

T H E C I T Y O F
N O R T H C O L L E G E H I L L

★ ★ M A Y O R ' S ★ ★

N E W S L E T T E R

O C T O B E R , 2 0 0 9

Wasn't the summer short! I must have slept through August because I don't know where it's gone. But, fall is here and it looks like we're in the middle of the bi-annual sign fest. Well, in the mean time, an awful lot has been going on and unless you haven't been out lately, N.C.H. is the "Crossroads of Construction". It is exciting and I'm anxious to tell you all about it. So please, pull up a chair, pop open a cold something and enjoy!

POLICE – Our Officers continue to do a great job and in a most professional manner. We are very glad to report that we have not had to make any personnel cuts in our department and do not anticipate any. We see the challenges that are being faced in other cities and are pleased to be in the position we are. We value all of our people and know their importance in making our City a great place to live. As can be expected this election year, there will be a variety of rumors, comments and opinions floating around. One of the more popular ones is that Council cut the Police budget by \$200,000. This "story" got going due to an erroneous statement made at a Council Committee meeting but here are the facts: we spent \$1,832,000.00 or 48.6% of our total income on our Police Department in 2008. That's a lot. In fact, it is one of the largest percentages of monies allocated to a Police Department by any city in the area. We looked into the budget and anticipated the poor economy and realized that if we were going to keep our level of staff, we needed to eliminate any unnecessary spending. The result? We were able to reduce the Police budget by \$84,968 yet INCREASE the amount allocated for the all important *wages* from \$885,524 in 2008 to \$900,000 in 2009. These are the hard facts and real numbers. If anyone would like to see the figures and/or books, we'll be glad to show them. It is public record. Ah yes, don't you just love an election year! So much for the rumors.

During our search of facts, we discovered another interesting item. We found that, while we had a lot of calls for service in 2008 (16,642), we actually had more in 2007 (18,866). Want to know something even more interesting? In 2000, we had 11,447 calls for service compared to 16,642 in 2008. That is about 5,200 less calls. We also spent about \$450,000 less in 2000 than in 2008. We even have *2 more officers* on the street *now* than we did in 2000. I find that interesting on several levels. The bad news is that there were 170 violent crimes in 2000 compared to 311 in 2008. What bugs me is why did crime go up while we increased the number of officers on the street? I have an opinion which I will share later in this newsletter.

We are pleased to announce that the Administration, Council and our Police Association have begun a process of "brainstorming" in order to come up with innovative ways to better serve our citizens while maintaining efficiency and professionalism. We're excited about this arrangement and look forward to great results.

I'm sure hoping we can get our Safety Enforcement Program off the ground this year. It puts more police on the street and controls traffic violations at the same time.

FIRE DEPARTMENT – It's been busy in the Fire Department this summer. Chief Fels has submitted a very detailed report outlining directions in which our Department can go that will improve service both short and long term. What really is encouraging about this is that, once again, our great firefighters are stepping up and becoming an active part of creating a more effective and efficient department. We continue to be very proud of them.

Speaking of being proud, we're pleased to announce the appointment of **Dave Gerding** as Deputy Fire Chief. It's been a long process but good things are worth the wait. Congratulations and good luck!

More Congrats go out to our four new Lieutenants: Pat Seyfried, Jermaine Caldwell, Ryan Schwitalski, Joe O'Shea. Way to go and good luck!

Our fire department has received a \$2,500 medical equipment and training grant from the State. As tight as things are at the state level, I think we did O.K.

Have you seen our big, new, shiny fire truck? Officially it is a "Quint", but hey, to me it's still a fire truck. It is a dual purpose vehicle capable of aerial operation and pump operations. Those babies are a tad expensive. This little item cost over \$600,000 and is paid for by utilizing the insurance reimbursement monies we collect for our emergency runs. No money is taken from the general fund. Also, the Insurance underwriters, or ISO as they're called, give us a better rating with the addition of such vehicles. This means that your fire insurance rates are lower, so we all win. It is a great piece of equipment, though, and will serve us well for a lot of years. But, what happens when you buy a new car? You got it. It gets wrecked. Yes, our brand new truck was pulling out of the garage and the release cord for the overhead door caught on the aerial ladder and released the door. It came down on the truck. Ouch! Oh well, I'm glad we have insurance.

