

State of the City Address

Mayor Michael Armitage

January 25, 2016

The state of our city is strong!

Two years ago, the city set out to transform itself. It has been a process of turning over every stone and examining every process. Thanks to the hard work of many, that process is resulting in a more efficient city government. Many processes have been streamlined, freeing city staff to get more done and to do it in a timely fashion. Weaknesses were identified and addressed. I sincerely thank all of our employees for embracing this change! I am excited to share some of the results of those efforts with you tonight. The results to the residents include receiving tax bills on time and the ability to pay them using a credit card, just as two examples.

On the economic front, we are taking a pro-active approach towards economic development. After taking office, we pushed our resources to the max when we leveraged the Michigan Strategic Fund to assist *Jaytec* in hiring for new jobs here in Milan. Here are the results of that innovative endeavor:

- *Jaytec* was obligated to retain 141 employees and hire an additional 50.
- Of the 50 we tracked, 23 had been receiving Unemployment Benefits prior to hire.
- Of the 50 we tracked, more than 60% of new hires were low to moderate income.
- Of the 50 we tracked, the average annual salary is \$36,944.
- Nearly 15% of *Jaytec's* work force live in the City of Milan.
- *Jaytec* has hired 64 full-time employees since the program started in 2014!

I would like to thank our former City Administrator and Police Chief Gerard Scherlinck, Tim Lake from the Business Development Corporation of Monroe County, and City Administrator Jade Smith for their work on this project. The paperwork was cumbersome at times, but the positive results cannot be denied.

Another success story currently playing out in our community is the opening of JR's Hometown Grill and Pub on Dexter Street. JR's broke corporate records for opening day, 5-day, 7-day and 30-day sales, exceeding their projections by over 40%. Across the street, the new Milan Bakery and Diner is open for business now as well. These are clear signs to those that want to invest in Milan than not only are we open for business, but our residents will support you!

In 2015, the city utilized economic development tools not used in decades to assist with the demolition of the abandoned building at 900 Dexter St. Tonight, I am happy to announce that in 2016, we will be moving forward with establishing a Corridor Improvement Authority along Dexter Street. This authority will provide opportunities for redevelopment and improvements in the area. As the main entrance to our city, it is important that it is vibrant and alive with commerce. We will also focus on the corridors that connect Dexter Street to Downtown Milan to make that an obvious and attractive connection. We have started that process through small gestures, such as adding the corn stalks down this corridor in the fall. Tonight, I am happy to announce that through private donations, we will be adding additional Christmas Lights along this corridor!

Another unprecedented story resulted in the development of *Milan Flour Mills Corporation*, located off of Pennsylvania in the City. I would like to thank Avtar Singh for his investment in our community. A representative from Gurbachan Khalsa First Commercial Realty and Mr. Singh were in town looking at property, even though they had looked earlier in Detroit and were sure that was where they should open their business. While in City Hall one day, I received a call from a broker asking a question about our zoning laws. He indicated that they were at the property in Milan, so I invited them to City Hall. Quickly we assembled a team to meet with them, including the City Administrator and Building Official. After meeting in my office, we offered

them the front meeting room to discuss things with their broker. Over the course of several hours, they worked out a deal with the property owners and walked out of City Hall as new investors in Milan. This is proof that our “one stop shop” where we get everyone at the table really does work!

On the housing front, we are seeing people moving to Milan. In 2015, 34 new homes were built. That is an increase of 78% from 2014. Building permits increased by 45% in 2015 as well, with 498 issued. Overall, that leads to a residential investment of \$5,391,263 in 2015, which is 30% more than 2014.

The final point on economic development is probably the biggest visible sign of Milan’s revitalization. The \$5.2 million renovation and restoration of the southeast block of downtown is historic and transformational. Within the next 60 days new tenants will start occupying the rebuilt apartment spaces in this block. With 15 rebuilt apartments and 8 storefronts, this promises to be a game-changer for downtown Milan.

This project is not the only positive progress being made in downtown Milan. In 2014, the city became an Associate Member of the Main Street Program. This has opened up training for those wishing to help our downtown. From these initial meetings of volunteers, projects have been completed to enhance downtown including the installation of new mailboxes, addition of public Wi-Fi, the creation of Tolan Square, brighter lighting installed, new programs such as the “Let’s Chill Winter Fest,” the purchase of new trash receptacles and flower containers, painting and cleaning the old existing ones, as well as installing new bike racks. So far, 150 people have indicated that they wish to volunteer for this program and I want to thank all of those that spend their own time to make our downtown vibrant and successful. An important decision will be made next month in Lansing as to whether we will be moved to a “Select Member” of the program, which would open up nearly \$200,000 worth of in-kind resources from the state to help our downtown. I believe the tools provided by this program have enhanced our downtown already, but “Select Membership” will bring even larger results.

