

MEMORANDUM

To: Common Council

From: John Weidl, City Manager

Date: 10/08/24

Re: 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.

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.