

THE CITY OF
NORTH COLLEGE HILL

★ ★ MAYOR'S ★ ★

NEWSLETTER

MAY, 2009

HAPPY SPRING... Finally! The sun is out, flowers are blooming and the grass is growing. It won't be long and we will all have our summertime chores to do while listening to the Reds on radio. Let's hope this is the year. OK, so that may be a stretch but this IS the year for NCH. We all have been struggling a bit and that includes those of us at City Hall. This is the time that we all need to get a little inventive in the way we do things. As our new President says, "we must address the current problems without losing sight of the big picture in the future." We'd like you to take a few minutes away from the yard work and catch up on what's happening now and some exciting things coming down the road. Kick back, catch a cool one and here we go!

THE ECONOMY - This subject is on everybody's mind and as it affects everything we are about to talk about in this newsletter, let's just get it out of the way first. The economy kind of stinks! NO BIG NEWS THERE. Probably the least understood thing about local government is exactly how the City's money is collected and spent and how do times like these affect the budget. Well, here goes my feeble attempt to try to explain it in everyday language.

NCH, by law, cannot spend more than it takes in. The Federal government obviously can and does. Our City is just like your household. If we borrow money, we have to pay it back with monthly payments. While you and I get paid for our work, the City generates the bulk of its funds from the things we all know and love...taxes. We all are aware of the property taxes and the income taxes but there are other forms of taxation that unless you are an employer, you are probably unaware of. There are employment taxes, licenses, permits and other miscellaneous taxes that are paid by businesses and self employed people that generate more income for the City. I will touch on this point again shortly. Now, here comes the fun part. NCH generates nearly three-quarter's of our income from earnings tax. That's bad! Why? First, that means you and I are shouldering a huge burden. Second, earnings tax is obviously generated by those people who are employed. Has the light come on yet? The more people out of work, the less money the city has coming in to pay the bills. Remember, we cannot spend more than we make, so, we are forced to make decisions. Some are easy; some get real tough because they affect people's lives directly and indirectly. Now you see why it is so important to do everything possible to support existing business and to attract healthy, vital new business into town.

All those employees of those businesses pay taxes and help take the burden off us citizens. And, the higher the salary of those employees, the more tax money we get. We just love well paid people. Another little tidbit! If you feel your real estate taxes are high, keep in mind, the City only receives approximately 6 cents per tax dollar that we can spend on keeping our City running. Please take time to read your tax bill and see where your money is going. You'll be surprised.

The part that gets interesting is what is called the "General Fund". Imagine a big pot into which you put all of your money. That is what the General Fund is. This is required by Ohio. ALL monies must go into this pot, from which we must take funds to pay the bills. HOWEVER, now that we got that clear, there is an exception to that rule. These exceptions are called "Special Funds". You all are familiar with these. They are the Street Levy and the Senior Levy. These are additional "pots" into which the monies that are collected go. Here is the part that few understand. The money in those "pots" cannot be spent on anything except for what that pot is established. In other words, we could have a million dollars in the Street Levy Fund pot and we could have 5 cents in the General Fund pot BUT, we can't take money from the Street pot and put it in the General pot. So, you see, we can literally have over a million dollars of cash in the bank but we may not be able to touch it. Don't kill the messenger. Our challenge is to continually figure out how best to spend the money we have available, and as you can imagine, there are lot's of opinions on that subject.

POLICE DEPARTMENT - It will come as no big shock to anyone that the economy has affected all departments. However, the public safety comes first so we have been trying hard to maintain our level of protection. We have been able to increase the number of part time officers available for duty which really helps. A sign of the economic conditions was obvious when we gave the Civil Service test for full-time and part-time officers. Nearly 50 people showed up in March to take the test.

We have applied for Federal Stimulus funds for enough money to fund two additional Officers. This would be great but don't hold your breath. Our chances are slim. We also have met with the Governor's office and asked for assistance in Public Safety funding. Again, it is a long shot but it doesn't cost anything to ask.