Another area of unprecedented positive progress has been in street repairs. Last year alone we re-constructed the intersection of Platt and Redman,

North Street, Ann Street, and Ferman Street. Also, last year we resurfaced portions of Wabash Road, Pennsylvania Avenue, Ohio Street, and N Platt Road. That totals \$2.4 million in street projects in 2015 alone. You, the voters were clear that you want that to continue when the charter amendment was overwhelmingly approved last November to allow for one mil of taxes dedicated to streets. In the next two years, I will be bringing the following projects before council for approval:

- Gay Street
- Canfield Street
- E. Main alley
- Lewis Avenue (grant money has been approved)

We will also continue to work with Milan Crossings to get the final coat on those streets!

We have also made a great investment in our parks over the last year. Currently, our new 4,000 square foot pavilion is being constructed as a result of private donations, grants, and a partnership with the Washtenaw Community College Building Trades Program. Improvements were made to make Nature Park more accessible. We entered into an agreement with our neighboring communities to enhance the Saline River, and Sanford Road Park was renamed in honor of Rev. Vern Campbell. Looking ahead, I have asked the Parks and Recreation Commission to begin working on a campaign for new lighting for the field at Wilson Park. Also, with a recent change to state law, we will be moving forward with providing Epi Pens to our recreational locations.

I am excited to announce tonight, that as a result of a generous private donation, we will be able to add additional paved trails in Wilson Park this spring! Additionally, we are working to finalize a donation of park space in the Eagle Springs subdivision and I look forward to the development of that new park space.

Shifting gears to public safety, I am very proud of both our Police and Fire Departments. It takes a special person to risk their lives for others.

This year, there has been a significant investment in public safety technology from a new 800 MHz radio console to a new state-of-the-art 911 system. We are now moving forward with accepting cell phone 911 calls from the city.

We are also faced with a challenge and that is the heroin epidemic. This is something that we must actively address. Our efforts have started with Councilwoman Churchill attending a summit in Monroe a couple of months ago. I have also directed the Police Chief to supply officers with Narcan, a drug to counteract a heroin overdose, and he has started that process to get the department trained. Other steps to address the problem are being developed and more community engagement on the issue will occur this year.

When Chief Tillery started this fall, he conducted a survey of all department members. These results were very positive, but one area of concern was staffing with 65% of the employees listed additional manpower as their primary concern. I will also be recommending the hiring of an additional full-time officer to increase our commitment to public safety in the City of Milan by using funds currently allocated for part-time officers. With the difficulties we face recruiting part-time officers, and the training expense associated with these hires, this change is necessary.

On a more positive note, I am happy to report that 86% of our Police Department employees listed morale as 'high' or 'very high' and 100% listed that they receive 'high' or 'very high' support from their command and from the city administration.

When it comes to safety, there is more to be done in terms of building safety. We have taken a large step up with fire inspections in commercial buildings, but there are more concerns that need to be addressed. Life safety issues are still a concern and must be addressed to stop avoidable loss of life and/or property. For that reason, I will be working with the City Administrator to bring a rental inspection ordinance before City Council. I believe that we can approach this in a reasonable manner, but we must catch up with our

neighboring cities that have addressed this issue for the safety of their residents.

This year has brought significant financial stability to our city, from recouping \$200,000 in water fees that were not properly assessed to non-city users in the past to saving \$1 million dollars by refinancing our wastewater treatment plant debit. We have started long-term budgets, and will continue that process this spring. Through planning, what once seemed impossible will be possible. By identifying our goals and needs, we can work to achieve them. Through this process, known projects such as water softening and more parking downtown can be achieved.

I would like to thank Senator Dale Zorn and Representative Adam Zemke for their work in helping us overcome a hurdle that stood in the way of forming a district library. With their help, they were able to make a change in the law that will no longer prohibit the City of Milan from joining the Milan Area Schools to form a district library, in partnership with the Milan Public Library. I now ask the Monroe County Library System to let the voters decide what is in their best interest. There is no reason that a child living on Wabash Street, less than a mile from the library, but past a city limit sign, should be denied free library service in Milan. Conversely, it is not fair for city taxpayers to continue to subsidize the library service for residents living in our neighboring townships who do not pay a library tax.

Finally, I would like to unveil a new approach to communication. I am very pleased that our social media presence continues to grow, but not all of our residents have access to social media. We must do better transmitting information to the community. We must adapt to the changes in delivery of news and information. For that reason, I am announcing a new strategy in communication. First, the city will develop a regular newsletter with important dates and information that will be distributed via email. For those that do not have access to email, we will offer postal mail delivery options. Second, we will be adding a communications portal to our website that will bring all the options to one location. From this portal, you will be able to sign up for the newsletter delivery, as well as other services, such as Nixle notifications and Smart911. Third, crime mapping will be made available via our website. Fourth, we will be developing a new, user friendly and interactive website.

Finally, every address in the city will receive information about how to access information in the city.

I want to welcome the new members to our team, Councilpersons Thompson and Kerkes, as well as our newest department heads, Chief Tillery and Treasurer Samborski. It is because of this Council, city staff, and countless volunteers that we were able to provide the highest level of service to our residents over the last year. The future is bright and with this team in place, we will continue to emerge as a leader of our region.

As our newly-adopted Branding tag-line says, "Take time to 'connect with what matters.'" Milan is about knowing your neighbor, focusing on our families, enjoying the amenities of the region in a small town environment.

May God bless you and bless our beautiful City.