

## **Message from the City Manager:**

It is my pleasure to present the 2020 Annual Report for the City of Willard. This report highlights significant accomplishments and initiatives over the past year, along with key financial information for the City of Willard.

2020 was a year unlike any other. Our community and City government were forced to contend with a worldwide pandemic and the associated economic impact, all the while maintaining a high level of municipal services.

No organization, public or private, has been unaffected by COVID-19. The shift to remote working and online meetings has been an adjustment for many. In a municipal setting however, many of the services we provide, including law enforcement, fire and EMS protection, street and park maintenance, water and sewer services, and various financial services cannot be performed remotely. Consequently, a major focus for much of the past year has been ensuring the safety of our employees in the workplace while still being able to meet the needs of our community and deliver the same high-quality services to which they are accustomed.

As a city that does not have its own health department, the City of Willard regularly made it a priority to partner with the Huron County Health Department to come up with a response to this pandemic. This effort had its challenges at times, but our teamwork and cooperation went a long way to seeing us through the worst parts of the pandemic. Every City department was engaged in the COVID-19 response, providing everything from procurement of personal protective equipment for our team to making every accommodation to limit the spread of this virus.

The impact of COVID-19 on some of our local economy has been significant. Our manufacturing sector remained strong, but our service industry has had its existence threatened. The City supported local business by passing on funding in the form of grants. \$50,000 was given to small businesses that were negatively affected by the pandemic. Through the efforts of City Council, the City also recognized that our citizens were struggling as well. As a result, the Council removed late fees and penalties on utility billing for the affected months.

Even if it felt as such, COVID-19 was not the only noteworthy event of 2020. As you will see in reviewing this report, your City government was busy throughout the year continuing our mission of delivering exemplary municipal services responsive to the entire community and consistent with our history and culture. Because of this, I am especially proud to call Willard home!

Respectfully,

James Pomerich  
City Manager

## 5 GOALS IN 2020

I would like to express my appreciation for the previous City Manager, Jim Ludban. Mr. Ludban accomplished much for Willard in his time as City Manager, but perhaps his most important achievement was changing our culture. We moved from independent departments to a team that was willing to do whatever we could to help each other be successful. Without this base, in the year that we had, we would have not been able to accomplish what we did.

I am also grateful because Mr. Ludban spent a good portion of time preparing me for this position. He also was there at the beginning of Covid-19 and set the direction in how we would respond. These two efforts helped me hit the ground running and avoid the typical speed bumps that happen when a new City Manager is put into place.

Upon becoming City Manager, I had five goals that I wanted to concentrate on this year. Those five goals were to: enhance recreational opportunities; support the community; improve our housing stock, be fiscally responsible, and increase public-private partnerships. Highlights of the efforts towards these five goals are below followed by the Annual Reports of every department.

## RECREATION

### City of Willard 0.5 mill 5 yr. park & rec\_3 (Vote for 1)

Precincts Reported: 4 of 4 (100.00%)

	Total	
Times Cast	2,196 / 2,972	73.89%

Candidate	Party	Total	
For the Tax Levy		1,364	
Against the Tax Levy		751	
Total Votes		2,115	

### RECREATIONAL LEVY RENEWAL THANK YOU

Before looking at recreational improvements, we had to focus on maintaining what we had. We had a levy up for renewal that was crucial in that endeavor. On November 3<sup>rd</sup> the citizens of Willard voted to pass our Recreational Renewal Levy for our Municipal Park and Swimming Pool. The levy was for 0.5 mill for 5 years and the vote passed nearly two to one (1,364 to 751). We were extremely grateful for the public's support.

We are glad that our community is aware of the great Park system that we have, and we take this as a sign that they approve of the job we are doing. We will continue to try and maintain that respect and be the best stewards of this money as we can. With the strong leadership and willingness to work together across departments, I know that we will continue to innovate and

improve our parks. One area that we want to pay special attention to in 2021 is improving accessibility for disabled and handicapped persons.