Big thanks to our Citizens on Patrol. They continue to do a great job and really do help our police in identifying potential problems before they become big problems.

In trying to plan for the future, we need to concentrate on crime prevention just as hard as we do on apprehension, maybe even more so. Think about it. Once the crime is committed, somebody's already been negatively impacted. Wouldn't it be better to prevent the crime BEFORE it happens? What did they say about that horse and the barn door? To that end, there is once again much talk about getting the youth involved in activities interacting with the police as well as with the local churches.

No matter how good or big our police force is nothing reduces crime as much as observant citizens. If you see something that doesn't look quite right, call 521-7171. If you see an emergency, call 911. Do not hesitate. We are all in this together and in today's economic climate, the potential for an increase in burglaries is great. Be a good neighbor and take care of one another.

FIRE DEPARTMENT - A fire department open house has been scheduled for July 11th from 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. to celebrate the arrival of the new aerial truck. Please come and check it out. The Fire Department had participated in a free smoke detector/battery program for years. Unfortunately, a representative from the Red Cross has informed us the program has been suspended due to a lack of funding. Surprise, surprise!

NCHFD hosted an 80 hour fire Inspector class and we offer congratulations to the following new fire inspectors: Bosko, Braun, Metz, Kovach, Lockwood and S. O'Shea. Great Job! Chief Fels has initiated several new ideas into the department and has offered the Administration and Council some short and long term plans. They are quite exciting and we are working on ways to see them come to reality. More on this in the next newsletter.

Thanks to all of those involved with our Fire Department. They, like all of our departments are doing an unbelievable job. We are proud of you all and glad your part of our City.

PUBLIC WORKS - The bad news is that our long time Public Works Director, John Knuf, is retiring. John has been with the City for over 30 years and has been the Director of Public Works since 1979. The good news is that John has agreed to return as a part-time employee. So, good luck and happy retirement AND welcome back! We are very pleased to have him back.

As you may know, a few years ago we teamed up with Mt. Healthy and purchased a street sweeper. We share the equipment which allows both cities to sweep the streets on a regular basis. The schedule is every other month. It is a lot better if cars are not parked on the streets when the sweeper comes through. So, if you can, move your cars to help out. We also jointly own a bucket truck. This is used for changing traffic light bulbs and installing decorations. It comes in very handy.

The Christmas decorations were once again outstanding. We had several requests to leave the little lights on the trees along Galbraith Road. They did look good but too much of a good thing is not good. A big thank you to the guys and all the work they continue to do.

Landscaping is always important to us and we will try to do the best we can while paying attention to the budget. If you are interested in donating for annuals for the islands please call Tricia at City Hall 521-7413.

STREETS AND HIGHWAYS - If it's spring it must be time for the mud to start flying. This past year has been a banner year for us receiving grants for road construction. We received funding for Norman, Pin Oak, Goodman, and Carpenter. It looks like all of these projects will be going strong this year so get ready for the mess. We have been very successful in our ability to acquire the State grants so a big thank you to our city engineers, JMA Consultants. JMA is an outgrowth of our old Engineering firm, Joseph A. Allen, Engineers and they are responsible for writing our grant applications. Just keep those good applications coming.

RECREATION - The big news is obviously the status of our swimming pool. Our schools are building a completely new campus which is going to be great. However, what you may not realize is the fact that the new elementary school is being built in the field that is right next to our pool. As of this writing, the field is your basic sea of mud. In the coming months, however, the field will be full of workers, machinery, trucks and building materials. Obviously, this has been a concern for us at City Hall. Also, when the mud turns to dust, it tends to blow and would do so in the direction of the pool. The Contractors building the school and the School Administration will do everything and anything possible to try to minimize problems but, any construction site has built in temptations and potential trouble. After a visit by our insurance agent, we were strongly advised to not open the pool this year.

