

R. BENJAMIN STAHLER
Mayor
937/592-4376



WESTON R. DODDS
Service Safety Director
937/592-6807

CITY OF BELLEFONTAINE
135 NORTH DETROIT STREET BELLEFONTAINE, OHIO 43311-1476
FAX NO. 937/592-4218

January, 2022

The state of the city remains strong. 2021 turned out to be yet another year with the Coronavirus Pandemic as the dominant topic. Businesses, both large and small, continued to operate throughout the year. Many workplaces made adjustments in a number of areas; from associates working remotely to providing more safe and adequate space for workers and patrons.

The City of Bellefontaine, as an employer, was no exception. We know that all of our services remained "essential" to our community. All public meetings returned to in-person. The City Council adopted a flat line temporary budget for 2021. In July of 2021, Wes Dodds was promoted to the role of Service Safety Director. He had been a member of the city's administrative team since 2014.

When comparing our 2019 & 2020 income tax revenues, the city experienced revenue losses of \$622,890 in 2020. The Federal Government released the first of two rounds of ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding in August of 2021, which helped the city make up for this decreased income tax revenue. Our team of associates continued to focus on providing reliable services to throughout the city. During 2021, the City of Bellefontaine was able to reduce its expenses in an effort to keep our financial position stable.

2021	<u>Revenues</u>	<u>Expenses</u>
General Fund	\$10,189,108	\$10,120,448
ALL Funds	\$27,896,530	\$24,455,407

Bellefontaine was able to celebrate its city's bicentennial (1820-2020) in August of 2021. Banners were sponsored and placed throughout the downtown area. A Bicentennial Pacific Brilliance Pin Oak tree was planted at the municipal building and a commemorative coin was commissioned and made available to the public. The Bicentennial event featured a variety of music acts, food trucks, several automobile displays, and a laser light show. Remarks were offered by Mayor Ben Stahl, Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman, Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose and Ohio House Rep. Susan Manchester. The Holland Theatre engaged seven local actors to portray historical figures from our past. The Logan County Historical Center prepared a slide presentation that was also on display inside the Holland Theatre. The event was well attended and enjoyed by all.

The 2020 Federal Census results were revealed in 2021. The United States grew by 7.4% to 331,450,280 individuals. The State of Ohio only grew by 2.3% which means that, along with six other states, we are positioned to lose one seat of Congress. Logan County joined only 33 other Ohio counties by showing some growth. While Logan County only grew by 0.6%, the City of Bellefontaine experienced a 5.6% growth in population over that same ten-year period. Our neighbors to the east, Delaware and Union Counties were #1 and #2 for growth in Ohio while Hardin, Shelby and Champaign Counties had reductions in their population. There are 39 of Ohio's 88 counties with populations under 50,000 residents. Of those 39, Logan County is one of only eight counties that experienced growth.

Our Engineering Department saw the completion of a number of significant projects. Those projects ranged from storm water work, waste water treatment plant projects, street enhancements and improvements to our creek system. There were 50 home permits issued in 2021, with 22 certificates of occupancy issued by year's end. Campbell Landing, a 52-unit apartment building, quickly filled with new residents upon opening their doors in 2021. The Peak Industrial Park has two 100,000 sq. ft. buildings under construction. For the second consecutive year, our paving project was \$1,100,000. The Love's Travel Center was another large undertaking for our business community. The construction and renovation of the Ohio Hi-Point Career Center, a \$30 million project, is slated to be completed in 2022 to add to our community's ability to educate our young and train our workforce.

Our Street Department had a busy year with a variety of noteworthy projects. They experienced some supply chain issues with a number of their summer road and drainage projects. Bellefontaine had a lighter than expected year with salt application during the winter months of 2021. Their overtime for associates also came in below budget. Some or all of 44 streets were paved this year, making it back-to-back years applying over \$1M to our paving efforts. They also removed 37 trees and trimmed another 250.

