually refine, build on and keep alive.

I also continue to feel honored to be Mayor of a community that cares. I appreciate the close working relationship the City has with the Chamber. I'm ever amazed at the number of people who will step up to the plate and volunteer their time or resources to make great things happen. And I'm appreciative 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.