

2024 State of the City Address

Members of City Council, honored guests, City staff and citizens of Oakwood:

Oakwood continues to be “The Premier Residential Community in the Dayton and Miami Valley Region.” Why is Oakwood the region’s premier residential community? It is simple. It is our neighborhoods, our schools and library, city services, public safety, recreation and leisure; but most of all it is our citizens. If this sounds familiar to you it should. It was the opening paragraph in my first “State of the City Address” in 2010. It was true then and it is still true today.

In November, Steve Byington and I were re-elected to Oakwood City Council. Vice Mayor Byington begins his 17th year on Oakwood City Council and his 15th year as our Vice Mayor. I begin my 21st year on Oakwood City Council and my 15th year as your Mayor. We are deeply honored for the opportunity to continue to serve the residents of Oakwood. Joining us, as a newly elected member of City Council, is Healy Jackson. Healy is a long-time Oakwood resident and civic volunteer. She previously served on the Wright Library Foundation Board and has served on our City Planning Commission since 2010. We are happy to continue our service along with existing council members Rob Stephens and Leigh Turben. Rob begins his 15th year and Leigh begins her 4th year on City Council.

Healy Jackson replaced councilmember Anne Hilton who completed 14 years of service to the citizens of Oakwood in 2023. We honored her last month with a resolution listing all of the significant projects that occurred during her term in office. I will not recite all of these projects here, but I need to state the following regarding her service to Oakwood as noted in our resolution.

“Anne consistently based her public policy decisions on what was best for the community, yet always heavily considered the impact of those decisions on individual Oakwood citizens, businesses and on Oakwood neighborhoods; Anne distinguished herself through her consistent willingness to hear from any and all citizens, for as long as necessary, in order to provide everyone the opportunity to express their feelings and opinions on issues; and she always made decisions that recognized the reality and necessity of change yet stressed the importance of retaining the charm and storied history of our unique community.”

Anne will continue to be ‘*Round Town* as they say in *The Oakwood Register*. So, when you see her, please thank Anne for her many years of service to our community.

Schools/Library

Debbie DiLorenzo and Nathan Reiter were elected to the Oakwood City School Board. Ms. DiLorenzo is also a long-time resident of Oakwood and a community volunteer. Mr. Reiter is a former educator teaching English as a Second Language in Bellbrook and the Columbus area. The school board named Dr. Neil Gupta as its Superintendent. Dr. Gupta graduated from Miami University and received his master’s degree and doctorate from Ashland University. He has over

20 years of educational experience. City Council and city staff look forward to continuing our cooperative relationship with Oakwood City Schools.

Yes, they did it again. The OHS Academic Decathlon team won the Division III National Championship for the 11th year in a row. This scholastic competition is unique because the team is tested in art, social science, economics, language and literature, mathematics, music and science and participates in judged events in speech, interview and essay. Congratulations to all the students and advisor Lori Morris, now in her 18th year as coach. She deserves major kudos for her efforts on behalf of our students.

Congratulations are also in order to OHS senior, Bella Butler, the new State champion in the 1,600-meter and the 3,200-meter run.

Construction began on the Rick and Jane Schwartz Performing Arts Wing at Oakwood High School and Oakwood Junior High School. The wing is the result of the Flourish campaign for Visual & Performing Arts by the Oakwood Schools Foundation. We look forward to the ribbon cutting ceremony later this week.

Wright Memorial Public Library celebrated its 84th anniversary. Under the leadership of Director, Kristi Hale, it is one of the most heavily used libraries in the county. Their Foundation reported a record annual fundraising campaign in 2023. Our community is blessed to have a significant number of generous donors and volunteers supporting our schools and library.

City Services

The primary purpose of local government is to provide for public safety, refuse services, water and sewer services and other governmental and infrastructure services. We also have the obligation to create a community ambience that encourages citizens to want to live in our fine community.

Public Safety

Formed in 1927, our public safety department is the second oldest consolidated department in the United States. It is unique because all our officers are cross-trained and state-certified in law enforcement, firefighting and emergency medical services. Our first officer on scene response time for any emergency is two minutes, by far the fastest in the region. Our fire engine response time is 4.5 minutes; the national standard is 6 minutes. Our medic response time is 3.5 minutes; the national standard is 12 minutes. Oakwood has the lowest crime rate and fire loss in Montgomery County.

Under the leadership of Oakwood Public Safety Chief Alan Hill, we have the best group of public safety officers in our history. All four of our Public Safety Lieutenants have now graduated from the Police Executive Leadership College (PELC). PELC is a three-month leadership development program consisting of 105 class hours, covering 20+ leadership topics, 20 required readings, four

research papers, three team projects, two speeches, and one capstone presentation. Congratulations to all of our Lieutenants.

