

**City of North Ridgeville, Ohio
State of the City Address
January 18, 2019**

Delivered by Mayor G. David Gillock

Welcome to my sixteenth State of the City.

First, I would like to thank Marjorie Snyder and the North Ridgeville Chamber of Commerce for sponsoring today's event. Our Chamber is very active and if you own or work for a business in North Ridgeville you should really consider joining and supporting the Chamber if you do not already do so.

Thanks to Superintendent Roxann Ramsey-Caserio and our school board for making this facility available.

I would like to recognize several public officials that are with us today.

Let me start with our City Council members: President Kevin Corcoran, At-Large Members Michelle Hung and Martin DeVries. We also have Council Members Ward 1 Gregg Westover, Ward 2 Dennis Boose, Ward 3 and President Pro-Tem Bruce Abens and Ward 4 Bob Chapek. Also here today is Senator Nathan Manning, Jennifer Kiko from Congressman Gibbs' Office, Jake Altman from State Auditor's Office, Judge Robert White and Lorain County Commissioner Lori Kokoski and Dawn Walther from County Commissioner Matt Lundy's Office.

Before I get too far into this speech I would like to recognize my wife Beverly who has played a big part in my career and in writing this speech. I would also like to recognize my daughters that are here with me today – Kristen, Alison and Erica. My daughter Emily, who lives in Columbus, was unable to join us.

I'm going to start this speech with an announcement that there will not be a seventeenth State of the City. Let me rephrase that, I will not be the one giving a 17th State of the City speech. I will be retiring at the end of this year, completing my fourth term and sixteen years as your Mayor. Bev and I have given this a lot of thought and although I have enjoyed immensely being Mayor of this great city, there are other things I'd like to do before I get too old to enjoy them; like traveling, spending more time with my family and pursuing my passion for fishing on Lake Erie in my boat, as well as finally having the time to start checking items off my bucket list. Because this is my last speech I will change up my usual format a bit because telling you where I think this city is going will be up to someone else next year. Instead I would like to take this opportunity to reminisce a little and highlight a few things from my fifteen years as your Mayor.

If you work now or have ever worked for the City of North Ridgeville I'd like you to please stand. Audience, look around. These are the people that have operated our city on a daily basis, and they have done a darn good job of it. I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to each and every one of them. You are some of the most amazingly dedicated people I have ever had the pleasure to work with. We have not always agreed on everything but we have always been able to sit down and work things out. Our city's successes, and there are many, are a testament to your hard work and dedication and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Please give them a round of applause.

I'd like to ask this next group of people to stand when I call your name. These people comprise the "kitchen cabinet" that supported my office over those sixteen years.