This decision was made somewhat easier when we received the financial figures for the pool. In 2008, the pool was subsidized by the general fund with nearly \$75,000 and that was with decent weather. Regardless of the safety concerns, we don't want to gamble on having a significantly reduced attendance which would increase our subsidy. Thus, these two factors together played roles in our decision to close the pool for this year. There will be no passes sold for 2009. The good news is that this will give our Recreation Commission a whole year to plan for a whole new look for our pool operations in 2010. I will be asking them to create new programs and to co-ordinate with the YMCA so as to present our citizens with updated, enjoyable and expanded services in 2010. Our pool is an important element in the history of our City and we will do anything possible to keep it viable into the future. This was one of those times when we had to make a choice between bad and worse. Residents can contact the Powel Crosley, Jr. YMCA at 521-7112 or the City of Mt. Healthy 931-8840 for the 2009 pool season. NCH residents are welcome at these pools.

No decision has been made as to whether there will be a community picnic this year. The field where we played the games is gone and the pool will be closed. Watch the newspapers for more info on the status of the picnic.

You may have noticed the signs for Northern Hills Baseball signups. Don't be confused. That's us. We have joined forces with College Hill to form an expanded program for the kids. It seemed like a natural and everybody wins. Play Ball!

CITY/SCHOOL PROJECTS - The City and School have nearly completed our agreement for the property swap that we discussed in previous newsletters. The result is the school gets a much improved building site plan and the City gets the Clovernook School Building and property. So what are we going to do with the property and why? Why are we looking at spending money on this building when we need money for increased police and fire personnel? Well, here is the short and long term plan.

First, the school plan is much, much better with the property they received from us. Everybody wins on that one. We get the School AND open land. We have to replace our public works building and salt facility. The fact is that our Public Works facility is old and needs updating and our current salt facility must be replaced. It will cost us approximately \$225,000 for a new Public Works building and salt dome.

We need to do that right away. We will pay for it by restructuring our current total debt service so that our annual payments will not increase above the current level. It will not affect our ability to add necessary personnel in the future. Now the big picture! The Clovernook School has enough space and amenities to serve as a Community Center with little or no additional money being spent. We will be able to provide much needed meeting space for our various organizations like the American Legion Post. It is handicap accessible, has a completely equipped kitchen, a full gym and stage area, and is in excellent condition. All of this would occupy less than half of the available space. The long term plan is to move the current City Administration Offices and Police Department to the site as well. A special study shows that there is more than enough room to do so with minimal cost. What that will allow us to do is to sell or lease the current Administrative Offices on Galbraith Road. This is valuable land for business use and we will not only earn money from the land but continued annual income from the employees that will work in a future facility.

If you read the opening paragraphs of this newsletter, you will see the wisdom of this plan. The long term financial benefits to the City is the increase in annual income from increased earnings tax and the lease and/or sale of the land will help offset the costs of any remodeling at the Clovernook site.

We can then enlarge the Fire Department Facilities by letting them expand into the vacated Police Department. Our original City Hall Building can then become the headquarters of the NCH Historical Society and Museum. If that sounds crazy, then you don't know the extent of our historical society. They have assembled volumes of historical documents and memorabilia and need a place to store and display them. As this is a private group, they will not be funded by the City and will be responsible for the operation and maintenance of the building, thus, no expense to the City. There are several potential grants for such uses in the State of Ohio through the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, our historical society would finally have a home. As the cost of staffing must be considered, we have met with and are collaborating with several local churches who have come forward to help. We will not enter into a facility that we can not afford to staff. The key work to success is "co-operation" and it seems we're getting it. The best news is that none of this has to be done until we feel comfortable in doing so. We can do it next year or next decade. There is no rush so we have a two fold advantage, we can set priorities as time and circumstances demand and we have a long range, reasonable plan for future development of the City. Future Administrations and Councils will have options we never had before.

Economic Development - Lot's to talk about here. We are quite proud of the fact that while our country is in the midst of a terrible recession, we here in NCH have expanded our business base and are continuing to do so. Here is the latest:

VanZandt's Restaurant – Scheduled to open by Labor Day, they have purchased the Budna Grille and, with the help of our Economic Development Director, secured loans from Park National Bank and the Small Business Administration Loan Program.