Our Police Officers, with 31 sworn officers, remained on the front lines throughout the pandemic. The Police Department handled over 20,545 calls for service. Officers wrote 2,341 reports which included over 605 arrests (38 arrests for OVI). There were 359 auto crashes in 2021. The Citizen's Police Academy graduated its 9th class in the spring. They hosted their annual outdoor events like our Community Safety Event and National Night Out and nearly 25 other community outreach events. The department remains committed to around the clock patrol at Mary Rutan Hospital and our schools remain a safer place to learn with 2 school resource officers (SRO's) and one D.A.R.E. officer on duty throughout the school year. The department hired its first female officer in over twenty years in 2021.

Our Fire Department responded to 3,089 calls for service; 658 fire incidents (20%), and 2,431 EMS runs (80%). Of those calls, Mutual Aid was provided to 182 EMS runs and 39 fire runs county-wide. In return, there were 30 mutual aid responses from other communities for Fire/EMS in 2021. The department also conducted 173 building inspections in the community. There are 15 full-time firefighters, 3 assistant chiefs, one captain and our fire chief. Narcan was used 24 times as compared to 28 doses in the previous year. The department received grants totaling nearly \$855,641. \$68,245 was used to purchase firefighter rescue tools. The largest portion of grant funding was \$763,333 which makes up 55% of the purchase of a new aerial ladder truck. The new truck has been ordered, but may not be delivered until 2023. Our current ladder truck was purchased new in 1995.

Throughout the pandemic, cities have discovered the tremendous value in public parks. Our Parks Department continues to maintain and improve our 16 parks. While the Hoffman Pool was closed for the summer of 2020, it reopened this past year. They also supported an effort to create a display for Veteran's Day in Blue Jacket Park. In spite of certain restrictions, we were able to offer 1,322 area youth the opportunity to compete in ten different youth sports activities. One of our most popular attractions is the Myeerah Nature Preserve with miles of natural hiking trails, lakes and woods. In addition to maintaining hundreds of acres of park lands, the Parks Department also manages the Bellefontaine Cemetery and keeps the grass cut on several other city owned properties.

Our Water Department continues to maintain the operation of the delivery of safe drinking water to our residents. We continue to exceed the strict standards set by the Ohio EPA. Our experienced team of seven have six members of the team maintaining certain levels of Ohio Water Supply Licenses. The Water Department had another busy year as they maintained water lines and improved our water meter reading system. They responded to and repaired 33 water main leaks (compared to 19 in 2019 and 24 in 2018). They continued our program of water main replacement projects in an effort to update our water line infrastructure on an annual basis. They flushed all of our hydrants and the entire team is certified in the necessary lab monitoring procedures.

Likewise, the Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) reported another year with zero violations to the Ohio EPA codes. The WWTP handled over 898 million gallons of raw wastewater which produced 263 dry tons of bio-solid material. A new sludge thickener clarifier was purchased replacing the original (1984) piece of equipment. 9,000 feet of sanitary sewer lines were cleaned as a preventative maintenance procedure and they raised 40 manhole covers.

The Bellefontaine Tax Department reported that our income tax revenue collections for 2021 were \$7,001,922. This was the sixth year for RITA to manage the tax filing and collections for the city. The cost of collections in 2020 was 9% lower, at 1.39% of dollars collected. They also manage tax returns for 355 other Ohio communities. In 2021 there were 3,597 delinquent notices sent to residents and 2,878 subpoenas mailed out to delinquent tax payers. Over \$31,000 were collected as a result of the notices. Additionally, each year cases are filed with the Municipal Court. In 2021, there were 75 cases filed with the courts. Over \$28,300 that was owed to the city, was collected as a result of findings within those hearings.

Our community continues to take advantage of lower aggregate gas and electric rates available to our citizens. Out of 66 Miami Valley communities surveyed annually, Bellefontaine remains 7th lowest for our combined water and sewer rates. The Utility Department continues to upgrade our automated meter reading system. This helps us to bill more accurately, as well as notify customers that they may have a higher consumption of water in their home or business. In 2021, there were 4,248 service orders. Of those, 1,500 were service visits to notify customers of higher-than-normal consumption rates. The remaining service calls generally deal with requests for new service, cancellations, transfer of services or equipment maintenance. Our utility bill often contains flyers and important community notices which reach over 5,500 homes and businesses. Since 2020, we've seen a large number of residents taking advantage of paying on-line or enrolling in (ACH) automatic payments made directly from their bank.

