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MATTHEW T. SHORRAW

Mid-Year State of the City Of Monessen – August 13, 2020

Dear Monessen Residents -

I am honored to present to you, this mid-year state of the city address for the City of Monessen. This address covers updates and accomplishments made by this administration, for the betterment of our city, from January 2020 through August 2020. In dealing with the ongoing pandemic, economic hardships, closures, and everything in between, it has been a difficult year for all of us. We are happy that we have still been able to get so much accomplished, despite the challenges this year has brought. I want to thank you, the residents, for helping us ensure that everyone stays safe and cared for during these tough times. You all have proven time and again the importance of building a strong, positive community, and how resilient we all are when we support our neighbors.

First, I want to take a moment to thank our city's employees- the clerical staff, public works department, police department, and especially our City Administrator, John Harhai, Chief of Police, Jim Smith, City Consultant, Walt Haglund, City Engineer, Tony Vitale, City Solicitor, Tim Witt, and Municipal Fire Chief Delmar Hepple. They have all devoted countless hours to finding funding, planning and preparing projects and initiatives, organizing documents, finding and implementing cost-saving measures, researching ordinances, and keeping our city safe. It is because of them and their hard work that we have been able to get so much accomplished in such a short amount of time. Without good employees, our city would not be able to function properly. We are lucky to have them all. Here are some highlights of our accomplishments thus far, for the year 2020:

- Hired a new City Solicitor, Tim Witt;
- Hired a new City Administrator, John Harhai;
- Extended the Police Chief Contract;
- Hired a new Accounts Payable/Payroll Clerk, Cheryl Gordon;
- Hired a new Code Enforcement Officer, Todd Carter;
- Appointed a new City Controller, Rosalie Nicksich;
- Re-hired Portnoff Collection Agency to collect delinquent debts owed to the city;
- Demolished five structures and paved 4 roads;
- Purchased the following equipment for the public works department: street sweeper, front end loader, arm tractor, and two riding tractor, which will be funded through Line Usage, Liquid Fuels, and the Parks Fund.
- Began the process of planning for the construction of the DEP-Mandated EQ Tank;
- Did not acquire a Tax Anticipation Note (TAN); This year, Monessen was denied by two banks and was not able to receive a TAN. The reasons being:
 - The recent instability of leadership and internal struggles taking place.

- Budget and past financial statements do not make any sense.
 - A significant amount of long-term debt, without a concise plan of repayment.
 - A lack of collateral in the form of real property. (The city sold off past real property during the past administration.)
- Since delinquent garbage payment collection began in July, over \$61,000 in lost revenue has been paid to the City in one month.
- Solicitor Bills \$20,400 (about 39% less, year-to-date)
- Saved \$64,000 on workmen's compensation insurance for 2020-2021;
- Under Budget on City Engineering fees;
- Applied for several grants for various public improvements, and currently awaiting results;
- Improved playgrounds at City Park and 9th Street Park;
- Currently working on improvements to Shawnee Park with the help of volunteers;
- Completed much-needed maintenance at boat launch;
- Improved lighting at City Park, due to safety issues;
- Began clearing public sidewalks of brush and weeds;
- Creating a new city website, which will launch soon;
- Working on methods to market the city and improve its image, to attract investment;
- Working to re-establish the city's line of credit, and build trust with institutions and organizations;
- Repaired the roof at Hilltop Fire Station;
- Created a police accountability and internal affairs board;
- Abolished downtown parking meters;
- Updated fireworks regulations;
- Hired two new full time police officers;
- Acquired two new police cars through funding from the Westmoreland Community Foundation;
- Updated police department and city hall computer equipment;
- Appointed new municipal fire chief, Delmar Hepple;
- Investigating potential wiretapping and improprieties with City Cameras
- Began work to appoint vacant city board positions, so boards are fully functional;
- Began the process of seeking RFP's for auditing services;
- Successfully completed an emergency repair of a collapsed sewer line near the river;
- Repaired facilities (Routine maintenance) at Columbus and City Park ball fields;
- Finished the uncompleted liquid fuels funds grant application so the city could receive \$284,000;
- Received \$298,000 in CDBG funds for the fiscal year;
- Began repainting yellow curbs, throughout the city;
- Began replacing various traffic signs throughout the city;
- Rejoined the Westmoreland County Housing Consortium;
- Updated City-wide Fire and Burning regulations;
- Continued the process to acquire funding through the USDA to replace main sewer lines throughout the city;
- Repurposed two former police vehicles for municipal chief and code enforcement, causing savings in insurance costs;
- Repaired a portion of a wall at 4th Street and Parkway;
- Began promoting the state's conservatorship act to encourage building rehabilitation;
- Saw the opening of at least two new Downtown businesses.
- Working to pay off \$656,000 in 2019 debt, due to mismanagement of funds.
- All bills for 2020 are currently paid and up-to-date.

Overall, we have still been able to make payroll, and pay all of our current bills for this year. We are still working on paying down the bills that were not paid in 2019, due to mismanagement. We will continue to work with the agencies to pay these bills down. We are not anywhere near bankruptcy, like some had predicted we would be by this month. While we are certainly doing better, financially - in that we are under budget, year to date, and have been saving money on various fronts, all while getting projects accomplished - we still have a long way to go. We need to continue to find ways to make investments where they make sense and seek additional funding, so that we can grow our city, attract new residents and businesses, invest in our infrastructure - like our roads and sewers, invest in our assets - like our parks and public buildings; and invest in our future development by completing development projects, rehabilitation projects, and helping existing homeowners and businesses get the help they need to grow and thrive. This year, we have seen several new businesses open, and homes have been selling throughout the city. We need to keep this positive momentum moving, and let people know the benefits of living in Monessen.

I am proud of the work we have accomplished so far, and although we have a long way to go, I believe we are moving in the right direction. I can't wait to share more updates with you at the next state of the city address, so we can show our progress, and continue charting a new course to rebuild our city.

It is because of the cooperation and willingness of members of this council, and the hard work of our employees, especially our City Administrator, that these things could be accomplished. I am very grateful for their work.

Thank you all. Stay safe and healthy.

Onward!

Matt Shorraw
Mayor, City of Monessen