

## Mayor's Column for November 17, 2010 Review

It has been a busy, eventful couple of weeks. The terrific fall weather made it easy for residents to vote in the election and attend the Creekside Place Health Fair. A crisp Halloween evening brought out more than 650 costumed children (as well as a few adults) to collect sweets from residents along Main Street and throughout the city.

Eight classes of enthusiastic third graders, two classes a day, walked to City Hall to visit with the mayor and learn about their local government. It is an annual event that is refreshing and fun. The students are always fascinated with the old jail and the vintage walk-in safe that is still in use.

Some of the student questions I am asked are repeated every year, while others are timely. This year, a new question was: why there is a corn mountain out by the Pig? (We discussed a good harvest and transportation logistics.) Another question—how deep is Lake Leota now? (We talked about erosion, dredging, fish stocking, and looked at the engineering map of the lake showing the depths in various areas.)

These are often-asked questions:

- How do you become mayor? (We learned about citizen and age requirements, circulating nominating papers, marking ballots, and elections.)
- How much do you know about Evansville? (Not enough; I am always learning more about my community.)
- Do you have pets? (We explored the world of dachshunds.)

And the students always ask, what is the hardest part about being mayor? (I explained that telling citizens “no” is really tough. We talked about how sometimes what an individual asks for is not best for other residents or possibly Evansville as a whole.)

Building the budget for 2011 was extremely challenging. There were lots of “noes”. As we began the budget process, we asked departments to aim for 0% increases in their proposed budgets. When we plugged in requests from all sources, the preliminary figures showed an increase in the tax rate of over 13%. Balancing requests from the many departments and city programs, identifying needs, determining costs that could be postponed, and cutting expenses, resulted in funding reductions across the board. Working with the Finance Department, City Administrator, and the Finance and Labor Committee, we were able to identify cuts of more than \$275,000 in capital and operating expenses. Last week the Common Council adopted the 2011 budget, which results in a 0% increase in the tax rate for the city portion of your property tax bill. This is an austerity budget. It is likely that Eager Free Public Library will continue its reduced evening hours next year. Department Heads will receive no salary increase for the second year. The Police Department purchase of a new squad car is deferred. These are just a few examples of funding impacts.

The topic of the most recent column by David Broder of “The Washington Post” is the 18-person federal commission on deficits and debt. The commission is co-chaired by former Republican Senator Alan Simpson and Democrat Erskine Bowles, former Clinton White House Chief of Staff. The commission is charged with recommending budget actions to Congress by December 1.

A couple of quotes from Broder’s column explain the path before us. The commission co-chairs have “made it impossible for anyone to pretend there are relatively easy or painless ways to dig out of the monumental fiscal pit we have fallen into.”

“Everyone and every institution will have to contribute—no, genuinely sacrifice—if we are to repair the damage to our economic health. No area of government spending will be spared. Not the Pentagon, not Social Security and Medicare, not a single agency or bureau. The tax system will change and collect more from the people than it does now.” Broder declares, “it’s sober-up time.”

Similarly, Wisconsin’s \$3+ billion deficit will require painful solutions for all. Federal and state budget woes are extremely serious and not improving.

There will be ramifications for local government and our residents. The timing and extent of the fiscal impacts are as yet unknown, but they are coming.

In the next few months, City Hall and the Finance Committee will undertake “contingency budgeting.” We will develop operating scenarios should we suddenly be faced with a huge drop in state aid. It is fiscally responsible to have emergency financial plans in place, just like we plan for emergencies like fires, tornadoes, etc.

Our annual operating budget is just over \$2.9 million. We receive around \$800,000 in state revenues for transportation aid, shared revenue, and the expenditure restraint program, about 28% of our budget. If we lost \$200,000 (25%) annually in state funding long-term, we would need to adjust our expenditures accordingly. What if we lost half of our funding? There has been much discussion in Wisconsin about transforming local government; it will become reality. Stay tuned.

## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

The city yard waste facility will close for the season after Saturday, November 27.

Winter parking regulations became effective on November 15. On street even-odd parking is in effect from 1 a.m. to 7 a.m. until April 15. Parking should be on even-numbered sides of streets at 1:00 a.m. on even-numbered days and odd-numbered sides of street at 1:00 a.m. on odd-numbered days.

Evansville will celebrate the beginning of the holiday season with an Olde Fashioned Christmas on November 19-20, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. There will be carriage rides on Friday evening. Santa and Mrs. Claus will arrive on Saturday at 10:00

a.m. There are numerous business open houses and other activities on Friday and Saturday.

Other weekend holiday events include three Evansville Community Theater performances of "A Christmas Story" scheduled for Friday and Saturday, November 19 and 20. The Evansville Grove Society will hold a progressive holiday party on Saturday evening, November 20. Creekside Place will offer a Parents' Night Out on Friday, November 19, from 6-10 p.m. Enjoy the weekend in Evansville with family, friends, and neighbors.

#### CONGRATULATIONS/THANKS

Congratulations to Janis Ringhand on her election victory. Janis will represent the 80<sup>th</sup> District in the Wisconsin Assembly. It will be good to have Evansville representation in Madison.

Evansville citizens thank Sandi Spanton and the Evansville School District for the patriotic Veterans Day commemoration. Our veterans richly deserve our recognition and gratitude for their dedication and sacrifices for our safety, security, and freedoms.

We congratulate and thank the Evansville Community Partnership as they celebrate 10 years of service to our community. ECP efforts have enriched us and provided numerous opportunities for strengthening the fabric of our community.