With Wes Dodds transitioning into his new administrative role with the city, Heather Harpst moved into the position of Code Enforcement Officer. In addition to being the administrator over many of the city's grants and construction projects, she also issues citations to violators of our city's codes. In 2021, Wes and Heather reported 635 various violations and resolved 90% of them. The vast majority of those are for tall grass and/or exterior premises violations. Heather will wear the hat of project manager over many of the city's projects throughout the coming years.

Our fleet of various cars, trucks, and other such equipment keep our Vehicle Maintenance Department busy throughout the course of the year. In 2021, they managed 141 repairs and serviced 159 vehicles. Like many of our associates, the year was completed without any accidents on the job and the department spending was kept within the budget for the year.

We have a very busy Regional Airport. There are 37 aircraft on our field including 9 multi-engine or jet aircraft. With a staff of 22 associates (including 10 instructors), Midwest Corporate Air and Steve Buchenroth issued 300 pilot certificates in 2021. Steve holds the unique FAA designation for this process. In 2021, Mr. Buchenroth certified over 400 pilots with their "check rides", reportedly one of the highest numbers nationwide. Bellefontaine is host to a variety of pilots from at least 34 different states. Private pilots, commercial pilots, airline transport pilots, and flight instructors come to Bellefontaine's Regional Airport for this important certification. Midwest Corporate Air added a motor glider and an amphibious seaplane to their fleet in 2020, and a Cirrus Aircraft in 2021. Additionally, Cirrus reached out to Midwest Corporate Air to become one of their select few training sites in the coming months.

The Logan County Chamber of Commerce conducted a series of meetings to develop an economic strategic plan for Logan County. There were four areas targeted to focus on, which include Workforce, Internet Connectivity, Housing and Infrastructure. In 2021, groups continue to meet, discuss, and advance our

community in these areas of opportunity and more. Bellefontaine offered Federal Cares Act dollars from 2020, so that the Chamber was able to launch a virtual “one stop shop” for employment www.mylocalcareers.com which we share with Union County in an effort to connect our citizens with job opportunities. The Chamber of Commerce continued its assistance to *Peak Fiber* as a residential fiber-to-home option to increase internet connectivity for our residents.

Downtown Bellefontaine and small businesses continue to grow, thrive, and attract shoppers from other communities to our city. Numerous businesses opened their doors or renovated their spaces over the last 12 months. The Richwood Bank renovated and opened in the historic Carnegie Building, The Flying Pepper Cantina, BUILD Co-Work and Space, Dash and Joeys, Choice Properties, Undertone Beauty Bar, Silver Elephant, Revival Design Studio and Serve Pro are just a few more examples of businesses who opened their doors in 2021.

Small Nation, a group of young businesses professionals who develop many of our downtown properties and match them with entrepreneurs, continued to expand their footprint in Bellefontaine and other communities. In 2021, they acquired and began the renovations to the Opera Block Building and a large historic building on the 100 block of West Chillicothe. Over the past ten years, they have acquired over 56 historic buildings, created 34 upper floor loft apartments, added over 180 jobs and invested over \$30M in total private investments.

While these last two years have presented their share of challenges, I believe Bellefontaine is continuing on a positive path of continuous improvement. Our community is well positioned to attract individuals, families and new businesses to become a part of our “hometown appeal”. The stage is set for 2022 to welcome many of these new opportunities. We remain committed to offering high-quality services to our surrounding community. As Mayor, we will continue to strive to become a destination for visitors who choose to come and experience a community that we call home. I am excited to be a part of a city that faces its challenges head-on and embraces the changes and opportunities that may come with each new day. I am grateful for the opportunity to represent the City of Bellefontaine as Mayor. Bellefontaine is, indeed, a great place to live, work, and play!

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Stahler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ben Stahler

Mayor