- Denny Johnson was my first Safety Service Director. Denny was unable to join us today, however, I do want to recognize him. Beginning in December 2003 we immediately established ourselves as a team. Having both served in the Army, we quickly identified our roles and I was the company commander and Denny was the first sergeant. I still have this plaque hanging in my office. We hit the pavement running and welcomed everyone into City Hall and the Mayor's Office with an open door policy which I still adhere to today. We were both pleasantly surprised at the positive response from the employees and the general public to the open door policy. Denny stayed with me until 2009 when he retired but during his time as Safety Service Director, he passionately and compassionately oversaw our 200+ employees. But let me tell you a little story involving Denny. One day a couple came in for a wedding and told us that he was deaf, we had to provide an interpreter and we had to pay for it. Denny said Judge Musson's court uses interpreters and could do it over the phone. I had to ask him, how do you do sign language over the phone? After we finished wiping our eyes, Sandy was able to secure an interpreter who came for the wedding and did a fine job in person.
- Jeff Armbruster replaced Denny as Safety Service Director. As a businessman, former State Senator and Mayor of this city, his vast experience along with his contacts at the state level made him a natural fit. I actually have Jeff to thank for my political career. Back in the early nineties when he was Mayor of this city, my wife worked in his business office. One afternoon he casually mentioned to her that North Ridgeville needed people to run for City Council. The only catch was they had to be a Republican. My wife explained to Jeff that although she was a lifelong Republican, her husband came from a long line of distinguished Democrats. I knew Jeff and had worked on and supported his mayoral campaigns, so I guess I was already a Republican much to the chagrin of my parents back in Illinois. And, at one point early on when I was on Council, Jeff announced over cocktails one night that I was going to be Mayor someday. Surprise, surprise, his prediction turned out to be right. It's been a wild and crazy ride! Jeff and I have distinctly different personalities at times frustrating each other to no end. I don't think anybody ever told Jeff "No" before but I think that's what made us such a great team. I am very appreciative of the opportunity to work with him.
- Sandy Hall was my first Administrative Assistant. She worked well with Denny and I and brought with her to the Mayor's Office, her experience and expertise as an employee in the Council Clerk's Office as well as serving as secretary to many of our boards and commissions. Fiercely loyal to me and my family, you had to go through Sandy to get to the Mayor.
- Tissy Simon came aboard when Sandy retired in 2012. Tissy worked for the school district and her dedication and hard work with them did not go unnoticed – so I stole her away from them. And I still haven't heard the end of it. When I think of Tissy I immediately think of the bubbling enthusiasm she brings to our office. She's always smiling and cheerful and very accomplished at her job, whether organizing work documents or decorating for Halloween and Christmas. I tend to be a bit of a procrastinator and she has always kept me on task, making sure things get done in a timely manner even if it means hounding me to death.
- Robin Mayda has been with the City for 34 years and has worked with four different mayors. I think each one of them would tell you that she was loyal to them. Because, regardless of party affiliation (and I think she served two Democrats and two Republicans) she made it her job to be loyal and supportive to whoever was sitting in the Mayor's Office. Robin brings her best to work every day and, although she does a whole lot more than act as our receptionist, Robin's positive attitude and professionalism makes her the perfect person to greet visitors coming in to City Hall.

- Brian Moriarty is now the City Law Director with about one year under his belt as Law Director, but was the City Prosecutor then Magistrate for several years so he knows the ropes. Still, it's a learning process and Brian has done a yeoman's job filling Andy Crites' shoes.
- I saved Andy Crites for last as he couldn't be with us today. Andy, after fourteen years as Law Director, pulled up roots and moved to Montana! Haven't we all considered something like that at one time or another, but Andy actually did it. Andy was my sounding board and confidant (actually still is) and has a great sense of humor. Andy sort of learned while on the job and in my opinion became one of the most accomplished city law directors in northeast Ohio and served as President of the Northeast Ohio Law Directors Association. But it wasn't all easy. When I first became Mayor I asked Jeff Manning for assistance. Jeff had been City Law Director, a State Representative and was County Prosecutor at the time. He said he knew a terrific young guy and since Manning's office was just down the street, he could help train him and provide guidance as Andy learned the job. Unfortunately, shortly after hiring Andy, Jeff unexpectedly passed away. So Andy and I basically looked at each and said, what do we do now? But with his legal background and my experience on Council we were able to figure it out. We were able to settle a number of outstanding appropriations cases and go on to keep the City out of litigation for the most part, and me out of trouble for fourteen years! He was, and to an extent still is, a crucial part of my administration.

These people have acted as my sounding board, my advisors and my confidants. I placed my full trust in each and every one of them and they, in turn, have rewarded me with kindness and loyalty. Without question they have successfully maintained the integrity of the Mayor's Office with dignity and professionalism, and I am grateful to have had these amazing people in my life. You have touched my heart and my gratitude is overflowing. Thank you. Let's give them a round of applause.

I'm not going to say a lot about her (she doesn't like being in the limelight) but I would like to recognize my wife Beverly, the first lady of North Ridgeville. Of course, without her unwavering support, none of this would have been possible.

So, what a ride it has been. Looking back over previous State of the City speeches I would like to mention some of our major accomplishments.

