

2009 STATE OF THE VILLAGE OF LOCKLAND

Lockland continued to progress during 2008. The Village ended the year with \$450,000 in General Fund reserve. While that is not at a level that we are comfortable with, it is far better than when the State put the Village in its "Fiscal Watch" several years back. The State recognized our progress when it removed the Village from the fiscal watch in October 2008. Since then things have continued to improve.

Our earnings tax receipts were 8.3% (\$165,000) higher in 2008 than in 2007 largely because of our economic development efforts. One could easily be frustrated that improvements have not come as rapidly as we would like but our successes are impressive given the State and national economic recession.

Progress continues at the Celotex site on South Wayne Avenue. The environmental problems that have hindered development have been addressed and we expect to soon see building that will lead to an increase in the approximately 200 jobs already created on the site. We have worked with the Rheinhart/Catanzaro Food Service Corporation to not only maintain their presence in the Village but to expand their operations here. Their plans are complete and construction has started.

We continue to work with the owners of the Stearns and Foster site on Wyoming Avenue to push for more rapid demolition and development preparation of that site. Finding a developer/partner that is willing to take risks associated with the project given the uncertain timetable for the widening of I-75 and the general state of the economy make this, and other developments, difficult.

Lockland has not been immune from the national decline in housing starts and the sub prime mortgage crisis. In 2007 we contacted the developers and marketers for the new Westview Park Subdivision and gained their pledges for a review of the marketing and pricing strategies for the development. To date only one house has been occupied and despite the developer and the Village efforts only the initial three houses are constructed. We have been working on the creation of program that will offer new home buyers tax incentives to locate in the Village. This type of program has been successful in Cincinnati and other communities. It is hoped that the program will jump start the housing development.

Other efforts to improve the Village housing stock have been more successful. We continue to demolish abandoned or sub standard buildings through vigorous code enforcement. The County recognized our good work in this area and recently reserved over \$200,000 to assist our efforts. Our partnership with Cincinnati Housing Partners also continues. The 2007 grant of \$450,000 that we worked with Cincinnati Housing Partners (CHP) to obtain for the construction of 8 new houses in Lockland is already paying dividends. Ground has been broken on the initial four houses and four more ground breakings are scheduled for the spring. In addition, we facilitated the transfer of an abandoned house on Williams Street to the CHP. The CHP immediately secured the house, fixed the roof, and cleared the lot of debris and a fallen tree. The house will soon be turned into owner occupied housing.

Each of these actions may not seem like much when looked at in isolation but collectively they result in Lockland being an even better place to live and work.

The Village continues to be recognized as a Tree City USA by the National Arbor Day Foundation. In the past year we have planted roughly 100 trees in the village.

Our efforts in tightening administrative procedures in Village operations are also paying off. In addition to the improved code enforcement, we have tightened the water bill collection process and reviewed our accounting practices.

I am confident that we will not have a repeat of the past unacceptable behavior of a small minority of staff. It is no secret that we found two instances of embezzlement as we tightened our procedures. Legal proceedings were initiated in both cases which resulted in guilty pleas. Stolen money has been recovered and the guilty parties are being punished. I remain proud of the quality performance of our remaining Village staff and support them in their efforts to properly serve our residents.

The 2009 Appropriations Budget recognizes the continued improvement in the Village's financial condition. The success of our economic development efforts is best demonstrated by the increased earnings tax collections in 2008 over 2007.

The 2009 Appropriations Budget contains:

- A new police vehicle is included. The intent is to establish the practice of retiring one vehicle each year to maintain an operational fleet.
- A new fire command vehicle is budgeted to replace the current 12 year old vehicle.
- New energy efficient fire bay doors are budgeted.
- 40 communication devices are budgeted for the fire department to keep current with communication center requirements.
- A mobile data computer and radio is budgeted for the rescue truck.
- A new garbage truck purchase is budgeted.
- A carport is budgeted to protect the police vehicles.
- A backhoe and a pole barn are budgeted to be shared by the Service and Water Departments.
- \$25,000 is budgeted as a match for grant(s) for playground equipment.

Finally, I must again compliment the residents of Lockland for their civic pride. The work of the Lockland Beautification Committee under the direction of Council Member Ron Johnson continues to make our Village a better place to live. The volunteers in our recreation programs are much appreciated. We should be proud that our residents generally work to keep their homes and businesses maintained and presentable. That civic pride is at the root of what makes Lockland a great place to live.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you as Mayor. Working with you to make Lockland an even better place to live makes public service worthwhile.

Jim Brown
Mayor of Lockland