

State of the Village of Bratenahl Annual Report

By Keith Ari Benjamin, Mayor

2023 was a year of transition for the Village with the retirement of Mayor John Licastro in June after serving 22 years as our mayor. Since July, we have worked collaboratively with residents, staff, and Village Council to keep our community a great place to live, work and play. As we turn the page to 2024, I am pleased to submit the following State of the Village of Bratenahl Report:

Public Safety

Under the leadership of Police Chief Chuck LoBello, our police department works 24/7 to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our residents and community. Even with a regional and nationwide shortage of police officers, we are pleased to report that for the first time in many years, our Police Department is fully staffed with 15 full-time and 2 part-time officers. We continue to contract with the City of Cleveland to provide Fire and EMS services for Bratenahl residents, along with Chagrin Valley Regional Dispatch, which handles our 9-1-1 Calls for Service.

In the last few years, the Police Department has embraced regionalism to provide specialty services we could not afford on our own. An example is the EDGE (Eastside Departments Group Enforcement) Team, a group of specially trained and assembled police officers from member jurisdiction cities who are deployed during critical incidents. Team members attend regular trainings, and focus on field force and crowd control tactics, but also firearm drills, rescues, first aid and extrication tactics.

Service Department

Your Service Department, under the leadership of Director Dave Maund, keeps our streets and sidewalks plowed, our tree lawns neat and clean and our public spaces great places to meet, play and relax. The ongoing maintenance of our aging public facilities and infrastructure continues to be a challenge as we confront both expected and unexpected repairs and expenses at Village Hall and the Community Center. In the last six months, unexpected expenses included the replacement of a boiler and HVAC condenser at Village Hall, the remediation of loose tiles in the Community Center basement that contained asbestos, and purchase of a new emergency generator for Village Hall.

We have also begun addressing some long-term infrastructure needs. For example, we have contracted with Cuyahoga County Department of Public Works to jet and clean our sewer lines to keep them clear of tree roots and debris and help prevent backups in residential homes. Additionally, Director Maund has implemented new initiatives to improve services to residents, including the

ability to pick up large metal appliances (ovens, refrigerators, washers, etc.) from resident's driveways and the installation of a new cardboard recycling container in the Community Center Parking Lot.

Mayor's Court and Legal Department

In 2023 the Mayor's Court heard 1,055 cases, which included 52 Criminal Cases, 938 Traffic Cases and 65 OVI (operating a vehicle under the influences). Our Clerk of Court Julie Kreiner and Deputy Clerk Angela Takacs continued their hard work managing the Court and assisting those that have business before the Court bring resolution to their issues. Mayor's Court continues under the auspices of our Magistrates Chuck Bauernschmidt, Andrea Rocco, John Murphy, and Prosecutor Tom Hanculak. Law Director Dave Matty continues to provide legal counsel on behalf of the Mayor, Administration and Village Council.

Building Department - Mary Ranney, our Building Department Administrator, along with Building Commissioner Scott Packard, work to ensure that permits are issued, plans are reviewed, and residents and contractors are assisted with the process of submitting requests for approvals from the Architectural Review Board and Planning Commission. In 2023, 203 contractors were registered, 153 Permits issued and 52 Certificates of Occupancy for title transfer were issued. Major projects included the approval of plans for the new Sunset Pavilion at Shoreby Club and the construction of five new homes in the Village. Additionally, the Building Department completed digital scanning of archived drawings. In 2024, the Department will undertake the three-year Exterior Maintenance Inspection Program throughout the Village. With 91 Contractors already registered for 2024, it's sure to be another busy year!

Finance Department

Diana Cooks, our Chief Fiscal Officer also serves as Clerk of Council, Public Records Officer, and in-house Human Resources Manager. Ms. Cooks plays a critical and important role in the day-to-day operations of the Village. Among her many duties, she is responsible for preparing all financial transactions within the Village's approved budget, including maintaining purchase orders, verifying and paying invoices, processing payroll, preparing reports, receiving and depositing funds and working with the State Auditors to ensure our books are in compliance with Ohio law. In her role of Clerk of Council, Ms. Cooks is responsible for many tasks including preparing Council Agendas, tracking and codifying legislation and providing notices of meetings pursuant to Ohio Sunshine Laws.

The Village ended 2023 with a General Fund Balance of \$576,797. We collected 99.5% of expected budgeted income tax revenue in the amount of \$2,785,671 and Property Tax collections of \$1,267,551. In 2023 Village Council approved the issuance of a long-term note (15 years) to pay off the debt associated with the construction of the Service Garage (\$2,450,000). The first bond payment was made in December with semi-annual payments to be made with an escalating scale as we move toward maturity.

Community Center & Recreation Programs

The Village continued to offer residents a variety of activities during 2023 including the return of the Memorial Day Parade, our annual Home Days Fireworks Celebration, and the Santa Brunch. The Community Center hosted and provided space for many ongoing activities including yoga, tai chi, pottery, line dance, pickleball, basketball, our community garden and more. Our gratitude to former Recreation Program Director Dave Brown for his work organizing these and other special events. As we begin our search for a new director, a big thank you to our Community Center Staff Jim Scott and Mike Tomko for keeping the doors open and available for residents!

Village Council

In 2023 we continued to be blessed by the generosity of our community volunteers, beginning with Village Council. Joyce Burke-Jones, David Dews, Tracy Hoefling, Gina Huffman, Tom McDonald, and Robert Yonchak worked collaboratively with residents and the administration to keep our community a great place to live and took the first steps towards looking at many community improvements. In 2024 we welcome new Councilman David Koziniski, who has contributed many years to the Village as Chair of the Recreation Commission.

Village Council has many duties that are mandated by the Ohio Revised Code, particularly financial oversight. They are the legislative body (like Congress) that has final approval of many, if not all actions taken by our government, and I am grateful for their continuing dedication and hard work.

Boards & Commissions

Our many thanks to all the residents that have volunteered and served admirably on our many Boards and Commissions including the Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, Recreation Commission, Public Records Commission and Shade Tree Commission. We'll highlight the achievements of our Boards and Commissions in future editions of the Lamplighter.

Approaching the New Year

As we begin our work in 2024, my heartfelt thanks for your continuing support, ideas, and generosity. Our community is historic, diverse, vibrant, and ever evolving and it is our responsibility to ensure that we manage some of the challenges and uncertainties that demand our attention and respond with creative and innovative solutions.

Your input is invaluable, and we need your participation to help shape our future in a collaborative, inclusive and respectful way. No matter our background or beliefs, we are united by the shared goal of keeping Bratenahl a great place to live, work and play. Thank you for your guidance and creative ideas as we move Bratenahl forward! Have a great New Year!

With gratitude,
Keith