Before I do that, I would like to share a letter of appreciation written by a third grader after a field trip to City Hall. "Dear Mayor D. Gillock, Thank-you for taking your time on us instead of something else because I Know you have a busy schedule. I am happy That I got to see you and I Always wanted to meet the mayor of my hometown and I finally did. I have a question, How do you become mayor? Do you run for it or do you just be it? I just want to say thank-you again for all you've done and have a good day."

Beginning in 2000 when I was on Council, we installed a new sanitary sewer which opened up the western half of the city. This allowed my administration to extend sewers all along Center Ridge Road, sewer Dyke Avenue and we are presently working on eliminating the Westfield package plant and bring sewers to the eastern end of Sugar Ridge Road. We have also eliminated or renovated almost all of our lift stations with new systems that have generator backups, assuring our residents and businesses that our sewer systems will work, even if the power goes out.

Our goal from the beginning was to become known as a business-friendly city. One of the first things we did was to establish a Foreign Free Trade Zone along Taylor Parkway supporting our businesses in the Taylor Woods Industrial Park.

We established a Railroad Quiet Zone, so trains don't, as a rule sound their whistles when going through North Ridgeville. We are one of only a handful of communities in Ohio that have been able to accomplish this.

When I took over as Mayor in December of 2003, I met with ODOT that month and told them I wanted to widen Center Ridge Road. People said for thirty years it needed to be done, but that it couldn't be done. Well, we did it. Although it won't be finished during my term the process is about 90% complete and they just need to finish the construction phase. It took years to design the plan and put together the financing, and the City is only paying about 12.5% of the total. I suspect this will always be seen as the signature accomplishment of this administration. Unfortunately, because of the failure of certain utilities to move their infrastructure in a timely manner the project is woefully behind schedule and over budget. We will be looking to Windstream for reimbursement of approximately \$757,700 of additional charges that will be due when the project is completed in the fall of 2020. And I would anticipate those costs to rise as the project continues. Beginning this year we will be sending Windstream monthly updates and notice that we will be looking to them for reimbursement of these avoidable costs due to their delay in moving their infrastructure.

Also, we widened Lear Nagle to three lanes, under budget and on time. Traffic moves much more safely and is less congested in that area.

Another major project was our first roundabout. Controversial to say the least, we persevered in getting it done, even during an election year. We were confident it would work, would save us money in the long run, no traffic signals to maintain and solve our congestion problems during morning and evening rush periods. During the campaign the project was referred to as the "Circle of Death" and one of the stupidest things we had ever done. I'm proud to say that so far our experience has proven our detractors totally wrong. In the 16 months the roundabout has been open, the only accident we have had was an automobile fleeing the police who went around the circle the wrong way and didn't make it. That doesn't count in my book and as far as I'm concerned, we remain accident free.

A hidden gem that most people do not realize because it is so remote was a public-private partnership with a firm called Quasar Energy Group to install an anaerobic digester at the French Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant. When I first became Mayor our sludge from French Creek, the stuff left over after all the sludge has been treated and the water cleaned and sent to the Black River, was classified by the EPA as Class A sludge and was bagged and given away to our residents to spread on their yards and flower beds. Around 2011 the EPA suddenly changed the classification and our sludge was now Class B which required we dispose of it either in a landfill at \$50/ton or spread it on farmers' fields. For three years we did use farmers' fields, but the process was very expensive and was plagued with problems. Once Quasar installed the anaerobic digester on our property at French Creek, we no longer had to dispose of our sludge. Quasar was able to take the sludge, burn it and turn it into energy, which was sold back to our plant at the lowest public energy cost. So we not only solved a disposal problem but helped save the environment while saving on our energy costs. In my opinion this is one of the most important improvements the City has made in the last ten years.

Other projects over the years include straightening out the jog at Lear Nagle, totally rebuilding the Lorain/Root intersection, renovating the intersection at Lorain Road and I-480, totally rebuilding Dyke Avenue, rebuilding Lorain Road from Root to Bagley.

