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**Office of the City Manager**  
312 W. Whitewater St.  
Whitewater, WI 53190

To: Whitewater Community  
From: John Weidl, City Manager  
Date: 9/24/2024  
Re: Reflecting on Two Years of Progress in Whitewater

## **Introduction**

Over the past two years, the City of Whitewater has remained steadfast in its commitment to fulfilling its mission statement: to provide efficient, high-quality services that support living, learning, working, and playing in an exceptional community. Our vision emphasizes the importance of maintaining a safe, dynamic environment while embracing the cultural and educational opportunities presented by our thriving university and increasingly diverse population. This vision has guided every initiative and project we've undertaken during this period.

Today, I am proud to share our progress, which is structured around four core areas: Economic Development and Infrastructure, Community Services and Environmental Stewardship, Public Safety, and Community Engagement and Employee Support. This summary reflects the collective efforts of all our departments, each contributing to our shared goal of making Whitewater a vibrant community.

## **Economic Development and Infrastructure**

Our focus on economic development and infrastructure has been pivotal in fostering a thriving community and supporting sustainable growth. Since I took office, we have approved over \$50 million in residential growth, a testament to our commitment to building a vibrant and inclusive city. The Meadowview Subdivision and the final phase of the Park Crest Subdivision are already underway, contributing 51 new homes to our community. Additionally, the multifamily development on Jakes Way, which will add 128 apartments, is set to begin construction later this year, aligning with our strategic goal of building 100 homes in 5 years.

On the commercial front, we have welcomed businesses like ALDI and Starbucks and several new additions to downtown. The arrival of ALDI is particularly noteworthy, as it fills a vital need for a full-service grocery store in our community—a service that had been missing since the closure of Sentry in 2015. These new businesses are not only enhancing our local economy but also providing residents with more choices and convenience.

We have also been proactive in supporting our existing businesses. The Office of Economic Development has conducted 28 Business Recruitment and Expansion (BRE) visits in 2024 alone. These visits are crucial for understanding the needs of our business community and ensuring that we provide the support necessary for their success.



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Infrastructure improvements have been another cornerstone of our efforts. The \$4.58 million Vanderlip Pumping Station project, supported by \$2.1 million in Principal Forgiveness from a Clean Water Fund Loan, is a major investment in our wastewater system. We've also undertaken significant street reconstruction projects, such as the repaving of Walworth Avenue and Innovation Drive, with 80% of the costs covered by the state. These projects and our ongoing efforts to replace lead water service laterals demonstrate our commitment to building a robust infrastructure that can support future growth and development.

### **Community Services and Environmental Stewardship**

The City Clerk's Office has made tremendous progress in modernizing and streamlining our processes to better serve the community. One of the most impactful changes has been the implementation of MuniCode for agendas and meeting packets, which has replaced the outdated process of merging PDFs. This change has improved accessibility and transparency, making it easier for residents to stay informed about city business. In addition, we have introduced Badger Books, electronic poll books that allow voters to register and check in at any station within their designated location, regardless of ward. This advancement has significantly improved our election processes' efficiency and enhanced our community members' voting experience.

We have also established a Central Count location to process absentee ballots, which has centralized the procedure, ensuring greater accuracy and reducing the burden on polling places during elections. This centralized process allows for more careful attention to detail, further safeguarding the integrity of our elections. These efforts, combined with our continuous collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater to host joint City and University Common Council meetings twice a year, have strengthened our engagement with the community and reinforced our commitment to providing transparent, accessible services to all residents.

Further, our dedication to community services is reflected in the improvements made at the Whitewater Aquatic and Fitness Center (WAFC) and the Irvin L. Young Memorial Library. After years of operating without a long-term contract, we successfully negotiated a 6-year agreement with the school district for WAFC, ensuring shared responsibility for operational and capital expenses. In two years, the WAFC has experienced a 33% increase in memberships, from 1,596 in 2022 to 2,126 in 2024. We've also enhanced the facility with renovations to the locker rooms and bathroom floors, as well as upgrades to fitness equipment, making WAFC a hub for community wellness and recreation.

