

When I became Mayor, I was confident I would enjoy the position. But what I did not know is how much. Last year was more rewarding than I could ever have imagined. Working with the citizens of Amherst, city employees and staff, contractors, and city council has been a pleasure. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Mayor. I will now share with you my annual State of the city report.

Amherst Citizens, City Council, and members of the press:

The state of our city is strong.

Let me begin with our financial strength. Residents rightly expect the city to spend within its means, just as they do at home. Last year, I presented a balanced budget. With just a few additional appropriations that were approved by City Council I am pleased to announce we stayed within the approved 2016 budget, and finished the year in the black. The city was able to provide high quality services and safety forces, while living within our means.

Stating the City's finances in simple terms, we have more money in the city's bank account today than there was 1 year ago.

All 3 of our revenue accounts (Sewer, Water, and Electric) are stable. The city of Amherst continues to enjoy some of the most affordable utility rates in the area, while receiving some of the most reliable services. In order to assure the affordability and reliability of our utilities into the future, the city has contracted with Courtney and Associates to complete an electric rate and capital expenditure study. I will share the results of this study with council as soon as it is complete.

The city is always striving to continually improve utility services. The Electric Department has recently taken an inventory and has inspected every utility pole the city owns. The poles were all assigned a number and its GPS locations were recorded. This will allow us to better map our electrical system in order to make more efficient emergency repairs and further help in the planning and completion of general maintenance.

Another project, the installation of the AMI utility metering system should begin later this year. This will allow a more timely, consistent and accurate billing of our utilities. Our customers will also have more information available about their utility usage in real time, allowing them to make better energy and water consumption choices. There will be more council action necessary in the near future to keep this project on schedule. I would like to take this opportunity to thank council, for their continued support of this project.

We can all be proud of our utility and service workers. Last year our city realized significant cost savings due to our own utility workers performing infrastructure improvements in house that would normally have been subcontracted. Among those improvements were the Rout 58 and Spring Street waterline replacements that were coordinated with the street resurfacing program. Also, upgrades to our wastewater treatment plant that expanded our holding capacity of raw sewage during high flow events. Those are great examples of doing more for less and saving the city dollars.

Winters are hard on our city streets. With that in mind, we have adopted a city pothole repair policy mandating that once a pothole is reported, it is fixed within 2 working days. City workers are out fixing

potholes all winter long and some pot holes multiple times. The Street Department currently repairs potholes with a cold patch material. One way we are considering improving our street maintenance is by purchasing a Duropatch machine, which will improve pothole and basic road repairs by using a more durable material than cold patch. Duropatch adheres to the road surface better and will not as easily be affected by snow plows. Indications are that once a duropatch repair is made it will be longer lasting and the need to fix a hole multiple times per season will disappear. The city is also investigating new road surface maintenance technology that will prolong the life of our streets. Instead of waiting for our streets to crumble requiring completely repaving or reconstructing them we would extend the life of our streets using this technology. Both the duropatch machine and a new maintenance program are much needed tools to improve our street program. Not only will it save funds it will free up labor hours that would normally be spent fixing the same pot hole multiple times, and again it will be ways we can continue to do more for less.

Council has already approved this year's street program. Bramhall Engineering is preparing the bid packets and we will be advertising it soon.

Mother Nature, so far, has again cooperated with a mild winter. Thanks to her we will realize some savings this year. I will analyze these savings in the coming months and it is my hope to add another round of road resurfacing projects.

The City's safety forces are excellent. This year's budget allows the full staffing of both the police and fire departments. We are planning for 2 retirements in the police department that will be replaced with internal promotions and the hiring of 2 new officers. One member of the police department is currently deployed overseas and is expected to return early 2018. Last year the police department implemented the countywide New World software. The system is up and running and the police department is utilizing and benefiting from the data provided and shared with all the other departments in the county.

The police department would like to remind residents to sign up for WENS. This is the Wireless Emergency Notification System. During emergencies, specific to your location, this system will notify you by calling your phone. More information can be found on the police department's website, AMHERSTPOLICE.NET. The WENS system was recently used to notify residents in a neighborhood where there was a burglary. Not only did the call increase safety and awareness of the situation, the information that was gathered from the residents who responded will be useful in the case. The police department would also like to remind us, "If you see something, say something." Please call the police department if you see something unusual or suspicious in your neighborhood.

The Fire Department provides exceptional emergency response services due to its fine personnel and the equipment they use. The Fire Department facilities and equipment are all kept up to date and maintained solely through the funding of a tax levy that comes due every 5 years. This 1 mil tax levy renewal will appear on the May 2<sup>nd</sup> ballot this year. I urge every resident to please vote for Issue One, and support the Fire Department so that they may continue to provide the best emergency response services possible.

The Building Department had a busy 2016. The city issued commercial building permits for over 7 million dollars in new construction, and 11 new homes. The preserve at quarry lakes is a new subdivision that was approved last year. At completion this will add 100 new homes in Amherst.

The improvements to phase one have been dedicated and new homes should appear there soon. It is predicted that there will be more new housing starts this year than last.

The Building Department has implemented a new managing software offering even a higher level of customer service than we already provide, allowing the department to better track permits, and building code violations. The department will offer online services and credit card payments to better serve our public and commercial builders. The building inspector is replacing the department's old pickup truck, and has ordered a new Ford Edge and you should see that vehicle on the road soon.

Existing businesses are growing and new ones are coming to Amherst. There were 14 new businesses in town last year. Our historic Downtown District is thriving. Downtown Building occupancy is near 100%.

Downtown merchants have taken advantage of the Community Development Block Grant to pour more than \$153,000 into improvements to their buildings. 58 thousand dollars of that was in grants. More business means more need for parking. The city added 83 new parking spaces downtown last year, mostly funded by grant dollars.

The technology upgrade is well underway. Last year city council approved funding for the data center which is the heart of the project. It is being installed as we speak and will soon be finished. I have done as much as I can to provide the necessary equipment and technology to meet our immediate needs, and to prepare us for the future without an IT department. That's why I have asked council to approve the new department of Information Technology. Thank you for approving that new department tonight. To complete the network phase of our technology upgrade, Council will soon see an agenda request for funding of a fiber optic ring that will connect our city buildings.

Soon, a request for proposals will be advertised in search of a firm that will head the restoration of City Hall's auditorium. The successful applicant will not only be responsible for engineering, but will be responsible for searching for funding sources and opportunities.

As I said earlier, the state of our city is strong.

I stated last year, our city's strength is seen in more than just numbers in a budget, utility rates, reports and infrastructure. After one year in office, I believe even more now, than I did one year ago, that Amherst's sense of community is among our biggest assets. If we continue to work together, Amherst will remain the place we all want to live, run our business, and are all proud to call home.