### **CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS AT THE PARK**

Due to the pandemic, we found out in mid-October that our Christmas Parade was cancelled. With the festival, concerts, and other events cancelled, we believed that the community needed something around Christmas to lift our spirits. In its place, we decided to try something to bring a little light into a dark year, Willard's First Annual Christmas Festival of Lights Drive-thru at the Park.

I am extremely proud of what the City and community was able to accomplish in just two months. In preparation for the light display, City forces installed pedestal lighting with electric outlets down City Park Drive. With the help of the Willard's Business Association (WBA), we were able to invite the community to join us. 14 individuals, businesses and agencies came out and set up light displays. On top of the lights the City was able to order, we also purchased just about every usable light we could in Mansfield and Sandusky. Every City Department pitched in to make this event a reality.

Opening night saw cars backed up down Laurel Street all the way to Main Street for several hours. Because of our community's efforts, thousands were able to come and experience a little Christmas joy. We cannot wait to see what 2021 will bring for this festival.





## DEPOT PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT

The Recreation and Maintenance Department finished installing the new playground equipment behind the Depot on City Park Drive. We would like to say a special thank you to the Willard Firelands Moose Lodge #2153 for their generous financial contributions towards this equipment. We had initially removed the old equipment to make room for our Flags of Honor event and we are glad to see the kids have this available to them once again!



A picture of a wooden train set that kids can play on that was made by our Park and Recreation Department.





## **DEPOT IN THE PARK IMPROVEMENTS**

We had several new groups utilizing this building due to the lack of available meeting places in our community during the pandemic. A couple of these groups requested internet and multi-media accommodations. Utilizing Covid grant money, City forces were able to add internet and a large screen tv that can be used for training or presentations.

The City hired and assisted a contractor in installing new air conditioning and a gas furnace. This new HVAC system has ultra-violet lighting to help sanitize the air. On top of that safety improvement, we also installed new touchless faucets and hand dryers that will make this building even safer to meet at for our community.

# COMMUNITY



## FOOD GIVEAWAYS

The City worked with Second Harvest, the Willard Area Ministerial Association, National Guard, the State Highway Patrol, and numerous community volunteers to do a free food giveaway nearly every month of the pandemic. After an issue with the traffic at the first giveaway, the location was moved to the City's park because of its ability to accommodate the amount of traffic this giveaway regularly saw.

As a result, 400 boxes of food were given away at each of these events. These boxes contained 20 lbs of shelf-stable food items, which generally consisted of canned fruits and vegetables, pasta, canned beans, entrees, and cereal. At times 400 boxes of vegetables also were added thanks to Wiers Farms. As a result, over a thousand people from our community were fed with each event.