We also acquired numerous acres of property over the last several years. One of the first was acquisition of 68 acres off Lorain Road that used to be a fly ash pit. It is now home to Victory Sports Park, a destination site for baseball and softball players throughout Northeast Ohio, as well as the National Paintball Tournament. We worked with Forest City Land Group to acquire 30 acres adjacent to Shady Drive baseball complex for future growth. Recently through a grant we acquired 27 acres off Cary Drive to be used for future development of a detention pond in a park-like setting to help address flooding.

And let's talk a little about what the City has done to address flooding concerns. For several years now, we have been working on a Stormwater Utility Program which was passed by Council just last month in December. In 2019 it will cost each homeowner \$3.88 per month. We took our time as we wanted to make sure we got it right and avoid some of the controversy some other municipalities went through in establishing their programs.

We have spent close to \$1,000,000 in engineering and land acquisition to give us the ability to establish the program and take the steps necessary to address flooding concerns in the city as residents have demanded and deserve.

Much has been done to address these concerns. To name just a few, we widened the West Point detention pond by removing 4,000 cubic yards of dirt to accommodate an additional million gallons of water in this 65 million gallon pond.

We revitalized the Hersey Circle Dam that will keep water from Mills Creek from spilling over into the Pitts Blvd. and Gina Drive area.

The City added a new 1.6-million gallon detention pond off Jaycox Road.

We raised the weir from the Waterbury Development to help retain an additional 5.5 million gallons from the flood-prone Robinson Ditch.

But much remains to be done. Using the revenues to be generated by the utility it is part of our plan to create a 20-million gallon retention pond off Boulder Drive in a park-like setting with waterfalls and walking paths.

As most of you know, a few years ago working with Bramhall Engineering the City developed a flood control program that was estimated to cost \$4,000,000 not including land acquisition. This stormwater utility will allow us to continue implementing that plan.

There is no doubt in my mind that the City has developed one of the best stormwater utility programs around by looking at other plans and using best practices for rates, need and credit structure. It has been reviewed over and over to make it right.

Not too long ago a local newspaper had a cartoon criticizing flooding issues in North Ridgeville. When I mentioned it to someone, he said he thought we had conquered flooding issues. We're somewhere in between. I would never say we have conquered the issue. Mother Nature gets the final say on flooding. But I will say we have made great strides and in the last few years we have avoided flooding in many rain events that may have potentially caused flooding in the past. Adding a new series of detention ponds off Cary Drive to help control Mills Creek will add 124

acre-feet of flood water storage, which is approximately 40 million gallons of water, which will further continue our efforts to address flooding concerns in North Ridgeville.

Several years ago the abandoned gas station at the corner of Route 83 and Center Ridge Road, historically known as the “old gas station” was acquired by eminent domain. It was the only way we could get rid of this eyesore, but we did it. We also worked with developers and Lorain County Community College to remove eyesores on Lorain Road, an old trailer park and a euphemistically known campground on Bagley Road. Remember those? Lorain County Community College Ridge Campus and Redwood Apartments now occupy those spaces.

And, of course, with the widening of Center Ridge Road several properties and businesses were acquired or relocated changing the landscape forever. Two of our oldest businesses are gone and are still missed. Buescher Hardware and Hale’s Florist were the most significant casualties of the project although Hales did relocate to Lorain Road in North Olmsted. To name just a few, other businesses such as First Federal Lakewood, Fiesta Jalapeños and South of the Square Collision Center were able to relocate within the city. It’s always hard to see businesses like these go away, but I think in the long run when the road is finished we will see a lot of new businesses grow and flourish along our main business district.

Over the years we have had a lot of animal stories. Who can forget the “Woodpile Five?” Without going into detail the unfortunate demise of some feral kittens resulted in the largest negative publicity the city has ever seen. We have seen escaped kangaroos, live camels in Christmas displays and a pig following a man home. Seriously. Officers received a call about 5:30 a.m. about a man walking home on Center Ridge Road from Elyria claiming a pig was following him. There was and it was a real pig. The man was sober, and the pig was placed in a police car (the jokes here are endless) and returned home. Our police commented “anyone that thinks they’re funny is actually unoriginal and trying too hard.” No thin skin there. The City instituted bow hunting for deer which has worked out well. Our police also deal with wild turkeys and coyotes so we’re not totally citified yet.

