

A couple weeks ago Kelly Gildner asked me to reflect on the community's accomplishments over the last five years. Fair enough, but I prefer to look forward than back. So in this week's column I preview the trends I see for the new year. There are obviously some common themes in these trends, and they are interconnected.

Management Team

With three alderpersons choosing not to run for re-election, we are guaranteed to have some new faces on the city council. I don't say this as either good or bad; I simply mean that there will be some different people bringing their experiences and perspectives to the city council.

One recommendation that came up last year was that we did not have an orientation program for new officials. Some might attend a newly elected officials seminar put on every spring by the League of Wisconsin Municipalities. But we didn't have anything local.

With input from the city council, committee members, and department heads, we developed (and distributed just last week) a Common Council Reference Book. It includes information on public leadership, city finances and budget, opening meetings law, and other helpful information. It is meant to provide both an orientation for the new alderperson as well as a reference for our veteran members. In just the last week, I've already checked it for info on quorum and voting.

In the very near future, we will be putting together similar reference books for the various city committees such as park board, plan commission, and water & light committee. This is one of the loose ends that I intend to tackle before my own departure.

Excellence

We will continue to look for ways to improve. In some cases, this will mean better services directly. In other cases, this will mean better operations and organization.

A recent example of better service includes customer ease and convenience with a new on-line and phone system for paying utility bills. Another recent example is the new wastewater treatment plant which has won several awards in recognition of its energy efficiency and effective treatment process. Looking forward, the electric utility will be applying for the RP3 program for better reliability, safety, and training.

Some of the behind the scenes examples of an improved organization include the city council/committee reference books and the city's great engagement in state and federal legislation. Emerging examples include the police department's efforts for best practices compliance through accreditation, department head certifications and ongoing training, and the software upgrade and consolidation of accounting systems.

This drive for professionalism has been a key discussion during the recent hires of city planner and water & light superintendent and the review of city engineer proposals. I expect it will be the case in hiring a new city administrator.

Collaboration

Last summer, the city council and Union town board met three times. In one sense, this was to promote a better understanding and appreciation among neighbors. But more productively, it also involved initial discussions about ways we may cooperate better. I expect these joint meetings will be renewed throughout the coming year; an ongoing forum is needed to build trust.

The few meetings last year were between Evansville and Union. They should be expanded to include the school district. We should also look to opportunities with Rock County and other jurisdictions. With tighter budgets, this is the responsible thing to do.

We need to look service by service for areas we might work together. An inventory of services, equipment, and operations would be helpful; this should include an inventory of ways we already cooperate both formally and informally. We need to identify our shared interests and priorities, as well as our differences. An agreement can be developed along our shared interests and how to deal with divergent interests.

Lean Government

We need to be both effective and efficient. We need to be effective – from the citizen’s point of view – in providing quality service. We need to be efficient in the process – whether it means eliminating unnecessary paperwork, time and delay, costs, etc. We need to maximize the value of our performance.

I expect over the coming year and into the future that there will be deliberate attention to building capacity for lean operations among city officials and staff. This means a commitment to improvement: a vision for top-notch service, practical training, a focus on results, and nurturing an organizational culture which looks past the status quo.