The Irvin L. Young Memorial Library is similarly experiencing transformative growth. Surpassing its capital campaign goal, the library raised over \$2.3 million, enabling a significant expansion project that began in September 2024 and is expected to be completed by October 2025. The library's commitment to enriching the community is evident in its innovative programming and receipt of multiple grants, such as those for RFID tagging of library items and STEM learning initiatives like NASA @ My Library.

Environmental stewardship has been at the forefront of our community efforts, particularly concerning the health and accessibility of Trippe and Cravath Lakes. Over the past two years, we



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have conducted extensive cattail removal, enhancing the usability and aesthetics of these lakes. The formation of the Lakes Advisory Committee and collaboration with the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) to develop a comprehensive lake management plan are pivotal steps toward preserving these natural resources for future generations. Additionally, our investment in the Whitewater Effigy Mounds Preserve has improved access and initiated a maintenance program to protect this culturally significant site.

## **Public Safety**

Our commitment to public safety has been exemplified by significant advancements in both the Fire Department and the Police Department. In November 2022, we embarked on a comprehensive campaign to transition Fire and EMS services to a full-time model, culminating in the successful passage of a \$1.1 million staffing referendum. This enabled us to hire 15 full-time positions, including 12 operational staff, a Fire Inspector, an Assistant Fire/EMS Chief, and a Fire/EMS Chief. One of the most impactful developments was achieving paramedic-level certification, elevating our department's ability to deliver advanced life-saving care in emergencies. This certification allows our team to administer critical pre-hospital treatments, significantly improving patient outcomes during medical emergencies.

These enhancements have drastically reduced response times—from over 5 minutes to an average of 1 minute and 30 seconds—and greatly improved our capacity to provide essential services to Whitewater and the surrounding townships. Our paramedic-level services and the department's expanded full-time staff have ensured that our community receives the highest standard of emergency medical care available.

Our Fire Department has also strengthened its training program, logging over 2,000 hours of fire and EMS training since January 2023. This rigorous training has elevated the skills and readiness of our personnel, ensuring that we are well-prepared to meet the evolving needs of our community. The department's transition to a digital record management system has further streamlined operations, enabling more efficient tracking of emergency calls, training, and public outreach. With these advancements, the Whitewater Fire Department stands as a model of excellence and commitment, providing unparalleled service and care to our community.

The Whitewater Police Department (WPD) has been equally proactive in enhancing public safety. The establishment of the WPD Drone Team and the Search Warrant Response Team (SRT) has significantly improved our capabilities in investigations and high-risk operations. The installation of 12 automated license plate reader cameras throughout the city has been a game-changer, aiding in the apprehension of multiple suspects, including an MS-13 gang member on the terrorist watchlist. These technological advancements have made Whitewater safer to live, work, and pursue academics.

Recognizing the unique challenges our law enforcement personnel face, WPD has introduced a department-wide mental wellness program. This initiative provides annual wellness check-ins with a licensed psychologist and anonymous follow-up appointments, offering crucial support to



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staff who have experienced traumatic incidents. This program underscores our commitment to the well-being of our officers, ensuring they are equipped to serve the community effectively.

### **Community Engagement and Employee Support**

The City of Whitewater is dedicated to fostering strong relationships with key organizations to better serve our community. A prime example of this commitment is our ongoing collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and the Whitewater Unified School District (WUSD). While we continue to research and discuss pedestrian safety improvements around school crossings and along Starin Road, our efforts are part of a broader, continuous dialogue aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of our students and residents across the community. These discussions are supported by quarterly meetings between the University, the City, and WUSD to address various community issues and opportunities for collaboration.

Another significant partnership is our renewed collaboration with the University on the Whitewater University Innovation Center. This initiative strengthens our shared goal of fostering community innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic development. The center serves as a hub for start-ups and small businesses, providing essential resources and support to help them grow and thrive in Whitewater.