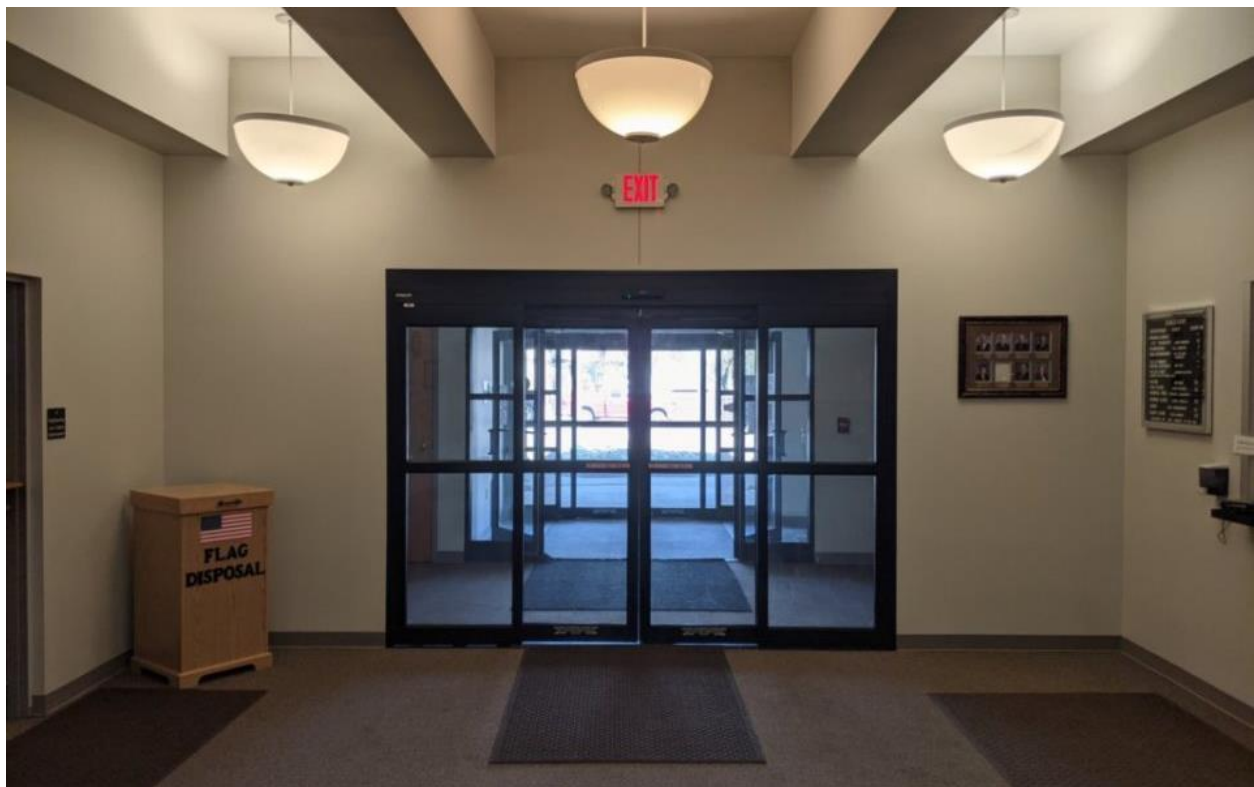
## INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCEPTANCE (IDEA) COMMITTEE

2020 was a year filled with racial and unity tensions across our nation. These tensions motivated a member of our community (Tara Hines) to come to Council and share her concerns. She challenged the City to do something to address poverty, racism, and unity for our community.

With the encouragement of Council, the City led the way in starting a committee to look at addressing these issues. Organizations and leaders were invited on September 10<sup>th</sup> and fifteen (15) members of our community responded.

Seeing a strong representation by those in attendance, the City recognized the importance for this committee to be community lead. I encouraged the group to concentrate on three general areas that I thought our community would benefit the most to focus on. Those areas were the inclusion of minorities, poverty, and our elderly. On October 8<sup>th</sup>, a President (Crystal Escalera) was voted in and at the next meeting, the committee came up with its name (IDEA).

The committee continues to meet monthly, and the City is well represented at these meetings. The City looks forward to seeing what this group can accomplish in 2021.



## **TOUCHLESS DOORS FOR CITY HALL**

City Hall remained operating throughout the pandemic. Covid-19 protocols recommended the reduction of touchpoints in public buildings. One primary way we were able to accomplish this was by installing touchless doors at City Hall. The project was able to be entirely funded utilizing Covid-19 Cares Act money. This hands-free door option not only makes City Hall safer to access for our community, but it also makes our building handicap accessible.



Due to heating and cooling concerns with our outer and inner doors being open at the same time, we installed the inner set of touchless doors further into the lobby at City Hall. We had to have a new wall framed in to accommodate these new doors. By creating this new wall and placing the inner set of touchless doors further away, this allows for the first set of doors to close before the second set opens.



## **WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA**

Wreaths Across America seeks to remember our fallen U.S. Veterans, honor those who serve, and teach children the value of freedom. In 2020, we learned that the Air Cadets were not able to be involved this year and lead this event. One of our team members, Kim Williams, took on the challenge and accepted the responsibility of leading this effort with the help of the Willard Schools.

Willard had a Wreath ceremony on December 19<sup>th</sup>. At this ceremony, volunteers and family laid a wreath on 440 veteran's graves, read their names aloud, and thanked them for their service and sacrifice while reflecting on their lives. I am proud of our community's efforts to show our admiration and respect to these Veterans.

We will always strive to be a community that supports the men and women of our armed forces.





## **TREE CITY USA**

The Tree City USA program has been greening up cities and towns across America since 1976. It is a nationwide movement that provides the framework necessary for communities to manage and expand their public trees.

