

To the Residents and Friends of Ostrander: Mayor's Annual Report for 2017

In the past, I have discussed with the Council in January those issues that drove the previous year and how they might shape our efforts in the next year. This is how I see the challenges we met in 2016 and how we might meet those we face in 2017.

INTRODUCTION: “Bullseye”

If you could draw a circle around our little village and build a wall we could continue basking in that “quiet” little community that began in the 1700’s and remained mostly unchanged through the 1800’s, 1900’s and even the early part of the 21st Century.

Delaware County is the fastest growing county in the state and it was only a matter of time before we were discovered. Using Ostrander as the center if we draw a circle 2 miles from that midpoint we will begin to see our challenges. We are sandwiched between some of the richest Limestone quarries in Ohio and on any day Ostrander will see 120 dump trucks (half the time under full load) cruising through town. Additionally, we encounter golf course cut through traffic, school bus traffic along with parents and teachers, as well as US 42 bypass and east / west traffic on 36. We are not only the destination for school and businesses but often the shortest distance between two points.

GROWTH:

The Village of Ostrander was founded in 1852 as a direct result of the CCC & I Railroad running through the area from Springfield to Delaware and eventually on to Mansfield. By the 1970’s the original 104 Platted lots of the Village had grown to nearly 172 and by the the year 2000 our population had grown to about 650. Surrounding growth, our rural location, an excellent school system and, in part, one of Central Ohio’s most popular golf courses created the interest that resulted in the annexation of 171 acres. In 2004, Meadows of Mill Creek Development would add 193 additional homes and increase population to 850 with 65 additional homes yet to be built.

We have received inquiries and preliminary sketch plan ideas for commercial and residential projects from four different developers and are in conversations that would involve the possible annexations of over 200 acres to the Village. The BPA has completed an upgrade to the “technology” stage of the sewer system and will be looking for the next trigger to expand capacity. I expect those discussions to continue during the next year.

CHALLENGE:

The needs of a community of 600 are far different from ones of the 900 to 1,100 that we predict by the year 2018. Ostrander today is not that “quiet” little Village that we celebrated for the last 140 years but a destination instead.

Meadows of Mill Creek development is in full swing as well and we can have multiple builds occurring at any time bringing with it the addition of the construction crews and equipment. However we choose to identify the actual population of the Village, we can’t ignore the additional 900 or so during the day with the related traffic.

The proactive Planning Commission and Village Council see two major demands:

Number One: PUBLIC SAFETY:

Ostrander was well served by limited Volunteer Police coverage with the smaller area size and population but as we grow the need increases. We currently can only budget about 100 hours per month with the response from the Delaware County Sheriff's Office.

The intersection of Ostrander Road and 36 has been the site of rather serious accidents requiring "life flight" response as well as one fatality several years ago. The most recent incident was an accident involving one of the school busses. "T" Bone incidents have occurred in the vicinity of the Convenience Store ... again requiring "life flight" response.

We believe doubling the population, increased school bus traffic, and general safety during the day warrants the development of more extensive police coverage. If that isn't sufficient, consider this: In the evening and late at night, when Ostrander returns to that "quiet" little community of about 850 residents, we have had 7 different break - ins in the older section of the Village and multiple property shooting incidents in the newer section this summer.

How would a police force be developed? The Council and Planning Commission do their homework. During the course of the next year we anticipate getting all the information on all the various options and will choose the best one for the Village. We have access to a number of experts and plan to use them. For the next step, I personally lean toward a police "identity" such as a resident Village Marshall supported by perhaps some paid part - time officers with Auxiliary Special Event back - up. The objective is simply to provide more deterrence and quicker response. All to be worked out in the months to come.

Number Two: MAINTENANCE:

Typical road engineering is calculated to the anticipated need of the road, width, base, load limits, trips per day and on and on. Most of the road construction and re-construction in the Village has been under the guidance of Village Engineers and we design for life expectancies of 8 to 10 years per ODOT standards. If you consider the argument made relative to the growth, it is easy to see that we are pushing the serviceability of our roads as our infrastructure continues to age.

A great deal of our road construction and rehabilitation to date has been accomplished by using the OPWC / CDBG Grant Programs. With that "quiet" version of the Village where it was a population of 400 to 600, that option worked. Communities all over are in competition for the grants and there is a scoring system used for the final award. **Need** is one of the main categories. It is assumed that preferential consideration should be given if the community has limited means to do the project on their own. 500 residents with 179 lots, minimal property tax and a median income in the range \$41,000 made the need portion of the calculations attractive and we got the extra points and were able to secure the grants.

Fast forward to today, increase the population to 850 with MMC, the same property tax, and areas of the village that increased the median income component; we lose some of our advantage and therefore do not get the grants we were once awarded.

