

## STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

2008

It is a pleasure to deliver my 19<sup>th</sup> State of the City Address and to report to you that the State of the City is good! Since our main highlight over the past year was the construction of the wonderful new City Hall building in which we now sit, a review of this success is the main focus of my address.

About a decade and a half ago, in order to continue the best possible service to residents, the City began to review its physical plant needs, especially for the Fire and Police Departments, at the obsolete City Hall complex. The former City Hall building dated back to 1962 when Richmond Heights had less than ½ of our current population of 11,000 and roughly ¼ of the employees. Architect Claire Dickson of Dickson & Associates was asked to formulate options for the City to consider which ultimately led to Richmond Heights voters passing a ballot issue to construct a Police Department building in 2001. That project was completed in 2002 and the City began further review with Claire on how to address the remaining needs.

Claire's City Hall renovation options that resulted were typically in the \$5,000,000 range but the City's budget could only support an approximate \$2,000,000 project. Faced with this dilemma, Council Finance Committee Chairman Mark Alexander's committee began to consider less traditional forms of renovation which led the City to pursue the "design-build" process which is now popular for local governments working with a fixed budget. For instance, the City of Beachwood also recently successfully completed a renovation of some of its major facilities using the design-build model.

I established a Design-Build Renovation Committee chaired by Mark and consisting of: City Engineer Lee Courtney, Economic Development Director Lee Gase, Planning Commission member Dennis McAndrew Sr., Council member Don O'Toole, Council President David Roche, Building Commissioner Bob Rodic, Finance Director Lynda Rossiter, and myself. During 2006, the Committee requested contractor proposals based on our budget and criteria. The Committee received eight proposals, and through many meetings and hours of review, narrowed the list down to three.

The most innovative and best value for Richmond Heights residents for the dollar was determined to be the Marous Brothers proposal. It was unique in that it suggested that Richmond Heights avoid the high renovation expense of unknowns inherent in old buildings by 1) partially demolishing the old City Hall, 2) maintaining and expanding the existing Fire Department space, and 3) building a new City Hall structure to the east of the Fire Department. This also would allow a phasing whereby the extremely costly and disruptive extra expense of relocating City Hall staff during the long months of construction renovation would be avoided. Mark's stewardship of this complex project has been superb throughout and things went according to plan with construction beginning June this past year.

A ground breaking ceremony was held on the sunny evening of May 22, 2007 and was attended by the Marous team and City elected officials and department heads as follows: Councilman Mark Alexander, City Engineer Lee Courtney, Councilwoman Kathy Gambatese, Councilwoman Eloise Henry, Councilman John Keyerleber, Councilwoman Marcia Starkey Morgan, Councilman Don O'Toole, Council President David Roche, Building Commissioner Bob Rodic, Finance Director Lynda Rossiter, Clerk of Council Betsy Traben, and myself. The ceremony took place in the parking lot that served the former City Hall building right about where we are

sitting now, with each participant turning a shovel full of Richmond Heights dirt that had been transported to the precise spot by Marous Brothers for the purpose. At the time the site was already fenced in for safety purposes although the parking lot was still largely intact.

Thereafter at weekly meetings, a fantastic committee consisting of Councilman Mark Alexander, Council President Dave Roche and City Engineer Lee Courtney along with cameo appearances by relevant other city officials as necessary, performed the tedious work interfacing with the construction firm that accompanies the decision points along the construction pathway that are characteristic of the design build process. Therein lies the beauty of “design-build” and the reason it is the most economical approach for many municipalities today – it allows for flexibility in maintaining items of most importance to the City, while economizing on other factors that are less important. For instance, we have deliberately chosen modest baseboards in all of the hallways and offices whereas a traditional architectural approach might have led to more costly wooden baseboards. The committee was then able to direct the money thereby saved toward items it deemed to be of more importance.

Once underway, the construction proceeded at or ahead of schedule throughout the second half of the year. In tandem, Finance Director Lynda Rossiter, my assistant Dina Greisl, Building Commissioner Bob Rodic, Council President David Roche, and Councilman Mark Alexander worked hard over many months to bring in the final costs of new furniture well below the budgeted amount. Seeing the furniture before us in our new building, I believe that the group did an excellent job!