More than 3,400 communities have made the commitment to becoming a Tree City USA. Cities achieve Tree City USA status by meeting four core standards of sound urban forestry management: maintaining a tree board or department, having a community tree ordinance, spending at least \$2 per capita on urban forestry and celebrating Arbor Day.

This year we were awarded our 40<sup>th</sup> continuous Tree City USA award. There are only a handful of communities in Ohio that have a longer continuous record than we do.

# IMPROVE HOUSING STOCK



## COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT ACT (CRA)

The City of Willard has a tax abatement program that makes it possible for property owners to minimize the taxes they pay for up to 15 years. Property tax abatement is available for any new single-family home built on any lot inside the City of Willard. The abatement is for the increase valuation that results from the new construction. Tax abatement benefits stay with the property the entire length of the abatement and transfer to any new property owner within the approved time period. Only owner-occupied properties qualify for the program.

The CRA also has tax abatement opportunities for commercial and industrial projects that include new construction, additions, and remodeling.

We had six residences apply for this abatement in 2020. The combined value of all six of these residential properties was \$1,151,000.00. With this incentive, we moved from a position where we sometimes did not see any new home construction started in certain years to the point where we are almost out of buildable lots for future construction.

In 2021 we will explore ways to encourage the construction of subdivisions and look for City owned property that might be able to be sold as buildable lots.

## HURON COUNTY LAND BANK

*The mission of the Huron County Land Reutilization Corporation (Huron County Land Bank) is the preservation, restoration, or disposal of abandoned or foreclosed properties. To strategically*

*acquire properties, return them to productive use, reduce blight, increase property values, support community goals, and improve the quality of life for Huron County residents*

The City of Willard partners with the Huron County Land Bank. This year we acquired four (4) vacant blighted properties. One of these properties has been torn down and the land will be sold to someone interested in building a new home. The other three have been sold to persons that are fixing the properties up. Below are two of the properties and details of the efforts made.



327 West Maple Street (pictured above) sat vacant since 2013. The Land Bank was able to take ownership of that property through the County and sell it to a preapproved contractor who has a proven track record in these types of improvements. That Contractor has started to renovations. They also purchased the house at 310 Woodbine Street and will do the same. We look forward to watching their progress and seeing these houses restored.

In conjunction with the Huron County Land Bank, the City hired a contractor to demolish 1 South West St. This property was dilapidated and sat vacant for years. The City and Land Bank split the cost (\$2,500 each) for demolition. We have received two bids on the property that will allow us to recoup our demolition investment and save some money towards our next project.

## RENTAL REGISTRATION

Willard has an unusually large percentage (nearly 40%) of rental units within the City. To ensure property maintenance standards are met and life safety issues are addressed, Council passed a Residential Housing Registration Program that went into effect in January of 2020. This program is primarily aimed at the exterior of a property, but it also allows the City to enter a property to make sure it is safe.

Currently, we have registered 1,093 rentals which are owned by 198 different owners. It is the goal to inspect every rental property in Willard within a two-year period. Those inspections started in March but were stopped due to Covid-19. They then resumed at the end of May and



we were able to inspect 529 of these rental units. At the end of 2020, around 60% of these properties have at least one issue that will need to be addressed.



## **716 PARK STREET**

Through efforts of our Police Department and the Huron County Prosecutors office, the City was able to take possession of this property and sell it to a local Contractor. We added a deed restriction that prevents this property from becoming a rental. As you can see from the picture, this Contractor has a proven track record for improving properties.

# FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

## BUDGET

After taking over in April, which was the start of the Covid pandemic, the Finance Director and I were concerned about the potential financial impact due to the pandemic. As a result, we met with each department head and made it a goal to cut 20% of the budget. To accomplish this, most capital improvement items were cut. Through the additional hard work of our department heads and with the guidance of the Finance Department, in the end we were able to cut over 27% of our expense budget. Expenses totaled \$13,423,065 in 2020, which was down approximately 4.6% from 2019.