Here’s another letter from a third grader... “Thank you for teaching us about were people go to if they get in trouble and for having us there. It was a lot of fun to learn about you guys and what you do. I learned about how if you get in big trouble you go to Elyria. My favorite part of the tour was meeting you.”

Looking back obviously we see the city has grown. When I became Mayor our population was about 22,000. As of our last official report US Census July 2017 our population was estimated to be 33,436, an increase of about 50%. But we still ranked as the third safest city in Ohio for municipalities with a population of over 20,000, a ranking we are very proud of.

We unfortunately lost two employees unexpectedly in April 2018 which affected the entire staff. Rita Price, longtime Director of the Office of Older Adults, passed away after a short battle with cancer. Rita had touched so many lives in our community during her 15 years with the City. Rita was not only a great leader, but a very energetic, caring and compassionate individual. Police Sergeant Dean Mraz passed away unexpectedly. He served our community since 1995 and had been a member of our detective bureau, part of our motorcycle unit, a D.A.R.E. officer and a field training officer. Dean’s friendly and contagious manner will be missed by all who knew him and has come in contact with him. Both Rita and Dean will always be missed.

About five years ago, I started monthly Coffee and Conversation with the Mayor. I’m continuing these in 2019 because they have been well received and numerous residents attend each month. These are great because we get to see things from the resident’s perspective. I was a little

surprised because I get very few complaints at these sessions and attendees are really interested in what is going on in the city. It's cool when you're in a more casual setting and can bring up city maps and so forth and discuss their questions in more detail. I would suggest that whoever fills my chair next year consider continuing that tradition.

I would like to mention that over the years this administration has always had a great working relationship with our schools' administration, and although Superintendent Roxanne Ramsey-Caserio hasn't been here very long, I see that relationship continuing. Working with the school district as part of their project building the new grades 3-8 academic center, the City constructed the new road Ranger Way. A little side story, the first 300' of Ranger Way from Center Ridge Road was to be built as part of the Center Ridge Road widening project which would not be done in time for school to open. No problem, ODOT told us they would build a temporary road connecting Ranger Way to Center Ridge Road. Unfortunately, just a few months before school was to open ODOT reneged and said they could not do it as it would cost too much. Panicking only a little bit, we started trying to figure out how we were going to connect the end of Ranger Way to Center Ridge Road at Jaycox. Our Service Department stepped up, and said Mayor, we can do that. And they did, and did an excellent job. Don't forget this is the same Service Department that a few years ago when we found a failing bridge on Stoney Ridge Road, replaced the bridge in-house with material they had in the yard, saving the city thousands of dollars. The city is extremely fortunate to have a Service Department that is so talented and willing to step up to the plate when needed.

In my opinion all of our departments rise above the norm and you should be very proud of our employees.

Last year, our residents showed their support when they passed a levy giving the city the funds to build a new fire station. The old station was a health hazard and was built in 1957 for a volunteer department. We now not only have a full time Fire Department but all of our firefighters are paramedics. The compliments from their patients never stop. You will be very proud of your new fire station and I look forward to being able to give tours to show it off. The anticipated completion date remains April 2019. In addition, this May the City is asking our residents to pay a little more towards our ambulance levy which will give us the ability to have three full service ambulances. The increase from 1.75 mills to 2.25 mills will fund three additional firefighters needed to fully staff the third ambulance. The increase will cost about \$17.50 per year for each \$100,000 of home value. So, if you have a \$200,000 home it will only cost you \$35 per year to help assure assistance is available when needed.

While we are on the subject of the Fire Department, here's another letter of appreciation from a third grader. "Dear Local Governments Leaders, Thank you for teaching us about North Ridgeville. It was so much fun meeting you. The other departments were also fun. My favorite part was the N.R.F.D. Thank you for visiting us."