Congratulations and a job well done go out to Kevin Craig and Justin Bell. They have obtained their Paramedic certification. **That gives us 9 current Paramedics on staff!** With two more scheduled to graduate in 2010, we will have a total of 11 by mid-2010. We are getting much closer to our goal of providing full paramedic service to our citizens. It takes a lot of work and dedication to earn this certification so, congratulations and thanks!

Our Fire Chief wants to remind citizens about two programs that NCHFD has participated in for some time now. The Vial of L.I.F.E. (Lifesaving Information For Emergencies) allows individuals to provide medical information in advance that can be used by emergency personnel in the case of an emergency. The vial is placed in the refrigerator, usually recommended to be on the top shelf of the door, because it has been shown that the refrigerator's contents are preserved in the event of a fire. Also, the KNOX-BOX® Rapid Entry System provides non-destructive emergency access to commercial and residential property. More than 9,000 fire departments and government agencies use Knox key boxes (key box, key boxes), vaults, cabinets, key switches, padlocks, locking FDC plugs and electronic key retention units for safe and secure rapid entry. You can contact the FD to participate in either one of these programs.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR – Jerry Thamann has accepted a position with the City of Springdale and left on September 16, 2009. Jerry served the City and this Administration with the highest quality of professionalism and dedication and we all will miss his presence. I am sure I speak for all citizens in thanking him and wishing him well.

The business of the City, obviously, must continue. To that end, it is imperative that we have continuity in service to our citizens, management of our departments and relationships with multiple county, state and federal agencies. This obviously calls for a person with experience and familiarity with North College Hill. While it was my first inclination to appoint a permanent replacement for Jerry, I have come to the conclusion that it would neither be prudent nor fair to do so at this time. This position is vitally important and should not be rushed. Secondly, as this is an election year, I feel it would not be fair to force upon the incoming Council, a person whom I selected without their input.

Therefore, I have decided to appoint Mr. Mark Fitzgerald as the interim City Administrator. Mark has extensive experience as City Manager having served in that capacity in both the Village of Lockland and most recently in the City of Loveland.

During the past two years, he has worked closely with Jerry Thamann in his capacity with LSR Consultants and has become familiar with our system, our staff and our citizens. I feel Mark is the perfect person to insure our stability and continued progress until a permanent City Administrator is selected.

It is my intention to continue to interview prospective candidates until after the November 3, 2009 election. At that time, once the incoming Council is settled, I will then meet with that body and present my top three candidates for the purpose of interviews, after which I will consider council's advice and input. I wish to make the final selection by December 1, 2009. This will give the person selected a full month to become acclimated to North College Hill as well as giving his/her employer reasonable notice before assuming their duties as North College Hill Administrator on January 1, 2010.

As Mark is a partner in LSR, our current economic development consulting firm, this will be considered as an extension of their contracted duties. This "outsourcing" of the interim city administrative duties is not unique. Deerfield Township has done the same thing in the last month while they search for their permanent Administrator. This arrangement will save the city nearly \$2500.00 per month during the next 3 ½ months.

While I really don't like the term "interim", (it sounds like a basketball coach), I think it is the wisest thing to do. While Mark may be an "interim" Administrator, he has the full authority to take whatever action necessary to insure the primary goals and policies of the Administration and Council namely, the preservation of the life, safety and welfare of our citizens, the efficient and effective management of all departments, and the continued progress in the development of our city. Stop by and say Hi to Mark if you get a chance. And yes, there really was a desk under all that paper.

PUBLIC WORKS – As always, what can I say about our Fabulous Five. They continue to do their job and do it well. I am familiar with quite a few other cities and I can tell you that our guys are second to none. Now that fall is here, we can start looking forward to the holidays and our outstanding decorations. If you see our guys, why not say thanks? God knows, they deserve it!

