

2023 State of the City Address

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

On behalf of Oakwood City Council, it is my honor to proclaim that Oakwood, with its population of 9,572 residents, continues to be the premier residential community in the Dayton region. We have this distinction because of our beautiful neighborhoods, our excellent public schools and library, unmatched city services, including public safety, public works, recreation and leisure, and most of all because of our citizens.

Neighborhoods

We have outstanding diversity in housing choices. Although most of our housing stock is over 75 years old, our homes and properties are better maintained than any other city around and our home values prove it. Whether a classic Tudor, a Georgian revival, an American Foursquare, or an Italian Renaissance, in 2022, 95% of Oakwood home sales were higher than the County appraised value.

Oakwood is the proud home to five sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Hawthorn Hill, which also holds the special distinction of a National Historic Landmark, was the home of Orville Wright from 1914 until his death in 1948. Dayton History and The Oakwood Historical Society conduct regular educational tours of the home, and the surrounding historic district. The Long-Romspert Homestead on Far Hills was the home to three generations of the same family from circa 1863 to 1985, when it was bequeathed to The Oakwood Historical Society to serve as their headquarters and house museum. The entire Schantz Park Historic District in Oakwood was added to the Registry for its exceptional and intact collection of mid-century and late Victorian-era homes. The familiar Queen Anne style double home on East Schantz Avenue was built by Adam Schantz, Sr. in 1895. In addition, Wright Memorial Library was added to the National Register in 2013.

Schools/Library

Everyone knows Oakwood has great schools, in fact, the finest public schools in the region. This has been the case for decades and the tradition continues. I know this is hard to believe, but the OHS Academic Decathlon team won the Division III National Championship for the 10th 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 17th year as coach. She deserves major kudos for her efforts on behalf of our students.

Oakwood High School is the first public high school in the Dayton region to have a Virtual Dissection Table. The Anatomage Table, as commonly known, makes it possible to visualize and interact with virtual anatomy in the way people would on a living human body. As the *Oakwood*

Register described this addition, “The days of the traditional frog dissection are over.” This is an incredible learning tool made possible with a grant from the Oakwood Schools Foundation.

We congratulate and thank Todd Duwel for his 11 years of service on the Oakwood Board of Education and thank outgoing Superintendent Kyle Ramey for his outstanding leadership of our school district.

Wright Memorial Public Library celebrated its 83rd anniversary. Under the leadership of Director, Kristi Hale, they are one of the most heavily used libraries in the county, and in 2022 they were named Partner of the Year by the Greater Dayton Partners for the Environment, in recognition of the library’s environmental programs and native community gardens. They also completed a \$5.1 million renovation and restoration of their beautiful Tudor architecture building. A substantial portion of the renovation came from private philanthropy.

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 under three minutes, by far the fastest in the region. Our fire engine response time is 4.4 minutes; the national standard is 6 minutes. Our medic response time is 3.3 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. Captain Mike Jones retired after 25 years in public safety and received the Oakwood Rotary Community Service Award. We were able to promote from within our organization, promoting Officer Justin Slone to Lieutenant and promoting Lieutenant Mike Tanner to Captain. Lieutenant Chuck Balaj was recognized for more than 20 years of service with the Kettering Regional SWAT team. He was the first non-Kettering officer to serve on the SWAT team and has received commendations from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other law enforcement organizations for his assistance with federal and multi-state investigations.

We offered our fifth 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.

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 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 49 years ago, and Francine's Garden. We have been a Tree City USA for 40 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.

Other Important Events

We celebrated several notable anniversaries last year. CARE Walk celebrated its 20th and final fundraiser for breast health of women in Dayton. They raised over \$300,000 over their 20-year run for breast cancer research. The *Oakwood Register* celebrated its 30th anniversary. Ashley's Pastry Shop, the best bakery in the Miami Valley, celebrated their 40th anniversary. Oakwood and Le Vesinet, France celebrated the 50th anniversary of our twinning with our first Sister City. The Oakwood Club, the best steakhouse in the Miami Valley, celebrated their 60th anniversary. In 2023, Dorothy Lane Market, the best grocery store in the Miami Valley will celebrate their 75th anniversary. We also commemorated the 150th anniversary of the platting of the "Town of Oakwood" with a historical marker placed in front of our City Building.

We also mourn the loss of former city manager Michael Kelly. Mike served our city for over 33 years including nine years as city manager. He was the consummate professional in every sense of

the word. He will always be remembered for his dedication to the betterment of Oakwood and as a man of the highest integrity. His grace and class are the primary reason I chose to become involved in public service.

Mary Jo Scalzo passed away on Christmas Day 2021 and we celebrated her life last June. She retired from Oakwood City Schools in 2013 as Superintendent after 41 years in public and non-public education including 21 years with the Oakwood City School District. It was my honor in 2013 to present her with the first “Key to the City” award for her career of service to our community.

Financial Stewardship

Under the leadership of City Council, our outstanding city staff and the advice and counsel of our 32-member citizen Budget Review Committee, we met the challenges to our financial stability. Our revenues exceeded our expenses in both 2021 and 2022. This year, as well as in 2022, we plan no increase in income tax, property tax or refuse, water, sanitary sewer, or stormwater fees. In fact, our water rates are now the second lowest of any jurisdiction in the region.

We plan to have a property tax renewal levy on the ballot this November. This levy generates about \$1,100,000 annually for city services and was last renewed by our voters with a 70% yes vote in 2018. And, as you know, only 8% of your property taxes go for city services. The remainder goes to Oakwood Schools, Montgomery County agencies and Wright Library.

The 2023 budget includes \$2.2 million for the Far Hills Storm Sewer Reconstruction Project and \$220,000 for the Far Hills Resurfacing Project in 2024. The Far Hills Storm Sewer Reconstruction Project will be the third largest project that the city has completed in the past 30 years. Maintaining our city infrastructure, both above and below ground, is a top priority of City Council and city staff.

The Ohio Municipal League (OML) serves as the primary connection point between municipal and state government in Ohio, representing the interests of cities and villages to lawmakers and the governor’s administration. We support their 2023-2024 Legislative Priorities as follows:

- Restore Local Government Fund (LGF)
- Preserve Home Rule
- Protect Public Safety Funding
- Invest in Public Infrastructure, and
- Partner to Fight Opioid Addiction

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 31

years including the last 21 years as our City Manager. He is blessed with an outstanding group of department directors.

As I begin my 20th year on Oakwood City Council and my 14th year as your Mayor, I serve our region as a member the Board of Directors of the Greater Dayton Mayors and Managers Association. I 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. I am honored to serve with my fellow members of Council. Steve Byington begins his 16th year as a member of Oakwood City Council and his 14th year as our Vice Mayor. Steve represents our city on the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission and the First Suburbs Consortium. Council members Rob Stephens and Anne Hilton both begin their 14th year on City Council. Rob represents our city on the Miami Valley Communications Council (MVCC) and currently serves as the Chair of MVCC. Anne is our city liaison to the Oakwood Sister City Association. Council member Leigh Turben begins her 3rd year on Oakwood City Council. Leigh is our city liaison to the Oakwood Historical Society and represented our city in Le Vesinet France last June for the 50th anniversary celebration of our twinning with our first sister city. What a great team!

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.