**STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

City of Benton

February 22, 2016

Mayor David Mattingly

Five years is the average length of an NFL running back’s career. That’s interesting because a five year window probably applies to a lot of careers. I was just a kid without hair when I came here in 2011, and now I’m a senior citizen without hair, who at times feels like I’ve been sacked by all pro linebacker Clay Matthews. And guess what, the referee didn’t throw his flag and call an unnecessary roughness penalty. It’s thought-provoking that the NFL found it necessary to invent rules to protect quarterbacks, but no such rules have been instituted by governmental bodies to protect mayors. Alright, enough of all that. Here’s your State of the City Address for 2015.

Early in 2015, I was given the opportunity to speak, for the second year in a row, at the CADC Conference and the points I made have become my mantra. In case you have forgotten, below are the five principles I believe are fundamental to an individual who is in a leadership role:

1. You have to have a plan, and the strength to stand in front of a group of people and say, “Follow Me.”!

2) You either stand for something, or you stand for nothing; make that clear.

3) Tell the people what your plan is and get your message out.

4) Offer them a seat at the table.

5) Don’t ask somebody to do something you won’t do yourself.

Now, let’s turn our attention to the highlights from each department in 2015. Here is a short excerpt from each department’s report:

* In the Benton Police Department significant improvements were implemented in communications with the addition of a new AWIN dispatch system, which cost in excess of $800,000 and was paid for with cash from the ½ cent public safety tax to help facilitate improved service. Training for the police department exceeded 10,000 hours for the year and records kept on reports made to the department exceeded 35,000 individual reports. NIBRS reports for the year, in all crime categories, showed a decrease of 4.2% compared to 2014 statistics. Late in 2015, the Benton City Council approved the funding for an Assistant Chief of Police. The Civil Service Commission approved the position and a selection committee chose Captain Scotty Hodges to fill the position and he became the first ever Assistant Chief of Police in the City of Benton.
* The Benton Fire Department attained several goals, including obtaining ISO Class 2 rating for the City of Benton, departmental training exceeding 18,000 hours, the replacement of Engine #4 at a cost of $453,954, which was budgeted and paid for with cash from the ½ cent public safety tax, the purchase of a 12 ft. rescue boat, the design was finished for our new Fire Station #5 and a 40 hour CORE Rescue Technical training class was completed. The school fire safety program also set new a new benchmark, reaching over 4500 school age children.
* The Street Department’s activities for the year included a contract renewal for median and city owned property landscaping services, resurfacing of 4.21 miles of city streets, 16 culvert repairs, the replacement of 95 street signs, new street markings in 3 major areas and 7 new street projects throughout the city.
* In 2015, Benton Animal Control purchased two new fully equipped trucks and a mobile adoption trailer, to facilitate offsite adoption programs. All animal control officers, including Mr. Parsons, became nationally certified. Although the total number of cats and dogs adopted in 2015 were similar to that of 2014, the strategy in the past was to rely upon rescue groups coming to the shelter to facilitate adoptions. Last year a strategic change was implemented with the addition of the mobile adoption trailer and numerous public adoption events, which created a very proactive adoption program allowing 83% of all animals adopted to come directly from our shelter.
* The Benton Parks and Recreation Department continued to focus on expanding and improving its facilities and services provided to our citizens. The emphasis was on two specific programs, tennis and walking trails, both of which were rewarded with grant funding to support and improve these activities. Additionally, grant funds were obtained for improvements at Ralph Bunche Park, which will include a new earthen amphitheater and expanded parking. Lastly, progress on the construction of the new Riverside Park Complex, which will include a Community Center building, an indoor pool, and new Boy’s and Girl’s Club, a Senior Activity and Wellness Center, a soccer complex and a girls softball complex, continues with an expected completion date of April 2017.
* In 2015 the Community Development Department performed 4,692 inspections, issued permits for 158 residential structures representing a total estimated retail value of $30,420,760.00, and issued 15 permits for commercial structures with a total estimated retail value of $42,818,394.00. The Code Enforcement Officers completed 385 inspections last year, with 360 of those cases requiring citations. There were 33 demolitions, 8 by the city and 25 by property owners, and 1 property required clean-up, but no liens had to be placed in 2015. The Department worked on 5 major projects last year including, right of way acquisitions and utility relocations on the Alcoa Road widening project, for which we are the lead agency, projected to start accepting bids in May 2016. The department also issued permits for construction on the Riverside Park Complex, Certificates of Occupancy for the new Hurricane Creek Village Shopping Center, a Memorandum of Understanding with the Shoppes of Benton completed in September and the issuance of building permits for the Links at Longhills. There were a total of 1,400 businesses licenses issued by the City Clerk in 2015, as well as 227 new or modified licenses, 4 public conveyance licenses and 40 controlled beverage permits issued. A few of the new businesses are Kroger Marketplace, Academy Sports, Slim Chickens, Pie 5 Pizza, Zaxby’s and Adacus Investments, LLC, which is the sole industrial applicant for the year.