We're glad to have John Knuf back after his very short retirement. I think his retirement lasted about eight hours.

We already have a reputation for being the "Crossroads of Construction" but our current road projects are winding up. Goodman Avenue is nearing completion as is Pin Oak. It is amazing what a difference a new street makes. It is a shame we lost the trees on Pin Oak but I guess progress does have its price. Norman Avenue is basically complete and looks great. Funding has already been secured for and construction will start next spring on Carpenter. We have applied for more grants that include funding for Norcol/Bobwood, Greismer, Claretta, Bake, Clovernook and Bising. Keep your fingers crossed.

We have had a couple requests to close some of our cut through paths especially at LaBoiteaux and Bising Avenues. There seems to be some problems developing on these paths and that's not good. We're looking at several options and hope to have this resolved by the first of the year.

RECREATION – The biggest question of the summer has been whether the pool will open next year. The answer is yes unless something unforeseen occurs. One advantage of getting older is you learn to say "never say never". Seriously, it is our plan to open the pool in 2010. It is our hope that the Recreation Commission will develop some innovative ideas for the pool and work with the YMCA to come out "swimming" in the spring. In that spirit, if you have any ideas for improving the pool or any other recreational facility and/or program, please let us know. Just drop us a line or call City Hall and we will listen.

We have some programs planned for the winter including Basketball, Craft Show and Breakfast with Santa. The dates for some of these programs are not set in stone yet so call Tricia at 521-7413 for more info. The Basketball program is handled by the YMCA so check with them at 521-7112 if you're interested.

This year's Community Picnic was a challenge with the construction but thanks to the tenacity of Al Long, the picnic chairman, it turned out well. A big thanks to JTM Foods, Kroger, and Biggs for the donations of food and drink. A HUGE thanks to Life Springs Church for providing the games. With all the construction materials and sand around I thought we could REALLY have some interesting games but I was overruled.

Good Luck to Rene' Stiles who informed us she is leaving the Recreation Commission. She is going to advance her nursing education and that takes a demand on time. We thank her for her service and wish her luck in her career. We are getting closer to selecting a recreation director. We have recently received two very interesting résumés which sound promising. If you are interested just send it in and we'll take a look.

FINANCE – Welcome to Scott Gully who is our new Finance Director. Scott comes from a banking background and he has an undergraduate degree in Business Administration with an emphasis in public and institutional administration. He is also enrolled in a graduate degree program in public administration. This is a great combination to have in our City, someone who knows finance and can grasp the big picture at the same time. We're happy to have Scott on board. He will be training under Bill Lammert, our Treasurer, until January 1, 2010. I have a call into the Vatican to see how we nominate Bill for sainthood. He has literally worked miracles in the finance department and made it possible for us to get down to the facts with accurate figures. It sure does make it easier to make decisions when you're armed with the facts.

TAX DEPARTMENT - A very pleasing report was the one we got from our tax department. Unlike so many other cities around us, at the time of this writing, our tax revenues are **UP** 2% from last year. As a comparison, Blue Ash, Madeira and Montgomery tax revenues are down approximately 3% with Mason, the land of milk and honey, down

9.72%. Our increase is a result of our tax department being very diligent about collecting approximately \$322,000 in delinquent taxes. It also helped when we added new businesses and all the construction activity and workers. It all adds up to a uniquely healthy fiscal status. We have reason to be optimistic about next year due to the fact that several new businesses will be opening (see Economic Development) that will add more people working within our City limits. I know I am RARELY accused of being conservative, but, we are taking the conservative approach and planning for a flat increase next year in our budgeting process. That way, we won't over extend and end up behind the eight ball.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – Our program for Economic Development is really beginning to take hold. We are starting to see the results in creating an “atmosphere” conducive for development in N.C.H. We have successfully displayed to the business world that we are serious about what we're doing and we know how to do it. Also, we are getting noticed by residential developers as a good place to develop better housing and housing types. This is a direct result of our philosophy of Economic Development, that is: for real economic development to be successful; it must include the residential sector as well as the businesses.

