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FROM THE MAYOR'S DESK 09/19/2024

GOOD EVENING, FELLOW CITIZENS:

Welcome to our third town hall meeting!

After 17 months as your mayor, I realize that I need to be even more transparent and efficient about communicating with you. I'll continue doing that by using Next-door, modernizing the cityofbn.com website, posting updates that are easy to find, writing in the quarterly printed newsletter, and presenting monthly Mayor's reports. Also, I will continue to host "Breakfast with The Mayor" on second Wednesdays.

When we took office last year, we faced many challenges. Instead of exacerbating those challenges and laying blame, we rolled up our sleeves and started working toward solutions. We have continually addressed problems in our Finance Department: some are resolved, and we're still working on some.

Our required annual audits for fiscal years 2021, 22, and 23 were overdue, and we lost our bond rating. Our auditing firm, Sikich LLP, completed our 2021 audit in June 2023. Some bills were overdue by eight months, and some by two years. Several vendors withheld our credit and would only deal with us on a COD basis. Other vendors just dropped us. But historically, we have had good relationships with most vendors.

After contacting vendors and getting the details of what and who we owed, our team, the city clerk, staff, employees, and the police department worked to pay our debts. I have a phenomenal team! **We paid off \$1,431,001.03 in overdue bills and late fees. NOW WE ARE CAUGHT UP!**

The Finance Department needed to be more staffed and organized. The finance clerk was promoted and given a raise in November 2022. Our administration gave her training, and I don't regret it! She progressed but decided she wasn't fully equipped to do the job. She left our employment in May.

Our finance department now has two employees, and they're keeping us in Compliance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles. Several crucial employee-benefits contracts expired in 2021 and 22. We are working to restore those employee benefits. At the end of fiscal year 2023, we had **\$987,749.78 more in the bank than we had a year earlier.** We soon found thousands of dollars in checks that weren't deposited in the finance office. They have been deposited. **That's all fixed, and our**

2022 and 23 audits are underway. The audit for 2024 will soon follow. Our goal is to regain our bond rating.

We received \$2,097,964.58 in ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding. We carefully spent those funds to give our Recreation Center a new roof, floors, racquetball court, senior transport van, truck, office, and lawnmower. With other **ARPA** money, we bought two new police cars, two new public works trucks, new signage throughout the city, and much-needed HVAC systems for our buildings. We removed several dangerous storm-damaged and diseased easement trees. Also, we gave employees who worked during the COVID-19 pandemic a one-time municipal administrative pay. **We still have \$690,123.69 remaining.**

Early in our administration, with help from State Senator Angela Mosely and State Representative Marlene Terry, **we received a \$1,000,000 federal Urban Forestry grant.** We're using it to restore all eight of our city parks, remove dead and diseased easement trees, create a community compost program, and train and hire youth, young adults, and adults in green jobs for five years. We recently **received an additional \$250,000 workforce development grant from the state.**

We're beefing up security at City Hall, the Police Department, and the Rec Center with cameras and digital access control. We retired a ten-year-old non-system of locks and keys.

We replaced the municipal judge, appointed a new prosecuting attorney, and hired two court clerks. A full-time code enforcer is also an officer of the court now, as is a part-time building inspector. The Public Works department needs two additional laborers, and except for seasonal lifeguards, the Recreation Center is well-staffed now. In our Police Department, officers selected Major Timothy Sanders to serve as our interim chief. Our police department is still understaffed. **Four new police officers are proposed for the 2024 - 2025 budget. We need the budget passed!**

We plan to modernize our Board Room with up-to-date technology so you can participate in in-person meetings via Zoom, Facebook, and YouTube. We'll be able to display documents on screens, reducing wasteful paper use. Getting good bids for these upgrades has been challenging and has consumed many days.

We plan to solicit bids for a city planner/engineer firm to help us with structuring our street hump, street repair, and light enhancement project. Lights on three streets have already been upgraded: Dwight, Coburg Lands and Ashbook. Ameren did this at no cost. **The money available for the project is \$1,157,300.00.**

So, most departments are well staffed now, except ... wait for it ... the mayor's office. All the above corrections and accomplishments **required me to be in City Hall full-time.** I have listened carefully to my staff and employees and communicated honestly with them. Bellefontaine Neighbors have always said the mayor was to be part-time. **WELL, I'M NOT, AND I NEED AN ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT OR CITY ADMINISTRATOR. THE MONEY IS IN THE BUDGET!**