In addition to safety and economic development, we are deeply involved in supporting the Whitewater English as a Second Language (ESL) program, which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. This program plays a crucial role in our community by providing essential language education to our multi-language learners. Furthermore, we actively support the Community Space, an organization that distributes over a quarter million pounds of food and essential items annually to those in need, regardless of residency or status. This partnership is a testament to our commitment to inclusivity and supporting all members of our community.

The City is also represented at various community events, such as International Children's Day, Whitewater Pride, and the 4th of July Parade, ensuring that we are engaged and visible in celebrating Whitewater's diverse and vibrant culture. These partnerships and our involvement in community events demonstrate our ongoing commitment to building a stronger, more connected, and more supportive community for everyone.

Our commitment to a supportive and engaging work environment is evident through our recent updates and initiatives in Human Resources. The City updated its Employee Handbook for the first time in 13 years, incorporating feedback from employees and ensuring that our policies are up-to-date, equitable, and reflective of best practices. This comprehensive update, approved by the Common Council, provides clarity and consistency, enhancing the overall work environment for all staff.

In addition to policy updates, we have implemented several new employee recognition and appreciation programs. These initiatives, such as personalized awards for years of service, employee appreciation events, and the introduction of an "Employee of the Year" award, have significantly boosted morale and strengthened our organizational culture. Employee satisfaction



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surveys indicate that 93% of our staff are happy working for the city, and 76% would recommend the City as an employer, showcasing the success of our efforts to foster a positive and supportive workplace.

These initiatives demonstrate our commitment to meeting the needs of our residents and investing in our most valuable asset—our employees. By creating a workplace where staff feel valued and supported, we ensure that our team is well-equipped to provide the high-quality services our community expects and deserves.

### **Conclusion**

As we reflect on the significant progress we've made over the past two years, it is clear that our commitment has positioned Whitewater as a resilient and growing community. We have strengthened our economic foundations, enhanced community services, promoted environmental stewardship, advanced public safety, and continued our partnerships. These accomplishments are not just milestones but building blocks for the future.

We will continue to uphold our mission and vision as we look ahead, ensuring that Whitewater remains an exceptional place to live, learn, work, and play. Our focus will remain on fostering growth, maintaining a high quality of life, and embracing the diverse opportunities within our community. I am confident that, with your continued support and engagement, we will continue to build a brighter and more prosperous future for all residents of Whitewater.

Thank you for your dedication and partnership in these efforts.

Warmest Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John S. Weidl".

John S. Weidl, City Manager



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## City of Whitewater's 2-Year Accomplishments

### City Clerk's Office:

- **Modernized Agenda and Meeting Management:** The City implemented MuniCode for agendas and meeting packets, replacing the archaic process of merging PDFs. This has streamlined the workflow, made documents more accessible, and improved transparency for the public.
- **Introduction of Badger Books:** Paper poll books were replaced with electronic Badger Books, enabling voters to register and check in at any station regardless of ward. This modernization has reduced voter wait times and simplified the election process.
- **Centralized Absentee Ballot Processing:** We established a central count location to ensure the integrity of absentee ballot processing. Previously, absentee ballots were transported from the Municipal Building to various polling places. Now, the process is handled in a centralized, calm environment, improving accuracy and efficiency.
- **Campus Polling Location Consolidation:** All elections from September through May are now held on the UW-Whitewater campus for Wards 8, 9, 10, and 13, eliminating confusion and ensuring consistent voting locations for students and residents.
- **Joint Meetings on Campus:** The City and UW-Whitewater now hold joint Common Council meetings on campus twice a year, enhancing collaboration and accessibility.
- **Digital Bulletin Board:** Installed an 85-inch electronic bulletin board in the Municipal Building entryway, allowing the City to disseminate information more quickly and effectively in both English and Spanish.