Remember the comment I made in the report on the Police Department. Well, it is our opinion that one of the main reasons for the increase in crime despite the increase in Police Officers is that we have the dubious distinction of being the recipient of some undesirable people in our neighborhoods. Our housing stock and housing choices have not kept pace with the market demand. That, combined with unscrupulous and greedy landlords and unrealistic federal housing policies, made us an easy target. The worse the economic condition of those living in our neighborhoods, the worse our city wide economy becomes. This little snow ball keeps growing until you reach a point that no matter how many cops we have, we still have big problems. That is why it is so vitally important to include a housing initiative in our Economic Development strategy and that is what we're doing. This is a rather unique approach but it is working. So, I know this sounds crazy, but our Housing Maintenance program is connected closely with our Economic Development plan.

Kind of interesting that all these things tie together isn't it? Who was it who said "No man is an island"? Well, neither is any piece of a comprehensive plan isolated from one another.

You may find it interesting to know that since Council hired LSR nearly three years ago, we have been the recipient of \$520,000 in grants. Over that same period, we have paid them a total \$126,715. I'd say that's a pretty darn good return on our investment. Just keep it up and keep those dollars coming in.

There is good news and bad news on other fronts. First, the bad news. There still is no serious interest in the old Thriftway property except that it is now being listed by a respected real estate firm and not by the owner. Hopefully that will help. It is our understanding that the long term lease the owner had with Winn-Dixie has expired so perhaps that will add an incentive to sell it. The good news is that by the time this newsletter is completed, the Regency Nursing Center will be history. At long last, another major eyesore and neighborhood blight has been eliminated. We're eliminating them one at a time. A big thanks goes to State Senator Bill Sietz for helping us convince the owners that it was a good idea to follow our “directions” and tear it down. There was a lot of intense discussion between the City and the owners over the last 12 months but we got it done.

CITY/SCHOOL – Talk about projects. WOW! You must have noticed the buildings rising out of the earth. I think the masons are having a race between the schools and Walgreens. I'm loving it. Anyway, the schools project is moving right a long and they are still on schedule to open next September.

The impact the school is having on people's awareness of our City is huge. One of our Council members is a teacher and she related that her school system is looking at us as a way to do things. That's really cool! Also, developers are very impressed and are, all of a sudden, paying attention.

The Clovernook School will become the City's property in June of 2010. Between now and then, we will form a committee to examine what is the highest and best use for the property. It is a golden opportunity for our City and we want to do it right and get the best minds involved in creating a short and long term plan. The committee will include local church leaders, respected and proven business leaders in the Cincinnati area, private, local citizens, elected city and school officials. It will be a busy and exciting 2010.

Another example of the high level of co-operation between City and School is the creation of a new play area with new equipment in Schaeffer Park by the pool. The School Board has agreed to provide an entirely new design for the area and provide all new playground equipment at no cost to the City. We are enjoying a new level of co-operation and it is another win/win for everyone. I've seen the designs and equipment and they are first class. The kids will love it.

NEW BUSINESS – Welcome to these new businesses in town. Van Zandt Restaurant on Galbraith, Family Dollar on Goodman, and soon to be open Northern Hills Pharmacy also, on Galbraith. Coming soon will be the new Walgreens at Hamilton and Galbraith. We are already working on a potential tenant for the old Walgreens but Walgreens owns the building so, as you might imagine, it gets complicated. Why is nothing simple anymore? As we have discussed, local business is a life line in our community. Support them when you can.

RETIRING – I have saved this part for the last. Roger Krummen will be retiring as President of Council at the end of this year. This brings an end to an 18 year long term and that's a shame. God knows he deserves the retirement but he will be missed on multiple levels. For those of you who do not know him, he is a native son of N.C.H., a devoted husband, father, grandfather and a valued friend. Other than my wife, I am proud to say that Roger is my best friend. Not because he always agrees with me, but because he doesn't. He always has told me the truth and he treats people with respect and dignity and has carried that practice throughout his tenure as President of Council. Roger has had ample reasons to quit long ago but didn't. I really don't know how many people who would have kept giving his all while battling several serious health issues. He did it because he loves his City. As President, he made it look easy. I remember watching the great Roberto Clemente play outfield for the Pittsburgh Pirates. He always made it look so easy. Then, I played outfield when I was a young man. It wasn't easy. He made it look that way because he was just that good! That's Roger. I speak for the entire City when I say THANKS!

