

MAYOR JUDY COOK
2002 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
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“We begin 2003 at the end of a year that brought significant change. The community celebrated the conclusion of City Manager Michael Kelly’s 33½ years of service. His accomplishments are legendary and his leadership moved the city in new directions at an accelerated pace. To our good fortune, Norbert Klopsch stepped forward to assume management responsibility for the city. Already we have benefited from his intelligent, thorough, and knowledgeable planning and execution. His caring sincerity and steady calm when faced with adversity has already created a high comfort level with his leadership. The Klopsch family has lived and participated in the community for many years. Norb’s contributing involvement as a parent and resident in community activities has prepared him well to develop a balanced approach to the management of the city.

In 2002 Gretchen Bullock also retired as Mayor of the City. Her leadership prevailed through many trying times. She had a remarkable presence and will long be remembered for her contributions. To replace her, Roger Blumensheid was selected. As a new Council member, Roger hit the ground running. He is diligent in acquiring knowledge needed to serve our citizens and is a natural with group dynamics. His leadership has already been demonstrated as he voluntarily chairs our city efforts in the Celebration of Flight 2003. Part of this celebration will be the dedication Oakwood’s first public art.

Turning our attention to city operations, I’m happy to report that the financial picture remains strong with all funds and account balances enjoying healthy balances to begin fiscal year 2003. Prudent management resulting in conservative spending enables this fiscal standing. In addition, we have benefited from unexpected, large estate tax revenues. The city this year garnered more revenue from estate taxes than from property taxes. These surprise assets have allowed major facility upgrades and capital improvements. However, changes in estate tax law suggest a precipitous future decline in this source of revenue. We continue to finance day to day operation of the city from ongoing revenue streams. Pressure on these balances increases from inflation alone. Through efficient management, including cost saving measures, the city has been able to operate for an extended period without increases in taxes or fees. We will continue to do so as long as possible without seeking additional income from our citizens, but the margins are becoming increasingly narrow.

Building a new safety department and pursuant renovation of city hall continues to dominate our work program for 2003 in the same manner as the past year. Great care is being given to each step, each consideration, so that the end result will be as expected. The necessary relocation of administrative staff and municipal court staff into temporary housing poses additional challenges for these exceptional people. They will remain in the temporary buildings throughout the year and beyond. I’m sure each will be able to write their own version of “Nine to Five in a Trailer” by the time their tour is finished. Their accommodation is indeed praiseworthy.

Our aging infrastructure requires constant monitoring. Attention continued in 2002 with the needed reconstruction of the west most section of Oak Knoll Drive. This project will be completed in 2003 with the reconstruction of the south end of Deep Hollow Road where it connects to Oak Knoll. 2003 will also bring a major street reconstruction project to Shroyer Road. Projects to repair, replace and improve parts of our water system took place this past year in the form of reconstructing major water pumping stations at the north end

of Shroyer Road and at the water tower, and new projects are planned for the coming year. The replacement of all residential water meters is planned but will be delayed for another year.

In 2003 we will continue to address the two issues of sidewalk chains and supports along sections of Far Hills and the timber wall divider in the business district. Both are in need of replacement. A citizen committee will assist city staff and our consultant in developing options in planning for the sidewalk chains and support replacement. This will be the focus for 2003 with completion as soon as possible. The timber wall will receive planning attention but expenditure will likely be delayed until 2004.

The maintenance program for our public trees will be accelerated in 2003. This community asset is valued at over eight million dollars. Good stewardship compels completion of initial maintenance requirements in a timely fashion. On going maintenance will continue on a regularly scheduled basis. Oakwood trees, beyond their monetary value, contribute significantly to our community ambience and resulting image.

Also essential to remaining a premier residential community is the maintenance of property and buildings. Most of the homes in Oakwood are old; most are architecturally significant. Constant attention to maintenance, remodeling, and upgrading is necessary to maintain their appeal and value. There is clear evidence of property owner investment to meet these requirements. Improvements not only meet the high minimum standards set by the city but far exceed them. This positive record has a long history resulting in steady increases in property value. Future success mandates continuing this pattern.

It has been a dozen years since the community created our present Comprehensive Plan. This is an essential document for the work of city council and city staff. A new Comprehensive Plan is a top priority for city council in 2003. This effort will be led by council with support from staff, but properly done, its content will be determined by our citizens. We seek participation from all.

Community spirit was alive and well this past year as we celebrated together. "That Day in May" was temperature chilly but warm in reception. Oakwood Rotary again organized and orchestrated this welcome to spring day of fun. Our August Ice Cream Social brought the community forth for the last hurrah before the beginning of the school year. On a more somber note, we gathered with a ceremony in remembrance of 9/11. Also in September, another successful Lobster Fest was enjoyed both as a gourmet treat and fund raiser for our Sister City organization. The winter celebration of light was a beautiful night despite the severe cold. The lighting of the tree together with city streets lined with luminaries was magical. This was the first year of combining these festivities. The success was increased by the addition of horse drawn carriage rides.

This summary speaks to the visible aspects of our city. The deeper strength and uniqueness of our community is its people. No matter in which direction you turn, there are examples to illustrate this truth--- neighborhood musicians who shared their talents to entertain and gather support for the needy, a front lawn Veterans Day celebration to mentor the young about patriotism, a CARE walk in support of those who have known breast cancer, our safety officers assuring that no one need be alone or go without Thanksgiving dinner, a mother who helped children create bookmarks which when sold bought books for Children's Medical Center. These are but a few of a much longer list. In addition are the many who serve on our city committees; those who help enforce our rules, help create our city celebrations, and those who share their good counsel to help in our

decision making. The gifts of time and talent to benefit others are freely given by many. This is an asset no tax dollars can buy.

As part of an excellent City Council team including Vice-Mayor Jack Donnelly Councilmen Carlo McGinnis, Richard Killworth and Roger Blumensheid, and supported by outstanding city staff, it has been a pleasure to serve as Mayor of the city this past year. Plans for 2003 are in order and we are already busy at work. As always, we will endeavor to meet the high expectations of our citizens in 2003.”