Our revenues came in at \$14,671,662 which was up from previous years. This was due to special deposits that we received from Covid 19 stimulus money (\$949,829) and the Ohio Bureau of Workers Compensation refunds (\$352,723). If we had not received this money, our revenue would have been \$13,369,110 which would be down approximately 4.5% from 2019.

2020 was the first year that we brought in more than we spent since 2016. As a result, we were able to deposit \$750,000 back into our investments in February of 2021. In the last three years, we had taken around \$1,000,000 out of those funds. Looking ahead to 2021, we are financially cautious as to what the after effect Covid will have on our community.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Revenue	\$ 17,566,122.00	\$ 13,582,181.00	\$ 14,341,937.00	\$ 14,005,184.00	\$ 14,671,662.00
Expenses	\$ 17,351,536.00	\$ 14,014,416.00	\$ 15,481,875.00	\$ 14,070,336.00	\$ 13,423,065.00
Difference	\$ 214,586.00	\$ (432,235.00)	\$ (1,139,938.00)	\$ (65,152.00)	\$ 1,248,597.00

## HEALTH INSURANCE

This year we paid out over one million dollars for our employee's health insurance. After meeting with our insurance agent at that time and coming up with ways to save money with our health insurance plan, we were told to still expect around a 10% increase for 2021. This was unacceptable and caused us to look for other options.

Over the period of several months, we put together an Employee Insurance Advisory Board made up of Lori, myself, and four other employees. We called around to different municipalities around us to see who they were using and if they were happy with the service they were receiving. The Board ended up scheduling interviews with three different companies that we had received good references regarding.

After those interviews, we decided to go with a different agent (Brent Gardner with Gardner & Lindsey Insurance). Brent has a local office and has invested in our community. We believe he is the person we need to start moving us in the right direction.

Brent has a proven track record with the City of Bellevue. He took over Bellevue's health insurance at a challenging time for that City, and now their insurance costs are significantly lower than what we pay. They have recently experienced times where the City and employees have not had to pay any monthly premiums for the last two or three months of the year. We hope he can do something similar for us.

At the end of 2020, Brent started to make some changes with our Insurance. He shopped around for our Third-Party Administrator and Network and found us savings of approximately \$100,000.



# PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS



## **CITY OF WILLARD CARES SMALL BUSINESS GRANT**

The Covid-19 restrictions and lock downs greatly impacted our small businesses. The City recognized that efforts needed to be made to help these businesses. City of Willard's CARES Small Business Grant was started to do just that. Utilizing Covid-19 CARES Act money, small businesses adversely affected by Covid-19 were able to apply for a grant of up to \$10,000.

The City of Willard entered into an agreement with the Huron County Development Council (HCDC) to have them administer this grant. Eleven (11) applications were received. One application fell out due to lack of required information. failed to turn in all the required information, and that application was rejected. Another application was from an organization outside of our Corporation limits and we were able to help them get funding from a County grant. A third application was approved but later turned down the grant. In total, the City distributed \$50,000 in grant money to eight (8) struggling small businesses.

## **COMMUNITY PARAMEDICINE PROGRAM**

The City of Willard partnered with Mercy Hospital of Willard to look at implementing a Community Paramedicine program. Community paramedicine is a relatively new and evolving healthcare model. We are only one of three programs in the State of Ohio. It allows our

emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and a person from the Hospital to operate in expanded roles by assisting with public health and primary healthcare and preventive services to underserved populations in the community. The goal is to improve access to care and avoid duplicating existing services.

Some rural patients lack access to primary care and emergency medical services (EMS) to receive healthcare in non-emergency situations. This can create a burden for EMS personnel and health systems in rural areas. Community paramedics can work in a public health and primary care role to address the needs of rural residents in a more efficient and proactive way.

We are happy to report that this program will be implemented in 2021.



## **CLOCK TOWER**

In 2012 a former resident of Willard, Rick Reed, started a project to save what was left of the Willard Clock Tower. The Save Willard's Clock group was soon formed from local residents and they spent the next several years planning and fund raising for this project.