Walgreens – Is scheduled to open their new facility at Hamilton & Galbraith in early 2010.

Northern Hills Pharmacy – Will purchase the vacated Disc World facility on Galbraith Road and relocate from the current location at Galbraith & Daly.

Family Dollar store will be opening soon on Goodman Avenue.

We applied for and received a grant from the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP). We will receive \$350,000 for property acquisition and/or demolition. The first success in this program was the demolition of Swinging Doors Bar on Parrish. Instead of neighborhood blight, we will have at least two new homes. Our second awarded grant was for the acquisition of a vacant and blighted house at 6908 Grace Avenue. We have other properties on our list for the NSP funds.

We have continued a relationship with Cincinnati Housing Partnership in creating and redeveloping housing in our neighborhoods. We currently have three successful projects completed and they are working on three more this year.

We also have received grants from Hamilton County that will allow us to make low interest loans or partial grants for façade improvements in our business district.

We received another grant for \$120,000 to acquire commercial properties that have become eyesores throughout the City. We will be using these in combination with other grants to effect the successful demolition of problem properties.

These are the projects that we can talk about at this time. There are other "irons in the fire", which are more sensitive that I wish we could talk about but you know how that goes.

To give you some idea of the importance of development to a City, the permit fees alone for the new school campus amounted to over \$100,000. That's right. I didn't hit the wrong button. This figure does NOT include the earnings tax we get from the workers that are building the buildings. Hopefully, now you will see the importance of meaningful development.

We will more than likely see very little, if any, stimulus package money. The big guys have gobbled it up pretty quickly and there isn't much left for us little guys. We will keep plugging and win!

BITS AND PIECES

- It is hard to find adequate words to describe what Bob Harris has meant to this City and to me personally over the last 25 years. Bob is retiring from the Board of Zoning Appeals and he will be missed. Bob has been a good friend and an outstanding public servant. He has served as Clerk of Court, Recreation Commission member, member of Council and BZA member. Thanks Bob for being there when it counts.
- The Mayor's Ball was just that, a real ball. We're giving the Shrine nearly \$3,000. Thanks to everybody that helped make it a success.
- A State of the City address has been scheduled for 6:30 p.m., Thursday, June 11th. It will be held at the NCH Senior Center located at 1586 Goodman Avenue. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend.

- Don't forget our Seniors this November. The levy is up for renewal and WILL NOT increase your taxes.
- Speaking of seniors, congratulations to the Center on their 25th Anniversary. I remember helping open the original center. Now I can belong to it. That's scary.
- Our student government day was a huge success. What a great group of students. As a result of that day, the students have formed a "youth task force" to help the City address the problems/concerns of our junior population. How great is that?
- Congratulations to Kim Trytten, Band Director at NCH High School and the Pops Band. This spring will be the Trojan Band's 50th annual Pop's concert.
- We will be starting our "Yard of the Month" awards in June, so spruce up your yard!
- I have to admit, one of the highlights of my years as Mayor was being allowed to operate the super sized backhoe that tore down "Swinging Doors". I realized a boyhood dream. All those years playing with toy bulldozers, backhoes and trucks and then getting a chance to operate a "real" one. It was awesome!!! I guess I'm still just a big kid. You know what? I'm not sorry about that.

Well, that's it for this time. We covered a lot of ground and thanks for taking the time to read about our city. While we have our challenges, we also have great opportunities. Life is never easy but if it was, anyone could handle it. You, the citizens, are special. We are citizens of North College Hill and **that** is special. Our history, our courage, our dedication and our commitment to the future makes this a special place. I continue to thank God and thank you for allowing me the privilege to be a part of it.

See you next time.



Dan Brooks, Mayor

Just a thought: "I can accept failure. What I can't accept is not trying"...

Michael Jordan



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