BITS AND PIECES

- Best wishes to James Dewald. He has resigned from Council. His work and family commitments will prevent him from being able to complete his term. We thank him for his service and wish him the best of luck!
- How about the Trojan Football Team. As of this writing they are undefeated. Keep it rollin' guys!

- Halloween will be on October 31 and the little ghosts and goblins will be out from 6:00P.M.-8:00P.M. Be careful that night.
- A big "hats off" to our Fire Department during the Community Picnic. They brought the new truck in and had tours. The little kids and big kids enjoyed it a lot. I know this big kid did!
- As if I have to tell you, this is an election year so please vote. Our troops in Iraq fight and die in order to give those people a chance to experience liberty. It's the least we can do. No matter for whom you vote, please vote.
- We want to have a community tree for the Holiday Season again this year. If you have a suitable tree available please call City Hall at 521-7413. We asked the Girl Scouts to once again make the decorations but if anyone else would like to add on, please feel free. It is a "Community" tree.
- Speaking of the Scouts, Pack 183 is holding a "Scouting for Food" drive. Scouts will go door to door collecting non-perishable food items. St. Margaret Mary and Hilltop Methodist Church will get the food and distribute it to local food banks. The Scouts will collect between 12:00-4:00 P.M. on November 8th. You can leave the items on your porch or give them directly to the scouts. It's the right thing to do!
- Have you noticed I keep asking you to CALL City Hall in lieu of e-mailing or texting or whatever else is floating in space these days? Want to know why? I believe in talking TO people not AT them. I fear we are losing the most important factor in society, that is, the ability to relate to one another and speak, face to face. I like it that way but realize I may have to go into the computer age kicking and screaming. I am just very electronically challenged!
- The Planning Commission is spearheading a drive to restore our Historical Cemetery at Hamilton and Galbraith. Rick Dikeman, the newest member of the Commission is also a member of the N.C.H. Historical Society and has done a great job in researching the Cemetery and stones. The plans are to restore the stones and return the area into its rightful status as a historical site.
- We have contracted with the Perfection Energy Group to do a survey of our energy uses and the potential for savings. The best part is that it is free. Ohio House bill 420 makes it possible for a city to upgrade its environmental efficiency without any additional cost to what their paying now. It is an interesting program and we're going to give it a good look.
- Leaf collection will be held on November 7th, November 21st and December 5th. Please have leaves at the curb by 6:00 a.m. in either paper bags or trash cans. No plastic bags will be accepted.
- Now don't go crazy here, but we are considering starting a Mayor's "Blog" or an e-mail setup for people who are into the computer thing to get information more quickly. I felt very good that someone said they really enjoy the newsletters but wish we could do those more often. So do I, but, there is that nasty little budget thing, you know! So, we're looking into it. Another idea was to ask anyone who has the ability or would like to receive the newsletter electronically, to e-mail us at pandersen@northcollegehill.org and let us know. We're trying to save enough postage so we can add more newsletters.

Well, that's a lot of news but I hope it was worth it. You know, it's been a long journey, sometimes frustrating, sometimes complicated but never boring. But we are beginning to see our dreams start to come true. We have work to do but we have a direction and we can finally see our work showing positive results. We can see the physical improvements around N.C.H. We can feel the positive energy starting to build and the excitement and pride returning. Life and love are made up of a series of moments. This is our moment. Let's not lose it. As always, JoAnn and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts for allowing us to be part of this journey. We've just begun. We're starting to run. Now watch us fly! See you next time.



Dan Brooks, Mayor

Just a thought: “Our task now is not to fix the blame for the past, but to fix the course for the future”...

John F. Kennedy



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