We offered our sixth annual Citizens Police Academy (CPA). Chief Hill describes the program as a unique opportunity for citizens to better understand the job of a public safety officer and serve as a way for Safety Department personnel to hear the needs and expectations of the community. Graduates of the Academy have been very impressed with the professionalism of our Public Safety personnel.

Public Works

Public Works is often overlooked in our city as people take most of these services for granted. They should not!

Our public works employees handle our weekly household waste collection and disposal, our comprehensive recycling program, special pickup program, year around yard debris pickup, a dumpster program, fall leaf pickup and a spring mulch delivery program. They also provide routine repair of our asphalt and concrete streets and alleys, provide snow and ice removal and maintain our traffic signals and street signs.

Public Works staff also operates our water system, sanitary sewers and storm sewers. They are on call 24/7 for storm events, snow events and water main and other broken pipe events. Please thank them for their service to our city.

Leisure Services

Where else will you find in a community of 2.2 square miles the parks, gardens and green space found in Oakwood?

We offer four neighborhood parks, Cook Park, Fairridge Park, Orchardly Park and Shafor Park. Our natural areas include Loy Gardens, Elizabeth Gardens, Houk Stream and Centennial Park. Our recreation facilities include the Oakwood Community Center and Gardner Pool, the Dog Park at Creager Field, Irving Field, Hollinger Memorial Tennis Center, Old River Sports Complex and Mack Hummon Stadium.

Oakwood also features beautiful public gardens including Smith Gardens, donated to our city 50 years ago, and Francine's Garden. We have been Tree City USA for 41 years as designated the National Arbor Day Foundation and have planted over 3,200 trees through our Johnny Appleseed Street Tree Planting program. We also sponsor numerous community events including the New Resident Breakfast, the Ice Cream Social, the Family Fall Festival and the Holiday of Lights.

Financial Stewardship

Under the leadership of City Council, our outstanding city staff and the advice and counsel of our 34-member citizen Budget Review Committee, we met the challenges to our financial stability.

In 2024 we expect our expenses will exceed our revenues by \$1.3 million. This is primarily due to the expiration of our 3.75 mill property tax levy. We expect our replacement levy will address this shortfall. Our major capital expenditure in 2024 is the Far Hills Avenue Resurfacing Project. This \$1.5 million project will be paid 80% by ODOT and 20% by the city.

In 2024 we raised our water rates for the first time in seven years. Prior to this increase we had the 3rd lowest water rates in the area. Even with our 2024 increase, our water rates are still one of the lowest of any jurisdiction in the region.

We plan to have a 2.41 mill property tax replacement levy on the ballot this March. This levy will generate about \$1.1million annually for city services and replaces a levy that was last renewed by our voters with a 70% yes vote in 2018. Our Budget Review Committee and all of us on City Council support your “YES” vote on this issue. And, as you know, only 5.6% of your property taxes go for city services. The remainder goes to Oakwood Schools, Montgomery County agencies and Wright Library. The election is on March 19, 2024 and early voting begins on February 21, 2024.

Maintaining our city infrastructure, both above and below ground, is a top priority of City Council and city staff. Given the age of our city, we recognize the importance of regularly investing in infrastructure capital improvements projects.

Well Governed, Well Managed and Financially Strong

The excellent services provided by our public safety, leisure services and public works departments would not occur if not for the leadership of City Manager Norbert Klopsch. He is recognized throughout the region as an outstanding city manager. He has served our city for 32 years including the last 22 years as our City Manager. He is blessed with an outstanding group of department directors.

Members of City Council are also active in the Miami Valley. I serve our region as a member of the Board of Directors of the Greater Dayton Mayors and Managers Association and formerly served as the President of the Association. I also serve on the Montgomery County Solid Waste Advisory Committee and the Solid Waste Management Policy Committee. Steve represents our city at the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission and the First Suburbs Consortium. Rob represents our city on the Miami Valley Communications Council (MVCC) and recently served as the Chair of MVCC. Leigh is our city liaison to the Oakwood Sister City Association. Healy is our city liaison to the Oakwood Historical Society.

This Council, like those that preceded it, operates in a collegial style and everyone believes in doing the right thing for the citizens of Oakwood. We listen to one another, no one has hidden agendas, and we believe in community service.

When I joined City Council in 2003, it was my belief that Oakwood was well governed, well managed and financially strong. I still hold that belief and will continue this tradition.

With the help of City Council, city staff and the citizens of Oakwood, we will continue to be well governed, well managed and financially strong.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve you.