2020 was the year they secured a new builder for the clock tower and they were ready to move forward with construction. Sadly, setbacks due to Covid-19 and obtaining the commercial building permits prevented that from happening. The City continued to assist with obtaining this permit and with our help approval to begin construction was conditionally granted at the end of 2020. The builder has been instructed to move forward with construction and City forces have completed the foundation in early 2021. The City is extremely grateful to this



group's efforts in seeing the clock tower restored. We look forward to seeing the clock tower finished in 2021.

## **HURON COUNTY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (HCDC) AND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OFFICES**

The City of Willard recognizes how important economic development and supporting our local businesses and organizations is. To encourage this and also increase collaboration between the City and these agencies, the City has provided each with an office at City Hall.

Utilizing Covid-19 CARES Act money, we converted two rooms to create one office and have designated it for the Director of HCDC. The Director, who typically works out of Norwalk, will be working one to two days per week in Willard at this newly created office. It is our hope that this brings an increased focus on our community for the County's economic development.

We have also converted the Judge's office, which was not being used, to an office that Willard's Chamber of Commerce President can utilize. We had an agreement to provide them space in the 110 Center building prior to it being sold.



## **LISA'S ICE CREAM**

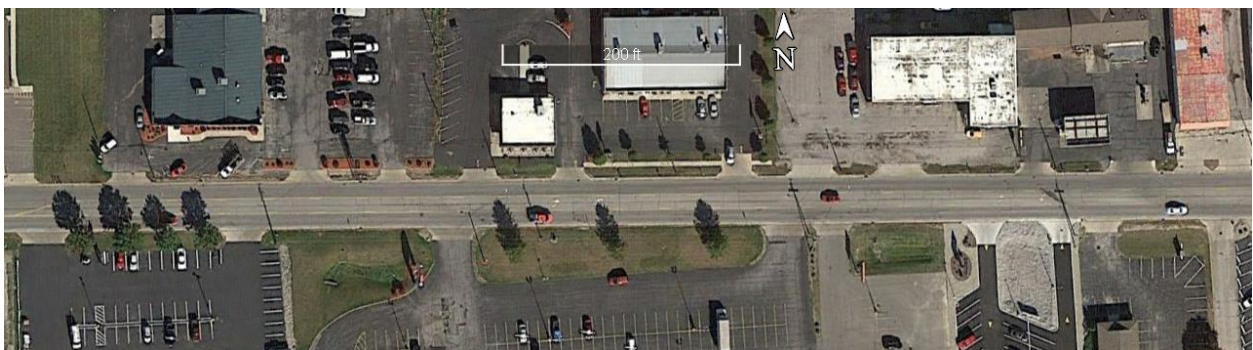
The City is excited to have Lisa's Ice Cream open in our downtown this year. We know this will be a huge draw to the downtown and encourage growth there. Thank you, Lisa, for investing in our community!





## TRILOGY INDEPENDENT LIVING DEVELOPMENT

Construction has finished and the Willows at Willard Trilogy Independent Living Center had its open house on September 3<sup>rd</sup>. The Villas at Willard are currently taking applications for their available units. Several units were already occupied by the end of 2020. The City is grateful for the multi-million dollar investment from the Willows at Willard and Mercy Hospital at Willard. This independent living option will serve a great need that our community has for this type of living.



## US 224 SIDEWALK PROJECT

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) had awarded us safety funding for pedestrian improvements along US 224. Along with signal improvements, this project will install sidewalks where there are none along US 224. This will allow our community to safely travel on foot in this corridor.

The total award for this project amounts to \$491,600.00. Typically, ODOT projects are funded at a rate of 90% ODOT Grant and 10% local (City) funding. We are pleased to report that the 10% will be paid by a Toll Revenue Credit, which means this project will be funded in full by grant money.



Finally, I would like to say it has been an absolute privilege to serve along side this great team. In a crazy year, we came together and were still able to accomplish much. I have witnessed our team going out of their way to serve our community at work and in their own free time. You will not hear anyone say that is not my job because ultimately, we care about the community we serve and want to do everything that we can to make this City better.

This year I have also had the pleasure of interacting with organizations and community leaders that I had not in the past. We are blessed to have these people in our City who work so hard to make Willard a better place. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for Willard with this leadership!

Thank you,

James Pomerich  
City Manager