Now the challenge becomes scoring points to secure the grants in other ways. Increase the Village contribution to 35% and agree to accept the balance as 50% grant and 50% loan? The Village Council decided that is not a good option: 10 year debt on an 8 year depreciating asset. The real problem is that we would be looking to improve additional roads every couple of years and there would simply be an accumulation of multiple debts. The Council decided this was not a wise use of tax payers money.

Instead the Village chose to look at a maintenance program where we do annual repairs, the reconstruction in house and save the larger projects for the appropriate time. To give us the information we would need to formalize that plan, we commissioned our Village Engineer to make a complete evaluation of every road in Ostrander and prioritize the need. That is a detailed lengthy document done to ODOT standards and we will use it in our annual and long term planning.

BUDGET:

Appropriations: Each year we begin with a complete evaluation and detailed discussion of the estimated income side of the Village budget as matched against the estimated expenses. The specifics are detailed and categorized into special accounts. It results in a 30 page document and passed as an Ordinance at the beginning of each year. We are audited every two years and always rank among the highest ratings. We are debt free with the exception of the sewer plant. We have an available estimated income of \$90,000.00, less than half supported by property tax. We are in that position and can ask very little from residents because we do not fund a large government with excessive bureaucracy.

We were successful in dealing with the bankruptcy and subsequent situation created by the original developer of Meadows of Mill Creek. All has resulted in a very successful transition to a quality developer and an exceptional project but not without cost to the Village. Over the last 7 years the Village has had to hold in reserve (appropriations) as much a \$25,000.00 per year to be able to pay attorneys (more than 25% of annual budget; 50% of all property tax)

We all should be proud of the Village for taking the appropriate stand, following the law and doing the right thing. It resulted in the completion of the turn lanes on 36, increased the safety of the residents and enabled us to have a 17 acre wooded preserve / park.

INCOME TAX:

After years of periodic conversation, the Village began seriously looking at the income tax issue in 2015. We gathered data and information from both RITA and our attorneys and came to the conclusion that it was the most reasonable thing to do to meet our future challenges.

All information was discussed in Open Meetings, explained in the May 2016 newsletter that was sent to 280 households and businesses, announced on the Village website and social media sites, posted in various locations around town and in the Delaware Gazette.

Special meeting announcement

Posted on May 29, 2016

Special meeting of the Village Council is scheduled for 6:00 P. M. Wednesday, June 1st. to vote on an amendment to the Sewer Use Ordinance and to have the first reading of an Ordinance initiating an Income Tax in the Village.

That announcement was made on that date for the specific purpose of initiating the process of the required three public readings and vote **before August**. August is the final month for ballot issues to be included in the November election. To have placed the issue on the ballot in November would have required one resident who was a registered voter to fill out a petition form and get 25 signatures (10% of the Ostrander votes cast in last election of Governor). The Council passed a 1% income tax with a 100% credit to those paying income tax in other jurisdictions and an exemption clause that exempts a large percentage of the residents from paying any tax.

The exact amount of revenue is to be determined as we progress with the implementation process. Income tax, unlike property tax is not public record. We can certainly make an educated guess and I am fortunate to have great people and businesses in the Village that gave me information on their annual payrolls. Our initial estimates are in the \$60,000 range.

Public Safety / Maintenance / Budget: We now have the information we need to begin planning throughout 2017 to meet the increases in demand that we expect in the years to come.

COMMUNICATION:

Elected officers are extremely aware of the Sunshine Laws, their Oath of Office and their understanding of our very Process of Government. Social media platforms, including emails are excellent tools in filling the need for instant information and there is an impulse to utilize them. However, each member runs the risk of speaking for the Village and for the most part can't get into any discussion or debate that could potentially lead to a Council decision. We are very limited in our ability to use those tools.

In the coming months, the Council members will take up the discussion, perhaps consult with our Solicitor and see if there is a better way to serve the public utilizing those platforms.

CONCLUSION:

We are prepared to handle the challenge. You have 3 elected members of the BPA that have been able to manage the sewer plant so efficiently that we have not had the need to raise rates since the construction of the plant. You have a Planning Commission that pours over each and every detail of any project we consider and a Council that spends sometimes months reviewing and discussing issues that effect the entire Village, not just selective neighborhoods.

They are backed up by an array of volunteer organizations that are motivated by nothing other than the desire to do what is best for the residents. The Civic Association, 4th of July Committee, Hump Day Helpers, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4H clubs ... oh yeah ... how about your Volunteer Fire Department and your Volunteer Police Department to name a few.

We are well organized and sincere in our efforts to work to the betterment of the Community. I am looking forward to 2017 and hope to set the tone for the future of the Village.