In the meantime, Police Chief Gene Rowe was working behind the scenes to help ensure overall safety and security of the building. Chief Rowe helped open a new line of thinking on the security cameras for instance, bringing to light funding that could be used for new equipment vs.

old City Hall cameras. Gene also coordinated changes to the important safety communications infrastructure between the old and new City Hall and the Police Building.

And so it is a pleasure to say that this is our first Council Meeting in our new City Hall! It is the result of the superb teamwork of elected officials, department heads, and employees over the past decade and a half; and prudent financial planning especially by Finance Director Lynda Rossiter during challenging economic times that we are able to present these assets to the residents of Richmond Heights --- the new Police Building and Service Department Garage built over the past seven years, the new City Hall here right now and the Fire Department renovation during this coming year.

Also in 2007, Building Commissioner Bob Rodic was busy with many typical situations relating to, for instance, new subdivision construction at Highland Ridge, Trebisky Woods, and Woods of Richmond. However, Bob also had at least one unique and memorable issue with an existing single family dwelling. The situation in particular had to do with a house that Bob and his predecessors have cited numerous times since the mid-1980's. As a result the homeowner made minor changes and improvements from time to time to comply with the minimums set by the Court. However, it became clear when the house actually partially caved in, that the Court should be demanded to do more. So, Bob gained legal entry into the premises making written and photographic evidence of the site and submitted this to the court with the intent that the City demolish the structure. Any reasonable resident would agree with the City's position and would think that there should be no delay moving ahead, but things at the site remain unchanged as a Court challenge now plays out. This illustrates the enforcement difficulties that Bob and building commissioners everywhere have to overcome in even the most extreme cases. Too often we take for granted the work and perseverance on this and the seemingly other minor situations that Bob deals

with on a routine basis where cajoling and convincing short of court action on Bob's part results in code compliance.

Recreation Director Teri Drda had an exciting year. Two unique highlights come to mind. Don O'Toole's Service and Recreation Committee over several years worked deliberately and thoroughly to put Richmond Heights in a position to make its first major City Pool expansion since it was constructed in 1968 -- a new SprayGround. With established criteria, Teri's work produced an optimal facility that can be enhanced further with additional attachments and structural elements in upcoming years to make new surprises for the kids as funding allows. The second item, the Susan G. Komen 3-Day Walk for the Cure, had not just local impact, but county-wide as women camped out at Cuyahoga County Airport journeyed far and wide to raise money for breast cancer cures. Sometimes stating the most fundamental facts reveal the most -- quite simply, Teri did not have to spend the many additional hours needed in meetings, tours and support for this event to be based in Richmond Heights but she did it out of dedication to community and the desire to spread the good name of Richmond Heights -- we thank and applaud her for her tremendous efforts on this extremely successful and meaningful regional project!

Probably the most unique aspect of Service Director Lazar's year was his involvement in helping to maintain and secure the Phyper's mansion and grounds which the City wisely acquired to preserve in a pristine state, what would otherwise have been lost to development. Don probably never thought that in his long career he would ever be involved with a 1917 mansion, but as is typical for him he has risen to the occasion and brought to bear the wisdom and knowledge of decades of experience to keep the structure in good condition while the City's plans for it evolve.

Did you know that Don Lazar is also a transportation expert? With most of the front work being undertaken by our enterprising Council President Dave Roche, the City obtained a grant to

acquire a modestly sized bus for Senior and Disabled transportation. Don and Teri Drda have risen to the occasion once again to help administer the program. As ridership increases, this will help our Seniors defray transportation costs for a modest fee in an era of high gasoline prices.

During 2007, Councilman-at-Large Joe Steffen unfortunately passed away in a scuba diving accident. Joe's institutional knowledge after many long years of service in our Police Department made him an effective Councilperson from the start and he is missed. To fill the position vacated by Joe I appointed John Keyerleber whose background on our Zoning Board of Appeals and long family history in Richmond Heights made him uniquely prepared to step in to fill the Council-at-Large slot. John has already made a big difference with his superb volunteer work on the graphics related to this past year's Fire Levy passage.

Councilwoman Marcia Morgan very ably took over as the Planning and Zoning Committee of Council Chairperson after Joe's accident. Not only has she guided the Committee very admirably, but she also finely turned the work of the 2007 Master Plan Committee into legislation recently passed by Council, making the plan "official."

