

Date: January 21, 2009

To: Mayor and Council Members

From: John Archocosky, Manager

RE: Monthly Activity Report

In case I missed it, Happy New Year to all. 2009 seems to be starting out with a loud bang, at least here at City Hall. Several issues have cropped up since my last report. Some of them good and some of them are a little frustrating.

With the upcoming retirement of our HR Administrator Carol LaRochelle, the City requested applications to select her replacement. We worked through the Michigan Works office in Caspian which was a huge time saver and help to the City. Through their program, we received over 50 applicants from which to choose. Michigan Works tested and prequalified the candidates, and our staff interviewed the top four individuals. I'm pleased to advise that Rachel Andreski was selected by the staff as Carol's replacement and started work on January 5th. Rachel comes to us from STS/AECOM where she worked on Iron River City projects for the past 10 plus years. Although we received many well qualified applications, Rachel's first hand knowledge and experience with several of our infrastructure projects truly made her an ideal choice. We are sorry to see Carol retire, but she has promised to stick around and be available with the training process with Rachel. Carol's official retirement date is January 23rd.

On December 29th, I was served personally at my home, with a Summons and Complaint from the Circuit Court for the County of Iron. Plaintiff, Mr. William J. Vajk, filed a Freedom of Information request on December 1st with the City Clerk, requesting 5 different pieces of information relative to City ordinances, along with substantial supporting documentation. Following the City's FOIA Policy, the staff estimated the costs of researching, locating, and copying the information requested. As required in the FOIA Policy, we advised Mr. Vajk that we believed the information he requested would cost approximately \$60 to try to locate, and then produce copies. Mr. Vajk responded by complaining the costs were too high. Much of the supporting information he was requesting however, required that it be located and retrieved from the City's document storage area, which had been packed away during the consolidation of the three communities back in 2000. Keep in mind that at the time of consolidation, the files from all three communities were simply placed in unmarked boxes, delivered to 2nd level of the former City Fire Hall and stacked on the floor. There were literally thousands of documents deposited in this fashion to the storage area. Mr. Vajk apparently believed the City was being unreasonable in estimating the cost of retrieving the information, and filed a law suit against me personally. This matter has now been turned over to Attorney Susan MacGregor from Marquette who will be representing the City of Iron River in this litigation. Apparently Mr. Vajk, who is a land owner but not a resident of the City, claims this is the first of "many" such demands and suits he plans against the City. It is unfortunate that the FOIA law, that was intended to provide access to our government, is often abused by some individuals and ends up costing taxpayers both time and dollars to satisfy the whims of one or two individuals who simply have an "axe to grind". Hopefully the legal matter will be satisfied without excessive expenses to our City residents.

During the second week of the New Year the DPW discovered a water leak had developed somewhere near the top of the riser column of the Hunter Road water tank. Although it hasn't affected our water distribution service, it caused a tremendous amount of ice to develop inside the column of the tank. Our crew has been working several extra hours to thaw the ice buildup so we can determine where the leak is actually located. Hopefully it will be located in such a place that it can be easily repaired. Although we haven't been able to verify it, we believe that a small valve used to flush the tank during cleaning operations may have failed and began leaking. As a result of the extremely cold weather we have been experiencing, the thawing process has been going very slowly. I hope our Water Department employees can resolve this problem without having to perform any expensive repair work.

The cause for the icing problem above is representative of the long term lack of maintenance of the City's well houses elevated storage tanks. The lack of maintenance is not the fault of the Water Department, but more so the result of the City most recently being forced to invest almost every available dollar in replacing the 80 year old distribution systems that were neglected for so many years in the past. Along with our engineers, we have begun the process of redefining the City's needs of having multiple wells and an over abundance of water storage, which should eventually be reduced. I believe by eliminating some of this infrastructure and upgrading the remainder, we can continue to supply our water customers in quantities which will be more than adequate to meet their needs, as well as the growth and safety of the City. This project is currently underway, and the results will be generated for the Council by early summer. Once the study is complete, it will become a major element of our long range planning.

The end of December 2008 and the beginning of January 2009 have proven to be colder than normal. The snow and freezing rain we had a few weeks ago have caused slippery conditions on almost every street in town. The DPW has been maintaining the roads as well as possible by spreading salt and sand, but slippery conditions continue to exist. Hopefully next week's forecasted warm-up will help thaw some of the ice.

In the "Pending Issue List," you will see that several of our projects are finally ready to be closed out and removed from the list. The City's Brownfield Authority has really become active with the clean-up activities getting underway at the former Central School. The DDA's Central School MSHDA Housing Project, the Rental Rehab Project and others are continuing to make good progress as well. 2009 appears to be shaping up as one with many challenges, but also many opportunities.