



State of the City 2024

The City of Montague had another productive year in 2023. As I look back over the progress of the year, I am struck by a sense of gratitude in being able to serve as Mayor to our unique community. I want to thank the voters that turned out for the local election this past November. I am proud to serve my third term as mayor, and welcome back councilmember incumbents Lisa Kiel and Bob Hires, and newcomer, Ken Mahoney. Together, Council will continue to work on the issues facing our City and residents. We do this with the help of our dedicated City staff a small crew of only 16 full-time employees and 10 seasonal employees operating at City Hall, the Department of Public Works, and the Police Department. Together they maintain our cityscape and take a great deal of pride in their work. And it shows! Here are some of the highlights and projects City staff and council worked on in the past year.

Council subcommittees and City staff continued to work on specific issues in our community. The Facilities Subcommittee saw a need to repair the historical building in Oak Grove Cemetery. City staff initiated a fundraiser for the necessary repairs, and \$1,200 of the \$1,800 has been raised for the project. We are currently taking donations at City Hall on the City's website. There are many ways for residents to get involved with City initiatives. We invite resident input and would like to have public representatives on the Sidewalks, Solar Projects, Curbside Leaf Pick Up, and Parks & Natural Areas Subcommittees. Also, with the local election this past November, many Board and Commission terms ended. Most have been filled by my appointees approved by Council, but there is still a need for an alternate on the Board of Review. Please contact City Hall if you are interested in any of these opportunities.

The City had another great annual audit for FY 22/23 and at the December audit presentation, we saw the results of fiscally responsible management by City staff. Retirement funding for staff is on track and the 23/24 General Fund Budget reduces the property tax millage from 16.40 mills to 16.15 mills due to the City's continued strong financial position. In employment news, this past August we said goodbye to long-time utility billing clerk and permit coordinator, Tina Ramthun. Happy Retirement, Tina! Hannah Cross is the newest full-time employee for the City and has taken on utility and permit duties with enthusiasm. The police department also had some changes with part-time Officer Dan Dice moving up to full-time and Officer Tom Walicki was promoted to Sergeant. Officer Brandon Tenhove is now fulfilling the new role of Student Resource Officer at Montague High School, a collaboration between the school and the City.

Road and pedestrian safety were at the forefront of many initiatives this past year. Trucking routes continue to be addressed as City staff works with trucking logistics companies to certify the most efficient, logical, and safest route for semi-trucks to get to the City's Industrial Park. School release times, pedestrian foot traffic, and traditionally residential throughways were key factors in determining routes. Public safety amenities such as speed detectors, parking signage, and a yield-to-pedestrians blinker have been installed around the City. Council continues to work on updating ordinances on clear vision areas at intersections and pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Sidewalks continue to be improved on, wrapping up with a span of sidewalk replaced on Sheridan Street this past fall. City staff and council also continue to work on economical parking solutions in the downtown area.

Council and City staff worked with consulting firm, McKenna, throughout the year on the Master Plan update. Residents had several opportunities to give input on the ideas presented, some of which were well-received...and others not so much. The updated Master Plan gives the City direction and achievable goals for the next 5 years. The face of downtown will be changing this coming year with the hope that the Ferry Street Project will commence this spring on the northeast corner of Dowling and Ferry Streets. The structure will feature space for small businesses on the street level and apartments on the upper level. Parking will be included in the development as well. Informational kiosks have been installed in the Artisan Market and on the corner of Dowling and Ferry Streets. The kiosks were created by local artisans who submitted their design to the DDA. Also coming to the downtown area, the Social District is slated to open for the 2024 summer season. City staff have been collaborating with the local business owners involved and purchasing infrastructure throughout the year for the new public space. The DDA sponsored an alley naming contest and had many great ideas submitted. The winning entry was selected at the November meeting and the social district alley shall now be known as Weathervane Lane.

In local business news, Home & Gather, a rentable space for gatherings, has opened in the Weathervane Inn. Busy Bee Café, a popular spot in the Artisan Market, will also be moving to the Weathervane Inn building in 2024 while maintaining their cottage at the Artisan Market. Bellabay Realty has opened on Ferry Street in the former Studio 2 location. Pretty in Polish opened on the corner of Water and Dowling Streets. Renew You Fitness opened in the spring and has since moved to 8725 Water Street. Also on Water Street, Big Cat Daddy Walleye's is now Big Shotz. In the Industrial Park, a boat storage business has begun construction, with one building being completed and a second proposed for 2024. Whitehall Products, devastated by a fire at the end of 2022, has collaborated with the city over the past year to rework their parking lot and setbacks. The unsalvageable sections of the facility have been demolished and they expect to break ground on the new build early this spring.

The Artisan and Farmers Markets had another bustling season. All vendors at both markets are local to the area and it is wonderful to see the community coming out to shop locally. Council approved, and City staff implemented, what would prove to be a very popular voucher program for senior residents using Senior Millage funds. City of Montague senior residents were eligible to stop into City Hall once a month during market season for a series of five-dollar vouchers that could be spent like cash at the farmers market. Senior Millage funds come from our

resident tax base and council decides how to allocate the funds. For 2023 the funds were split amongst Viking Athletic Center vouchers, Montague Farmers Market vouchers, and operating costs for the White Lake Area Senior Center. The Muskegon County Senior Millage will be up for renewal on the ballot this year. It is the hope that we can continue providing these services to our senior residents.

In 2023, the City facilitated two elections: the May special election for an MAISD millage renewal and the November local election. The City has just under 2,000 registered voters and voter turnout remains above average. In November 2022, voters across the state approved Proposal 22-2 which mandated many changes and additions to election laws. Some of the changes City of Montague registered voters might notice are pre-paid return envelopes for election mail and 9 days of early voting. This past November, Council approved an agreement between the City of Montague and the Muskegon County Clerk's office that allows the county to facilitate the 9 days of early voting at the County's Marquette Campus, formerly Baker College. 21 out of the 23 jurisdictions in Muskegon County are participating in this agreement at a great financial savings. Eligible voters may still vote absentee or in-person on election day. The 9 days of early voting is in addition to those already established methods. We have a busy election year coming up and I am proud to live in a community where we continue to work together toward common goals.

In 2020, Council declared a climate emergency and many economical and practical changes have been made to reflect that declaration. This past year, City staff initiated a popular battery recycling program in collaboration with the White Lake Area Climate Action Council and PadNos-Muskegon. The battery recycling station is located in the Montague Branch Library lobby and residents may bring in any kind of batteries and put them in the corresponding bucket for recycling. Solar panels installed on City infrastructure continue to save money, with \$18,000 saved in the past year and a half. Data also continues to be collected on a seasonal basis from electric vehicle charging stations, with 134 unique users since installation. In other infrastructure news, the City is two years ahead of schedule on the state-mandated lead line replacement program, a 20-year program. City staff has completed 150 services so far and will continue to stay on top of this important state program, initiated by the Flint water crisis.

With all that has been accomplished in the past year, I look forward to 2024 and the possibilities for growth while maintaining what we have here in our beloved community. Best wishes to all for the new year.

Sincerely,



Tom Lohman
Mayor
City of Montague