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Nappanee State of the City 2021 Flexibility and Perseverance

Welcome to 2021! A year ago, none of us could have anticipated the challenges that faced us this past year. The year 2020 was the start of a new decade and we anticipated a time of renewed optimism and economic progress. However, life through all of us a curve ball. Instead of a year of anticipation and hope, we experienced a year of uncertainty and disruptions.

I would like to take this time to thank those in our community who rose to the challenge of “service above self”. To our doctors and nurses, we thank you for your dedication and commitment to the health and well-being of our residents. To our first responders, thank you for risking your health and safety to serve and protect all of us. To our schools and teachers, thank you for your flexibility and willingness to adjust to changes that allowed education to continue. To our social service agencies, the Center and Open Door, thank you for continuing to provide services and go out of your way to ensure those in our community in need, received the resources and supplies necessary to make it through unprecedented times. To our churches and volunteers, thank you for stepping up to help with the production of masks, delivering meals to families, and providing prayer and encouragement to withstand these difficulties.

Despite the setbacks we faced as a community in 2020, there are some positives we can take away as we move into 2021. Financially, the City of Nappanee continues to maintain healthy cash reserves in the various funds supported by property and income tax. Despite warnings of a significant negative financial impact on municipal budgets at the beginning of the pandemic, the numbers were less severe than originally estimated. With potential shortfalls in revenue from gas and income tax anticipated in 2022 and 2023, we will work hard to protect our cash reserves while looking to prioritize capital improvements. I would like to thank Jeff Knight and his staff for all their work on our financial status. Due to Jeff’s diligence on some utility debt and dormant payroll accounts, we were able to further improve our financial position.

Despite the pandemic, we were able to celebrate some successes in local business. We were excited to see the re-opening of Miller’s Orchard, under the new ownership of Jake and Nikki Beer. After a few years of planning, Beacon Health broke ground this fall on a new clinic on North Main Street, across from NorthWood High School. In the downtown, Farm Bureau Insurance and local agent, Brady Klotz, opened a new office on South Main Street. In 2021, there are some positive signs of additional businesses coming to Nappanee.

Embrace the Place

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With the help and research provided by local resident, Ed Strohbahn, we submitted a grant application in June for safety improvements for the Railroad crossings in Nappanee. In September, we were notified that we were the only community in Indiana approved to receive a \$1.4 million-dollar Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant from the Federal Railroad Administration. Our Street Department will work closely with the Federal Railroad Administration, CSX, and Robinson Engineering to develop and implement the improvements over the course of the next few years.

We continue to make investments in our downtown. This past year we added a dumpster enclosure and improved parking in the northwest quadrant. We will continue to look at parking improvements and adding dumpster enclosures for the NE and SW quadrants. We also added new banner poles downtown to better accommodate the installation and visibility of banners promoting local and regional fairs and festivals. The new water mains currently being installed along US 6 and SR 19 will improve the performance and reliability of our water distribution system as they replace some of our oldest infrastructure in town. This work is in advance of INDOT's scheduled repaving of both of our state highways running through our city. NIPSCO completed upgrades to the downtown substation, providing additional capacity and improving reliability for our electrical system.

The Nappanee Art Council installed their Woodland Creatures in the woods at Derksen Farms, moved the Junkyard Dogs to their permanent home near the Dog Park, and installed the Tour de Nappanee sculptures in the downtown. The City of Nappanee Redevelopment Commission provided funding for a renovation at 253 W. Market Street, providing space for a community art studio, open to all artists in the Nappanee area. This is a unique opportunity for our community to encourage and promote art and the value it adds to quality of life, increased tourism, and greater economic vibrancy.

Design, right-of-way acquisition, and permitting proceed for the reconstruction of Woodview Drive scheduled for 2023. The inclusion of a pedestrian pathway from SR 19 to Oakland Avenue will help tie the existing trail system together and improve safety, especially near Woodview Elementary School. New curbs and drainage will also improve the overall quality of this heavily traveled road. In addition to Woodview Drive, the Redevelopment Commission is also working on designs for improvements along Miriam Street to tie the paths along Stahley Drive to Stauffer Park and our trail system.

The water department plans to begin construction of a new water tower near the airport in the next few months. The new tower will provide better fire protection, improve overall system pressure, and add emergency water capacity. As we look forward to other improvements, I will seek the input of the City Council and the Redevelopment Commission to establish priorities for capital improvements and look for opportunities to enhance economic growth. Recently annexed land on the northwest side of town will bring new industrial businesses and new residential development.

Inside the City, we are excited to have our human resources consultant on board. With the help of Adrielle, we have been able to write and approve our new employee handbook, expand the capability of our payroll software, and provide better resources to our staff. We recently added a Building Maintenance Technician in the Planning Department and added a Mechanic in the Park Department. This year we anticipate the expansion of our Fire and Paramedic services with the addition of three new first responders.

The Park Department will continue implementation of the master plan. We hope to complete the reconstruction of South Park this year. Included in the project is an inclusive playground, a basketball court, a new restroom facility, improved parking, and a measured walking path. New restrooms are also planned for Recovery Park and Stauffer Park. In cooperation with Wa-Nee schools, we hope to construct a new restroom/concession/locker/storage building at Wellfield Park. We will continue to look for opportunities to extend our dollars by utilizing grants and other partnerships to implement the entire master plan.

Work is nearing completion on two studies that were started in 2020. A review of current and future operations of our Emergency Services and Fire Department will provide insight and direction as we prepare for the merging of these two departments. A housing study, being conducted with the assistance of enFocus, will give us tools we can use to plan future housing, redevelop existing housing, and implement policies that will help us enhance our housing market.

The Mental Health Task Force continues to meet and focus on improvements and access to mental health services in Nappanee. We have been able to increase awareness and have had opportunities to provide education to individuals and groups. Our next steps will be focused on connecting residents to resources and providing local services with the professionals already living and working in our area. We look forward to building on the momentum to strengthen and improve our overall health.

Despite the obstacles we faced in 2020 with a global pandemic, racial tension, and economic uncertainty, I continue to be optimistic about the future of Nappanee. I believe in the people, the families, the businesses, and the churches of this great City. I am convinced that the hardships we have faced will only make us stronger. As I look back over the course of Nappanee's past, I see many examples of circumstances, outside of our control, that attack our resolve and threaten to cripple our livelihood. Yet, time and time again, we collectively get back on our feet and continue to press forward for the future of our community. I look forward to serving you and working alongside all of you in 2021.

May God continue to bless Nappanee!