

State of the City
Joseph J. Denen, City Manager
March 28, 2018

I am not a politician and I have no desire to make a political speech. Happily, I have no worry about simply talking with you. Tonight's talk is formal. I apologize for that formality. I have never expressed emotion with ease. Nevertheless, the warmth of my compassion is not absent and I believe that genuine humanity is preferable to the skills of an actor.

Let us talk about our community in the broadest terms. Given the limits of time, I can't address every point of importance, but together we can remind ourselves of accomplishment, opportunity and challenges.

I believe that we all know that effort has been expended to improve the marketability of our industrial park. All business and trade is appreciated. However, in the past year, several industrial businesses have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to our community. MARS, YUSA, Domtar, McKesson, Wingate Packaging, Sugar Creek, Riten Industries, Mid-Atlantic Storage, Wal-Mart Distribution, and Tony's Welding are examples of local industrial businesses that understand that we succeed together.

Industry is important, but banking is also a cornerstone. Huntington Bank, Merchants Bank, Fifth Third Bank and First State Bank have shown a commitment to our community that is extraordinary. Further, these banks have been or are the employer of citizens like Tim Fogt, Mark Richards, Mikki Hunter-Smith and Wilma Coulter. All excellent examples of business people engaged with the public life of our community.

The demand for labor remains high. All communities, small and large have challenges attracting and retaining workforce. Simply, more people are needed in manufacturing, transportation, services, the building trades, retail, commerce and the professions.

The challenge of workforce is great, but we have endeavored to seek satisfaction of our needs. The most interesting effort we are pursuing is Buxton. While counterintuitive, the solution to demand for labor may in part be more business. We are currently attempting to use analytical data to find more businesses compatible with our community. Greater diversity in retail shopping and dining will broaden the appeal of Washington Court House and in turn our ability to retain and attract labor.

A diversity of retail and dining options also helps to keep dollars circulating in the local economy. Estimates vary, but about seventy dollars of every one-hundred dollars that you spend at a local business gets reinvested in our hometown. Approximately, forty dollars of every one-hundred dollars that you spend at a chain business located in our community is reinvested in Washington Court House. When you have the opportunity, please shop local.

Last year, I noted the investment of W & W Drycleaners and Great American Jewelers in our downtown. This year, I thank Sweetwater Bay Boutique, Tee It Up Golf, Olde Rustic Willow, HomeMaidHunny and Village Homestead for their investments in Washington Court House. All small businesses giving you an opportunity to shop local.

I also must call your attention to Tamera Hall of the Village Homestead, she may have been born a little far north in Michigan, but she is now a part of our community. Tamera and many others are making impressive investments of time and energy in downtown.

I would also like to thank Mekia Roads, Tina Dahmer, Anne Quinn, Kelley Ford, Chelsie Baker, Whitney Gentry and Jolinda VanDyke for their efforts with the Scarecrow Festival and many other events that promote Washington Court House and Fayette County. While many people contribute to events like the Scarecrow Festival, a Toast to Summer or the Chocolate Walk; the people I have mentioned make an exceptional commitment to our community.

I have already this year cheered the renewed pride of Washington City Schools. Our kids are great. Our teachers are great. We see that greatness in improved academic performance, artistic expression and athletic sportsmanship. Together, we are restoring the roar.

All that we accomplish is because you are willing to invest dollars and your spirit in our community. We have survived recession and a state government indifferent to local needs. Via work and sacrifice, we have achieved a fiscal position of strength.

We will continue to invest resources in safety services. Simply, Firefighters and Police Officers. At the same time, we will invest in the Service Department and the infrastructure of our community. We do this while keeping an eye to maintaining reasonable financial reserves. The growth of an organization requires steady investment and the ability to maintain that investment.

Currently, we are engaged in creating the most technically complex improvement plans for the wastewater treatment plant in the history of Washington Court House. Allen Dawson and John Woodrow along with all of the staff of wastewater have shown an exceptional commitment to this endeavor. We seek to plan and build the improvements to make life a little easier for the folks that follow us.

We forge ahead with the Washington Ave. Project. We commence plans for the reconstruction of the Temple Street Bridge. A continuous process of construction and reconstruction that renews the infrastructure skeleton upon which we all depend to live, work and play. We seek to pass to the next generation a stronger, cleaner and more peaceable community.

