

## **STATE OF THE CITY**

*Mayor John Grogan*

Good evening, Council Members, City Manager, Administrators, Consoler guests and friends of the City of Canal Fulton. I welcome you to City Hall and thank you for taking the time to be with us.

Before I begin, I would like to pause and recognize the men and women of our armed forces who are engaged in war throughout the world, especially the fallen heroes in our own community and others throughout our nation. To the families who have endured the greatest hardship, we owe you a great debt of gratitude, and our thoughts and prayers are with those that serve this country and for their prompt and safe return.

Today, we begin to build a foundation, a foundation of hope and promise, built in a spirit of cooperation by men and women of this community and the elected officials that represent them. It was roughly a year ago today that we gathered here to begin the process of a new administration that outlined different goals and ideas for this city.

I laid out a vision toward progress, placed upon our shoulders the needs of this city, and set out a new course to change “business as usual,” to quash mediocrity and to raise expectations. As with any attempt at progress and change, we have been faced with those who doubt that progress can be made – the guardians of the old ways who fear change and progress.

When faced with such people, I am reminded of a man who faced many challenges - more so than most people - our 32nd president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. FDR was not afraid of going forward; he was not afraid to try new things. He (in fact) once said, “It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.” We are not afraid of trying. We are not afraid of changing “business as usual,” and we are not afraid of creating a Canal Fulton that serves as an example for others to follow.

Our blueprint for the future calls for putting our house in order, bringing integrity and respect to the way our city is run, and restoring our citizens’ faith in the government that is meant to serve them. While all of us owe a debt of gratitude to those employees who have served this city for many years, it is absolutely imperative that we change the way we operate by discarding the old ideas of government structure and replacing them with a private sector model that holds to task those areas of lower performance and rewarding the ones that strive to make our city a higher-functioning operation. Although we do not suffer from the same bureaucratic bloating of larger cities, we still have an obligation to maintain the fiscal responsibility that our citizens entrusted us with when elected.

In 2004, we did what was asked of us, but this is not enough. Our dollars need to be spent wisely in areas of human concern and growth. We cannot instill pet projects that cater to the few and bear no wanted desire for the many. We should not seek out those projects that we want but, instead, look towards the things we need, and one of these items should be a clearly defined study that documents the future economic development of this city. Our focus should be on building the arc before it rains to avoid future complications that stem from an unplanned growth. We must become more aggressive in identifying additional revenue sources and recognize that the money government spends is not without limit; it comes from the hard work of our taxpayers. Streamlining government by introducing efficient technology and E-government solutions, injecting a new culture into the services the city provides, is a priority. Funding sources must be identified to allow us to immediately match the need for repair and replacement of our infrastructure. Fact is no business, public or private, can guarantee its long-term financial health when its personnel costs exceed its revenues.

Our challenge is to not merely balance the budget during our terms in office, but to create the framework to establish balanced budgets for future generations. Our residents pay for and expect reliable and efficient services, and one of our primary responsibilities is to make all of the neighborhoods a safer and better place to live.

Last year our Police Department did this with over 7% reduction in the crime rate and 100% closure rate on felony cases. They have been working hard at keeping this city a safe place to live. A search is now underway to seek out a replacement for the Chief of Police position, and I fully expect a fruitful search. Currently, we have received numerous inquires and a number of qualified applicants have submitted their interest, and yet the deadline is still weeks away. This is a testament to the quality of life in Canal Fulton and the high standards of professionalism that exists within the Police Department. I will call upon members of Council to assist in this selection process, as we continue with our search.

Within the past month, we have installed a new Fire Chief and will begin the process of modernizing the Department through efforts focused on improved response times and training that will enable the officers to handle a wider aspect of fire and medic duties. Talk is underway with Lawrence Township concerning fire issues, and I am confident that we can continue to discuss ways of improving the fire services for both communities. One recommendation I believe may assist in this area is a Merger Commission made up of selected representatives from both sides of the issue. This commission would study and prepare a report that would outline the conditions that pertain to a fire district between the Township and the city. This report would compile the feasibility of such a merger, and whether or not it is a viable option for the residents of both

communities. With the increasing need for fire and E.M.S., it is only prudent to explore and, at the very least, seek out options such as this.

Our parks and recreation programs are in steady and increasing use. The numbers of residents that use them continue to expand as the population of our city grows. I call upon the Parks & Recreation Board to utilize the summer months in implementing a three-pronged approach that will enlist local artist and cultural programs, as well as places for regular neighborhood concerts and gatherings. This "Heart in the Parks" approach will endear many to our city and help to expand the cultural interest within our own children and community.

Last year we connected city water to the Northwest school development project and completed the Milan street water and sewer line. This line is an extension into the industrial zone that replaces an undersized pipe that would never had supported the type of industrial growth that would fit well within the area.

Over the past year, I have established and encouraged a greater amount of cooperation and fellowship with surrounding governments and their elected leaders to begin the process of shared ideas and unified goals. This must continue if we are to stimulate the waters of trust and encourage joined efforts for community-related projects. This city is not a stand-alone entity but a community, part of another, within the whole and interconnected. Conjoining dialog and vision, pushing past the boundaries of parochialism and embracing the unique differences within ourselves should be the benchmark of each shared task.

Let us commit to never allow our disagreements to divide us. Let us continue to raise the public discourse for the common good. Let us charge and lead. Let us all work together, as we serve the betterment of a city poised on the edge of a remarkable future!