I also want to touch on some of the 2018 commercial projects, some of which are carrying over into 2019. First, let me start by noting the Mosque that created much controversy, is no longer being built on the property they purchased on Center Ridge Road. They've since purchased property in Westlake and have decided to build their house of worship in the same community in which they are currently located.

Other noteworthy projects include the opening of University Hospitals North Ridgeville Health Center in June; Rudolph Libbe celebrated their opening in May; Burger King on Lorain Road opened their doors in February 2018; Master Pizza in the Giant Eagle plaza opened for business in March 2018; Van's Auto Service and Tire Pros celebrated their grand opening in September.

The Avenue at North Ridgeville Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Center, a full service nursing home, is being constructed on Lear Nagle and Washington is moving along quite nicely. Also, at Lorain and Bagley roads, Danbury of North Ridgeville, an assisted living with memory care facility, is under construction. A new office building is being constructed on Cook Road that will house Alber & Rice, a structural and civil engineering services firm. Several major renovations and expansions include Aldi, Bistro 83, Sheetz, PNC Bank, Marc's, Premier Flooring, and Health Express Urgent Care will be opening at the former Our Place restaurant location.

Let's talk stats a little bit. The Fire Department responded to 3,575 calls last year of which 3,033 were EMS, so you can see the need for three full service ambulances. Good News! The number of Narcan patients in 2018 was 68 down from the previous year of 100.

Our Police Department responded to 31,410 calls for service and 2,300+ hours of traffic enforcement. Speaking of traffic enforcement, there has been since August 29, 2018, the first day of school, 47 citations written for illegally passing school buses. The school district has installed several cameras on their buses to capture the drivers in the act. I would like to take a moment for you to watch one of the recent videos so that you can see how this new technology works.

The Building Department issued permits for 308 new homes, six condos/apartments and seven new commercial buildings. All are increases from 2017. They also performed 9,758 inspections due to construction activities and 872 inspections due to complaints for a total of 10,630 inspections.

Our Service (Streets) Department kept busy in 2018 with paving 12 streets, over five miles of paving and 11,000 tons of asphalt. Over 7 miles of ditches were cleaned, 33 water main breaks and 8 service lines repaired, 50 curb boxes replaced, and 10 fire hydrants replaced and 10 repaired, and 50 catch basins were replaced or repaired. Finally, the Service Department responded to over 6,300 OUPS requests to locate underground waterlines.

Our Law Department prosecuted well over 2,000 cases last year. The last available statistics from Elyria Municipal Court include 1,319 traffic cases, which includes driving under the influence of alcohol cases; 317 additional criminal cases and 737 civil cases for a grand total of 2,373.

The Senior Center continues to provide activities and services for our older adults. In 2018 the Meals on Wheels program provided 10,889 meals to shut-ins providing them not only a meal but often a safety check and personal contact they might not otherwise receive. We currently have a Meals on Wheels recipient that's 102 years old. In addition, the Senior Center provided over 2,500 trips for seniors to doctors' appointments and other needs and hosted over 9,500 visitors at various events and activities.

Our Parks & Recreation Department has much to celebrate with the opening of the tennis/pickleball courts in June of 2018. There are now 4 tennis courts and 8 pickleball courts. The newly opened pickleball courts were in use during good weather conditions and at times, had folks lined up waiting to get on the court. Also added last summer was the Summer Concert Series, alternating Fridays with Movies in the Park. Both the movies and concerts are held at South Central Park and are FREE to attend! What a great way to spend time with the family and not have to spend any money. Our recreation programs involved 4,149 participants and our special programming offered another recreational opportunity to another 7,503 people.

Since I took office, at the end of 2018 we have performed 386 wedding ceremonies. Most seem to be older couples who decide to tie the knot, and couples that have been together for years. I

recently officiated a wedding where the couple had been together for eleven years and their whole family thought they were already married. They tried to keep it a secret but somehow the family found out and everyone showed up and it was great. I married one couple on a Thursday and the following Tuesday the groom called wanting to know how he could get out of it. I have already officiated three ceremonies in 2019. One of these was a couple that dated in high school 28 years ago and then went their separate ways. Through Facebook they reconnected just a few months ago and decided to tie the knot. I guess love does conquer all.