* The city created its first Economic Development Department in 2015 and in April of last year I hired Brad Jordan to fill the position of Economic Development Director. In an effort to put together an effective economic development plan, my office, along with the city administration and business community, joined forces to create what is now known as the Benton Business Development Initiative (BBDI). BBDI debuted at the Municipal League Winter Conference in Little Rock, exhibiting the only trade show booth representing an Arkansas city. With BBDI and the Economic Development Department up and running, the city began discussions with GBT Realty out of Brentwood, Tennessee, to bring a new shopping center to Benton, which will feature several “big-box” stores as well as a few smaller shops. We also saw the opening of the Hurricane Creek Village Shopping Center, which houses Kroger Marketplace and Academy Sports, both of which experienced their most successful grand openings in history and created over 550 new full-time jobs and 400 part-time jobs. The downtown area of Benton also saw major change last year with the purchase of the Harvest Foods Building by a new tech company, ACDI, who has already razed the old building and will begin construction on their new headquarters in mid-2016. With the execution of a land lease in November between Henry Brown Realty and the City of Benton, the downtown area will also see the addition of a Farmer’s Market, hopefully in late 2016 or early 2017.
* Security throughout the main floor of the Benton Municipal Complex continued to see upgrades in 2015. A security camera system is in place, which provides real time monitoring and review capabilities for the protection of our employees, as well as the citizens. A training program has been developed and all employees and city council members, with the assistance of the Benton Police Department, have been trained in the proper response to a security breach within City Hall. The Document Retention policy remains in full force and has resulted in compliance with state law.
* The Human Resources Department is pleased to report city employees received 3.5% pay increase in July of 2015. We also saw health insurance premiums and worker’s compensation premiums remain stable for 3 years in a row, with no rate increase since January 1, 2013. Over 80 Service Awards were presented, 6 of which were acknowledgements for 30 years of service to the city. We were able to reduce the city’s contribution for non-uniformed pension funding from 16% of salary in 2014 to 12% in 2015, a savings of $91,000, and maintain that rate for 2016. We also experienced one of our safest years, with only 1 lost time injury last year.
* It’s been a big year for the City of Benton’s social media presence. Between Facebook, Twitter, the Benton Proud Blog and city website, we’ve made quite an impression. The Blog, which started in September of 2014, took five months to reach 10,000 visitors. Three months later, on May 1, we reached 25,000. Seven months later we’re over 230,000. We currently average about 1,500 visits per day, or a little over 10,000 per week. This is the same number we reached in the first five months of the blog. Unfortunately many news sources believe the best way to garner readers/viewers is to report bad news in a spectacular way, but our belief is that people want and need to hear the good news in their community. It gives us hope and a warm feeling about our home town. The number of subscribers to the blog has increased to well over 100 to date. The city Facebook page had 835 “likes” as of January 1, 2015, but by December 31, 2015 the page had grown to 3,875 “likes” an average of 8.33 new “likes” each day in 2015. The total number of impressions for our Facebook page was 1,318,826 for 2015. We saw a much higher number in the third and fourth quarter due to ads placed on our Facebook page through Your Ad Team. Our Twitter feed is watched by 300 followers. The feed had a total of 111,032 impressions in 2015, with 4,135 visits to view our Twitter profile. In 2015 we sent out 573 tweets, and average of 1.6 per day.
* Another highlight in 2015 was the City of Benton being recognized as the Volunteer Community of the Year. This award is sponsored by the Governor’s Office, the Arkansas Municipal League and the DHS Division of Community Service and I’m proud to say we’ve received this honor 5 out of the last 6 years.

I’ve attached a report prepared by Benton Utilities General Manager Terry McKinney, highlighting several accomplishments and goals reached by the Utility Department in 2015 and have included more detailed reports from each department which reports to me.

In conclusion, I’d like to thank the City Council, our City Clerk, City Attorney, and staff for their tireless work and commitment to our city. I am Benton proud of them, and our citizens, for supporting the progressive legislation and projects we have completed or have underway, and am pleased to tell you we have once again operated within budget, which is our 5th year in a row.

Thanks!