Speaking of the Master Plan Committee, the City of Richmond Heights obtained a County grant to review its Master Plan. With the grant, we hired professional planner Mark Majewski, AICP, Vice President of Northstar Planning & Design to guide the City through the process. Accordingly I appointed the Master Plan Committee consisting of City Engineer Lee Courtney, Economic Development Director Lee Gase, Councilwoman Eloise Henry, ZBA member Jai Kadambi, former Ward I Councilman and Council President and current Planning Commission member Ray Loushin, Reverend Michael Marino, ZBA member Dennis McAndrew Jr., Richmond Heights Local Schools Business Manager Dori Mittinger, Councilwoman Marcia Morgan, Council

President Dave Roche, Recreation Board member Terry Yerkic, and myself. The City is grateful to the Committee members who volunteered many hours to undertake this important task.

City Engineer Lee Courtney was sidelined with some “internal plumbing” work with his son Chris “coming off the bench” to ably pinch hit for his dad while away. Finally, the veritable “end of the tunnel” arrived for our Sanitary Sewer Projects with the completion of the last project – namely the Richmond Road side streets between Highland and Chardon. Congratulations to Lee on seeing this through over the past decade and a half to its conclusion!

Fire Chief Mike Cek’s 2007 highlight was the passage of the 3.5 Mill Fire Department Operating Levy. The levies passed in the 1980’s and early 1990’s to increase the number of firefighters and begin a paramedic program that had degraded vs. inflation to such an extent that it was a necessary and wise course of action to ask the voters to refresh this funding and continue the high quality fire services that residents currently prefer. At the same time, passage of the levy relieved the acute pressure on the City’s budget that manifest itself in early 2007. Mike’s efforts to help ensure its passage were superb. Further, the work of numerous volunteers too many to list was an integral part of the successful levy which will start to produce revenue in 2008. To cap things off, Ward III Councilwoman Eloise Henry graciously volunteered her home for the marvelous victory party celebration on Election Day evening.

In 2007, Ward II Councilwoman Kathy Gambatese rose to the position of Chairperson of the Cuyahoga County Community Mental Health Board. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time any Richmond Heights councilperson has been appointed to a standing County Board or Commission. I know that her work on the Board will be of highest quality and that she will wonderfully represent Richmond Heights during her tenure in that office.

In 2008.....the City will be busy shepherding the renovation of the Fire Department space and its expansion into the vacated areas of the former City Hall so that our firefighter/paramedics will have a facility that better compliments the excellent services that they supply to our residents. Marous Brothers, who did a great job in building the new City Hall on time and on budget will continue to work in Richmond Heights on the Fire Department project. In fact, preliminary demolition of the obsolete portions of the building and abatement where necessary is now taking place. The full blown effort will be evident to us all in the very near future.

Chief Rowe will be implementing a Juvenile Diversion Program in conjunction with Cuyahoga County who will provide the funding. This program has become quite popular with area municipalities as it allows the local community to help more effectively correct behavior of first time juvenile offenders. The program requires the volunteer efforts of local attorneys and we are pleased that Janet Kronenberg and Nancy Donnelly have expressed an interest in offering their time for this endeavor. Chief Rowe's dedication to Richmond Heights residents is to be commended in another instance of one of our "finest" going beyond the call of duty.

Economic Development Director Lee Gase will continue to work with City Council and me in determining the future of the previously mentioned Phyper's property. The potential of the mansion facility and grounds to positively impact Richmond Heights and the region is tremendous. The deliberate and thoughtful approach which we have taken to date is appropriate and necessary to help ensure that the site's full potential is not missed. I am confident that when people look back sixty years from now at what will then be a 150 year old structure, that they will think "what a great job they did back then" in preserving and nurturing the Phyper's estate for future generations.

Of great importance, coming up in one week will be the first joint meeting between the City Council and School Board in some time. With a key school levy issue appearing on the ballot this

March after successive shortfalls in recent voting cycles, this is a perfect time to show our unity with the School Board on the need to provide adequate operating funds to keep our City Schools functioning as a community asset. Our early passage of a resolution in support of the levy at our first meeting of the new year was excellent and I know greatly appreciated by the proponents of the levy.

Lastly, Law Director Todd Hunt and City Council Clerk Betsy Traben have continued during 2007 to dependably provide fabulous service to us all week in and week out.

In closing, I would like to thank Council members and City employees for another great year of fine service to our residents during 2007. God willing, we look forward to another year of progress and prosperity in Richmond Heights during 2008!

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Daniel J. Ursu  
January 29, 2008