

City of Napoleon, Ohio



State of the City Address

Prepared and presented in accordance with
Napoleon City Charter
Article III, Section 3.04(F)

by

J. Andrew Small, Mayor
February 4, 2008

Introduction

Council President, members of Council, ladies and gentlemen. Over the next few minutes, I will reflect upon some of the challenges we faced and success we achieved over the past year, as well as speak briefly about challenges and activities we can look forward to in 2008.

Challenges / Accomplishments

Much of last year was spent discussing sources of funding for the many projects we are being forced to complete to satisfy the Long Term Control Plan, due to the Findings and Orders issued by the EPA. In the coming year we will, likely, spend over \$11 million to comply with these orders. Although I'd like to convince Council that we should not complete one more project until we get financial help from our State and Federal governments for ANY unfunded mandates, we continue to move toward compliance.

One of the projects we must complete, as part of the plan, will be an upgrade of the water and sewer infrastructure along Woodlawn Avenue. The single largest disruption to normal daily activity in the City of Napoleon in the coming year will be a complete rebuild of all infrastructure along this corridor. This Avenue, when complete, will be an even more beautiful entrance into the City from the northwest, with, in addition to the replacement of water and sewer lines, new roadway, curbs and sidewalks along its entire length. Unfortunately, as with any project of this magnitude, there have been, and will be issues with adjoining property owners (and even some of us that live in the general vicinity of this project). I know it is going to be loud, dirty and dusty for many weeks. We will do the best we can, within reason and the scope of the project, to work to satisfy the many challenges that will surface. I ask for your patience and understanding in the coming months.

During our discussions with property owners on Woodlawn, it became apparent, once again, that truck traffic remains an issue with homeowners along this route. One gentleman recommended, and I agree, that we should make an effort, through signage and legislation if necessary, to divert the traffic along the US 6/24 bypass. I also agree with Councilman Helberg in that a second river crossing on the east end of Napoleon is the ultimate solution to routing trucks out of our residential districts and our downtown. Furthermore, increased signage and lighting at the intersection of US 6 and US 24 on the west end of town is necessary to route trucks onto the bypass. This is an important part of limiting the number of trucks on Woodlawn and, although we have had conversations with ODOT in the past, to no avail, I plan to initiate communication with ODOT, once again, in this regard.

Some of our discussions over the past year focused on assessments to property owners as one mechanism to assist in paying for these mandated projects. As you all know, at our first meeting in January of this year, we decided that each project must be reviewed individually on determining the level of property assessments. Would it have been easier to establish a policy that set a percentage assessment for all projects? Long-term...perhaps. Would it have been the right thing to do? I don't believe it would have been. And, obviously, City Council feels the same. There are far too many variables to consider. Does that mean that we will have residents in the Council chamber when we talk assessments for various projects in the future? You can guarantee that. But let me say this: Council has ALWAYS looked out for the best interest of all residents of the City; has ALWAYS tried to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people and, as difficult as it can be sometimes, will continue to work together to be as fair and equitable as possible in determining assessment levels for projects that warrant this funding mechanism.

I know there is some momentum, regionally, toward getting our State and Federal governments to help fund the significant costs associated to the projects related to these mandates. And, we will continue to "beat the bushes" in Washington, on our own behalf, to get some financial assistance; assistance that, in spite of nearly 500 pieces of correspondence from the citizens of Napoleon to our elected officials in Washington, has yet to materialize.

Unfortunately, the tremendous amount of time and resources we must spend on our water and sewer infrastructure issues detracts from the time and resources we spend on further development of our City. Fortunately, over the past year, independent groups formed and became very active in this area; specifically the redevelopment of our downtown. There is a committee established at the Chamber of Commerce that is active in marketing our downtown business district through the development of a website, and through various other means. The website (www.developnapoleon.com) highlights vacancy opportunities, established businesses within the downtown district (with links to many of their sites), businesses being targeted to establish within our downtown, and testimonials from successful business people in the district.