Financially, the city is in good shape. Income tax revenues were up only slightly but our investment income was \$803,471. I can remember when it was less than \$20,000 before we retained Meeder Investments and our City Treasurer Brian Keller continued and improved on the good work began by our former Treasurer Tim Pope. Our total budget is now \$89,000,000. The general fund is about \$15,000,000 and we were able to hit our benchmark of carrying over 30% of the general fund, or \$4,500,000 which helps us retain our excellent Moody's rating of Aa1, which helps keep our interest rates down. Moody's rating service stated in their recent draft concerning North Ridgeville, "The credit position for North Ridgeville is very strong, and its Aa1 rating is higher than the median rating of Aa3 for cities nationwide." I think this speaks well of our conservative budgeting. Kudos to all our department heads for staying within their budgets and our Auditor's Office for continuing to conservatively manage our taxpayers dollars.

The achievements made during my 15 plus years as your Mayor are not mine alone. We accomplished those things together, and when I say "We" I mean the 224 employees in City Hall, Police and Fire Stations, French Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, Senior Center and our Parks & Recreation, Service and Maintenance departments. And, I also mean those who served on our City Council and of course the 33,000+ citizens of North Ridgeville.

It's time to share another third grader thank you letter. "Dear Mayor Gillock and City Council, Thank you for letting us visit. My favorite thing was you all never give up. I also enjoyed learning about you all working together like Lebron James and the Cavs. Thank you again for letting us in your Council Chambers."

As far as my vision for our city? Well, it doesn't really matter for that will be the job of our new Mayor and City Council. But allow me to mention just a few of my thoughts for our future.

We need a new City Hall to include facilities for our Police Department and Senior Center. We have been "making do" with our current outdated facility long enough. Look around at our neighboring communities. Most have new, modern city halls with room to expand for future growth.

We need to provide more leisure opportunities for all of our residents, especially our children and a community pool would serve that purpose. A recreation center would be nice if we could find a way to make it financially feasible.

Those are all capital improvements that come with hefty price tags and can be hard-sells to the citizens, because who likes to pay more taxes. But these improvements would contribute to the economic and environmental well-being of this community and also go a long way in maintaining the quality of life that we all enjoy.

In closing, allow me to digress a bit. On December 6, 2003 I performed my first official act as your Mayor - the lighting of the Christmas tree. I think at the time we lighted the tree in front of Old Town Hall. Remember how the girl scouts decorated it half way up because that was all the higher they could reach? I remember being filled with pride as I stood there on that cold winter

evening, just after dark, waiting for my cue to plug the cord in. I remember reflecting on the paths I might take to make our community a better place to live. I couldn't wait to get started.

Ironically, my last official act as your Mayor in December 2019 will be the lighting of the Christmas tree. Only this time, instead of enthusiastic anticipation about leading our city, I will be filled with excitement for what lies ahead in retirement. But I know I will also be filled with a sense of sadness. I will miss all of you. I have loved being your Mayor. It has been one of the greatest honors in my career. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to serve you and this wonderful city.

Here's one more letter from a third grader I would like to share. "Dear Mayor David Gillock, It was nice meeting you. Thank You for taking time out of your day to come talk with us and answer our questions. I am sure our city has changed because of you. You also helped us learn about city government. It's awesome that you have been mayor for fifteen years. You have changed the world a lot since you have been mayor."

One final thing. I would like my wife Beverly to join me on stage. Each year at the end of my speech you have given me a standing ovation. This year I would like to lead the standing ovation to her for all she has done to make me successful. I have a much thicker skin than she does. She has endured through all these years getting me to meetings on time and dressed properly. I would like to recognize her for all she has given and sacrificed behind the scenes these past 15 years.