We have and will continue to invest in water infrastructure. In the not far future, debt will be retired in the Water Fund that will allow the deployment of resources to further

strengthen water. The basic requirement of safe, reliable water will continue to be delivered to you without worry.

Some problems that we work together to resolve are colossal. Heroin and opioid addiction are a national crisis. Ohio has the second highest rate of death by overdose in the United States. Far too many of us have seen the sorrow of addiction touch our families.

The people of the Life Squad, the Fayette County Memorial Hospital, the Health Department, the Police Department, the Sheriff's Office, Social Services, Grandparents, numerous churches and mental health services are shouldering a great burden. While the dedication of many is notable, I must tell you that the efforts of the Health Department have been extraordinary.

Leigh Cannon and the nurses of the Health Department deserve recognition. The citizens working together via Faith in Recovery deserve recognition. The insight provided by people like Barry Bennett have been invaluable in crafting a local response to opioid addiction that continues to build in depth and resiliency.

If you are an addict, I have confidence that you have the strength to make the choice to seek treatment. If you are an addict and you have children, please seek treatment. You and I know that drug use is frequently learned at home. A child deserves the opportunity to know a loving parent free of opioid cravings. A child deserves the opportunity to experience life. You love that child and you can make that choice.

I am proud of the efforts of our Police Department. I know that many times the best thing that happens in the life of an addict is the addict's arrest which helps to force the acceptance of the need for treatment. Enforcement of the law is not sought out of malicious intent; a Police Department protects and serves and is the ultimate expression of tough love.

Not all of our efforts meet with success. Sometimes we are criticized. Honest and just criticism is welcome. Perennial growling, condemning and finding fault is a disease of the mind. Sensational comments and gossip disguised as news is not reliable nor healthy.

I understand the value of news. I appreciate the efforts of WVNU, WCHO and the Record Herald. I don't always agree with how a story is presented, but reasonable effort is made to inform the community. Ashely Bunton, Bev Mullins, Martin Graham and Ryan Carter of the Record Herald care about our community. Along with Harry Wright of WCHO and Channel Three fame they are welcome faces.

I believe that most of us lead familiar lives. Family is the focus; work is important to us and perhaps we have a hobby. We go out and we make a life. We experience joy and sorrow. We see birth and death. A lot of other things fill in the blanks between, in their appropriate time those other things seem to be of great importance.

Not long ago, Pastor Keith Clary visited me. Pastor Clary stopped in to talk about the model aviation field near the YMCA. We discussed practical matters. At the end of the conversation, Pastor Clary took the time to remind me that he and several pastors in the community pray for local officials, myself included.

I knew that clergy prayed for local officials and I am aware of the uplifting efforts of the folks involved with the National Day of Prayer. However, from time to time you forget. The matters of the moment overcome what is truly important.

I shall in time forget the purpose of Pastor Clary's visit with me that day. However, I will for much longer remember Pastor Clary's kindness and how he made me feel. Events and accomplishments are important, but who we are is the real question.

Despite the cold weather, the transformation of spring advances upon us daily. This coming Friday will be Good Friday. I have no desire to express my opinion about social questions. However, as we approach Good Friday, my mind falls upon the people of the Life Pregnancy Center. People helping people brings us together. Compassion knows no division.

I have taken the time to recognize a number of businesses, organizations and citizens. I could have noted the contributions of many more, but we have the limits of my voice and time. The government of the City of Washington Court House was a part of tonight's talk, but only a part.

I love Fire Departments, Service Departments, Cemeteries, Courts and Police Departments. I love construction projects and roads and bridges. However, the state of a community is more than government, it is our collective soul. With more force than laws, you shape this community every day by your actions. You mold the community with your habits, your attitudes and your desires.

I don't believe in shouting accomplishments. I don't believe in chasing the gossip of the day. I suppose, I don't believe in politics, but I live a public life. I do believe that if you do your duty with dignity, the story usually turns out fine. I have enough confidence in you to say that; confidence that people care. Confidence that people believe in their future. Confidence that despite static, the song is still heard.

Together, we can realize a tomorrow of a gentler character.

Thank you. God bless our community and all who live within it.