### Public Works Department:

- **Vanderlip Pumping Station Project:** This \$4.58 million initiative replaces two wastewater pumping stations with one and relays significant sections of the force main and sanitary sewer main. After rejecting high initial bids, the City secured a Clean Water Fund Loan and received \$2.1 million in Principal Forgiveness, reducing the utility's financial burden. The project commenced in February 2024 and is scheduled for completion in June 2025.
- **State Municipal Agreements for Road Repaving:** Secured agreements for repaving 1.58 miles of Walworth Avenue and 0.41 miles of Innovation Drive. The state covers 80% of the \$2.5 million cost, with the City contributing around \$693,742. Construction is scheduled for 2025.
- **2024 Bi-Annual Street Reconstruction:** This \$3.18 million project includes repaving 1.2 miles of city streets, relaying 2,765 feet of sanitary sewer main, and replacing 2,940 feet of water main. It also resolved long-standing issues by eliminating a sanitary manhole and water main under Treyton's Field of Dreams.
- **Lead Water Service Line Replacement:** In response to EPA mandates, the City identified 327 lead water service laterals needing replacement, roughly half on the public side and half on the private side. The City applied for a Safe Drinking Water Fund Loan and is eligible for up to 100% Principal Forgiveness for private side replacements, ensuring no cost to property owners. Construction is planned for 2025.

### Economic Development & Neighborhood Services:

- **Residential Development Boom:** Since John became City Manager, the City has seen significant residential growth with the completion of Meadowview development, the final phase of Park Crest Subdivision, and multifamily development on Jakes Way, adding up to \$50 million in residential investment. This includes 51 single-family homes and 128 new apartments, advancing the strategic goal of building 100 homes in 5 years.
- **Commercial Expansion:** The City welcomed several new businesses, including Aldi, Starbucks, and Dollar Tree. The opening of Aldi marked the return of a true grocery store to Whitewater after the Sentry closure in 2019, fulfilling a critical community need.
- **Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Visits:** Conducted 28 BRE visits in 2024, exceeding the strategic goal of 25 visits. These visits help the City understand the needs of the business community and foster stronger relationships with local businesses.
- **Whitewater WindUp Competition:** Partnered with UW-Whitewater's Enactus to host the Whitewater WindUp business plan competition. With 25 participants, the event culminated in two local businesses—Barista Cat Café and Stellar Vintage—winning one year of free rent and additional funding for improvements.
- **Increased Community Engagement:** Hosted more outreach events than ever before, starting with the Housing Roundtable, attended by over 60 people. Upcoming events include a Home Buying 101 workshop and a Developer Meet and Greet aimed at fostering dialogue and development.
- **First Food Truck Fest:** This event, which featured 12 vendors offering diverse food options, attracted an estimated 3,000 attendees downtown. It was a huge success, and the City plans to host more events to draw attention to the downtown area.
- **Enhanced Code Enforcement:** In response to Common Council direction, the City has increased code enforcement efforts, issuing multiple violations and municipal citations to ensure compliance and improve community standards.
- **Revived Public Art Committee:** Reestablished the committee, which had been inactive since 2019, to promote public art projects like murals and painting traffic boxes, enhancing the City's visual appeal.
- **Updated Permit Fees and Online Access:** Conducted a comprehensive review of permit fees, aligning them with neighboring communities like Elkhorn, Fort Atkinson, and Delavan. The updated fees, approved by the Common Council, now better reflect the cost of staff time. Additionally, all permits are now available online, simplifying the application process for residents and developers.

#### **Fire Department:**

- **Successful Fire & EMS Referendum:** Educated the community and surrounding townships on the need for full-time Fire & EMS services, leading to the successful passing of a \$1.1 million staffing referendum. This enabled the hiring of 15 full-time positions, significantly improving response times and service quality.
- **Improved Turnout Times:** Full-time staffing has reduced average turnout times from over 5 minutes to just 1:30 from the time of page to out the door, with a 90th percentile time of 2:55, greatly enhancing emergency response capabilities.
- **Enhanced Training Program:** Logged over 2,000 hours of fire training since January 1, 2023, improving service delivery and preparedness.

- **Transition to Digital Records Management:** Implemented a digital record management system, replacing the outdated pen-and-paper method. This system streamlines documentation for emergency calls, training, public outreach, and personnel management and enhances compliance with state audits.