In addition to the Chamber of Commerce Downtown Committee, another independent group, Napoleon Alive, Incorporated, established as a non-profit organization and has gained significant momentum in their quest to see a vibrant downtown business district. Due to our success in receiving a Tier 1 revitalization grant, the members of Napoleon Alive, Inc. are working closely with the Community Improvement Corporation and Poggemeyer Design Group to develop a revitalization plan for downtown Napoleon. A public meeting was held January 24 to officially kick-off this effort. I am confident that the public-private partnership between this group and the City can succeed in the redevelopment of this district.

I know there have been some hiccups along the way thus far, real and perceived. This past year we made some effort in reviewing the building and zoning rules that effect development in our downtown area. I believe there is further work to be done. We must make every effort to remove excessive burden involved in the redevelopment of these buildings. I think we, the City and other groups, must establish a new way of thinking about our historic downtowns. They are no longer the center of commerce in communities, like Napoleon, that have developed commercial areas around highway bypass routes. However, we, those of us within this building, can NOT be an obstacle to the efforts of these groups and their projects or ANY group wanting to assist in the growth, beautification or development of our City. Let's not look at the reasons we can NOT do things, but rather HOW we can, together, accomplish tasks in order to, once again, have a vibrant downtown business district and a growing business community.

Residential, Commercial, and Industrial Development

I won't spend a lot of time on this since it has all, previously been reported. However, residential development in the City slowed over the past year, as was the case, in general, across the country. Last week I read that new home development, nationally, was down more than 25% last year and the numbers in the City of Napoleon over the past year reflect this anemic statistic.

There are a few items I'd like to note in regard to commercial development over the past year, including the transformation of the Bernicke's grocery building into Napoleon Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine and the remodel of the building formerly occupied by First Federal into new offices for Meyer-Badenhop Insurance. A new Mexican Restaurant, Azul Tequila established in town and recently moved to the former Rick's East facility on East Riverview, and we look forward to the impending opening of Stimmel's Market in downtown Napoleon in the very near future.

In addition to assisting with the downtown redevelopment effort, Lee Schroeder, Executive Director at the Community Improvement Corporation has been busy working to invigorate our industrial and commercial base. Lee has been active in renewed attempts to breath new life into the old Big Wheel Plaza property and has had a full schedule working with, not only strengthening existing businesses within our community, but potential investors in Napoleon. The CIC is currently in the process of assisting Tony Marks and TMT Logistics in the growth of that enterprise. There is real potential for substantial growth of this business. We must continue to assist the Community Improvement Corporation and the Napoleon/Henry County Chamber of Commerce in their quest to support, and grow, our local business base.

Fort to Port

One project that I have mentioned in past speeches, and I will continue to discuss because of its potential to have a tremendously positive impact on our community, when it is complete, is the Fort to Port, US 24 highway project. As you all know, this project is well underway. The one piece of the Fort to Port puzzle that will commence (and hopefully be completed) this year within the City limits is the, long over-due, Glenwood Avenue overpass. This project will remove the last at-grade intersection within the City, and greatly add to the safety of our motoring residents. We were successful working with ODOT in securing a path along the overpass to allow access back and forth for pedestrian and bike traffic. I commend ODOT District 2 Deputy Director David Dysard for his assistance in this important matter. Once again, I ask for patience from those that will be challenged by the detours that will be required when this project begins.

Closing

In spite of occasional negative letters and comments made by a few outspoken critics; comments that serve to do nothing but breed negativity, I believe the state of the City of Napoleon is strong. There are far more people and groups working to grow and develop this City than there have been in many years. They exemplify the strength and true character of our community. I have tried, in the past few minutes, to highlight and commend the efforts of these people and would like to pledge to them that we will do everything within our control to remove obstacles to their success. After all, the success they are trying to achieve is a benefit to all of us.

I know from experience that we will have many challenges to work through in the coming year. We always have an abundant amount of work to do to remain a strong, vital community. We will never be perfect, nor will we ever please everyone with our decisions. However, our focus must remain on delivering the greatest good, to the greatest number of people and we must continue to strive, every day, to do better than the day before in delivering an exceptional level of service, with respect and integrity. Let us rededicate ourselves to working together to build Napoleon into an even better place to live, work and raise a family.