#### **Irvin L. Young Memorial Library:**

- **Exceeded Capital Campaign Goal:** Surpassed the \$2.25 million fundraising goal for the library expansion project, raising over \$2.3 million, which, combined with library reserves, will cover half of the \$6 million project cost. Construction began in September 2024, with completion expected by October 2025.
- **Revamped Summer Reading Program:** Introduced a two-pronged approach with the highest participation since 2016, with 251 youth participants, 123 adults, and over 10,000 items checked out. The program included weekly Brag Tags, a prize wheel, and Book Bingo, engaging the community despite construction-related interruptions.
- **RFID Tagging Project:** Completed RFID tagging of over 50,000 library materials, funded by a Bridges Library System grant. This project streamlines item check-in/out processes and makes inventory management more efficient.
- **Grants and Programming Innovations:** Secured several grants, including NASA @ My Library, Thinking Money for Kids, and Library Improvement and Innovation grants, enhancing STEM education, financial literacy, and Makerspace resources. Programming Librarian Sarah French's innovative efforts were recognized at state and national levels, and she was invited to teach a course at UW-Madison.

#### **Human Resources Department:**

- **Updated Employee Handbook:** After 13 years, the City updated its Employee Handbook through a collaborative process involving multiple stakeholders. The handbook, approved in July 2024, now aligns with current policies and legal requirements, providing clarity and consistency for all staff.
- **Employee Retention Efforts:** Stay interviews, exit interviews, and employee surveys were implemented to gather feedback and improve workplace culture. 93% of employees reported being happy working for the City, and 76% would recommend it to others. A comprehensive recognition policy was also adopted, including service awards, team celebrations, and an "Employee of the Year" award, to foster a supportive work environment.

#### **Media Services:**

- **Public Access Channel Reinstatement:** The city's Public Access Channel, Channel 990, was successfully reinstated, providing a platform for community engagement.
- **Launch of City YouTube Channel:** Launched the City of Whitewater YouTube channel in June 2024, generating 102,000 impressions, 3,366 views, and 165 watch hours, significantly expanding the City's online presence.
- **Social Media Growth:** Achieved a 473% increase in Facebook post reach, a 729% increase in engagement, and a 236% increase in new followers from September 2023 to September 2024. This demonstrates enhanced communication and connection with the community.





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### **Parks & Recreation:**

- **Whitewater Aquatic and Fitness Center (WAFC) Agreement:** Reached a 6-year contract agreement with the School District, ensuring the continued operation of the WAFC. Membership numbers have increased steadily, with a 33% growth from 2022 to 2024, now averaging 2,126 members per month.
- **Senior Center Growth:** Welcomed 260 new members over the past two years, and class participation increased by 619 participants, reflecting a vibrant and active senior community.
- **New Recreation Events:** Developed “Christmas at Cravath,” a new holiday light display event, enhancing community spirit. Implemented new recreation software that simplifies registration, improves communication, and supports multilingual information access.
- **Lakes Restoration Efforts:** Continued efforts to restore Cravath and Trippe Lakes, including extensive cattail removal and creating a Lakes Advisory Committee. Coordinated with SEWRPC on a two-phase process to complete an updated Comprehensive Lakes Management Plan.

### **Whitewater Police Department:**

- **Creation of Drone Team:** Established a Drone Team using donated funds to enhance crime investigation, surveillance, and search operations. Deployed over ten times, including successfully locating a stolen vehicle in a marsh.
- **Search Warrant Response Team (SRT):** Created the SRT to handle high-risk investigations requiring tactical entries, deployed over ten times with successful outcomes.
- **Reaccreditation:** Achieved reaccreditation through the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Accreditation Group (WILEAG), maintaining high standards and best practices.
- **Flock Camera System:** Installed a city-wide network of 12 automated license plate reader (ALPR) cameras, aiding in arresting high-profile suspects, including an MS-13 gang member, and improving public safety.
- **Mental Wellness Program:** Launched a mental wellness program requiring annual check-ins with a licensed psychologist specializing in law enforcement, supporting staff mental health and well-being amid recent traumatic incidents.