
CITY COUNCIL

March 18, 2019

Good evening,

To the residents of this great city, my fellow councilors, City Manager Lori Curtis Luther, City Attorney Elizabeth Krueger, and certainly the entire staff of the City of Beloit, I want to take a little time out to say thanks to each and every one of you for what you do each and every day.

Each year we set aside time to share the city's successes. This year is no different. I graduated from Beloit Memorial High School in 1981. During that time at each and every sporting event, we had a cheer that simply stated "We're from Beloit, couldn't be prouder, you can't hear us now so we will yell a little louder." Now, back then it was simply a standard cheer. As I reflect on this simple cheer and our city, I have come to realize it is more than a cheer; it is the Beloit way. You see, when you talk to people from this great city, they will share all of the accomplishments, changes, visions, and successes that have taken place over the years.

Just like the cheerleaders boosted the fans' enthusiasm at games, we as leaders must boost the residents to become cheerleaders for Beloit. We must combat misstatements about Beloit with facts, such as our crime rate has declined in the last two years, and we have moved to 10-hour shifts for our officers to place the most of amount of officers on duty during the times the department is facing the most amount of calls. Our fire department continues to work diligently to provide fire and emergency care for our residents. Our firefighters continue to educate our parents, youth, and businesses on fire protection and prevention initiatives. If you ask them why they do this, I am certain they will say, "our residents deserve and expect a safe community."

Beloit could be known as the City of Bridges. Why? It's hard to miss all of our bridges. We have walking bridges that connect two sides of the river to make one blended city. We have driving bridges that allow cars to cross the river, once again, connecting us all as one community. And then we have the greatest bridges of all, the men and women who work tirelessly to create personal bridges to connect us all.

We're from Beloit, couldn't be prouder, you can't hear us now so we will yell a little louder.

This is evident by the partnerships made up of residents, city councilors, city staff and the business, religious, and educational community. Every single person

invested in Beloit's future helps create that bridge to make us one connected community.

A strong community and city partnership benefits everyone. Last week, city staff partnered with Community Action to host a meeting in the Merrill neighborhood to talk about the goals for the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area. Thank you so much to the residents who shared their vision for the neighborhood. The city will be meeting with the Hackett neighborhood at 6 p.m. March 27 at the Beloit Historical Society. We hope that more people attend to make their voices heard.

In just over a year, the NRSA plan is off to a great start. The investments in these neighborhoods over the next few years will make our neighborhood safer for the future of all of Beloit. Hats off to Community Development Director Julie Christensen, Director of Community and Housing Services Teri Downing, and the entire Community Development team for keeping their eye on the goal.

We must continue to show the residents we are working to create a workforce that reflects our community. We have made strides in both the police and fire departments and continue work in achieving this goal in all departments. We have redefined our definition of diversity in the most inclusive fashion so city staff represents a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences to make our city stronger. We will continue to enhance our hiring practices to ensure that qualified candidates from all backgrounds are given the opportunity to work for the city of Beloit.

Our city staff, under City Manager Lori Luther's leadership and with the full support of the City Council, have expanded their external hire searches to create opportunities for men and women of all backgrounds to start a career with the City of Beloit.

Thank you to City Manager Lori Luther, City Attorney Elizabeth Krueger, Human Resources Manager Hannah Kuehne and all city staff who continue to strive toward this goal.

The city implemented its updated workman's compensation policies in spring 2017, which is helping to create a safer work environment and reduce expenses. The immediate impacts are being experienced with a nearly 60% reduction in the number of injuries from 2016 to 2018. As a result, we reduced our 2019 premium by \$180,000. Thanks to Finance and Administrative Services Director Eric Miller and Risk Manager David Niedfeldt and anyone else who assisted with this task.

Year after year, the question is asked, "Where is that casino?" This past year has brought us even closer to that possibility. We are closer now than we have ever been before, and I strongly believe we will see a casino in the very near future. But in the meantime, we're seeing strong economic growth. From 2016-2018, 943 jobs were created, 19 economic development projects were completed in the city with investments over \$185 million dollars in 2018. Economic Development

Director Andrew Janke did not wait on the casino, he continued to recruit businesses to come to the city.

It's exciting to see new construction, renovations and remodels happening throughout the city. We're looking forward to seeing the following businesses and organizations complete their projects in 2019:

- Beloit College's Powerhouse project (2019 completion)
- G5 Brewing Company (spring 2019)
- Holiday Inn Express
- NorthStar Radioisotopes expansion in the Gateway
- Seal-Rite Door
- Hilton Home 2 Suites
- Additional businesses, houses, condos and apartments

"We're from Beloit couldn't be prouder, you can't hear us now so we will yell a little louder." Look around, you will see neighborhoods improving through our code enforcement and neighborhood revitalization endeavors. Street Dance, Harry's Place, Holiday Parade, BIFF, and other downtown activities continue to bring visitors to the city. We must continue to tell the Beloit story of how we pulled together during a tough time and turned the city into the showcase city it is today.

Our library is seeing thousands of digital materials checked out. Our senior population has found many opportunities to learn and build relationships at Grinnell Senior Center. Our families are enjoying our parks and programs. We have introduced new programs, and we have built new playgrounds to enhance our neighborhoods.

While this has been a particularly harsh winter, our Public Works department has found ways to fully clear our main roads during major snow events a full hour faster in the last two years as compared to 2016. While we can't escape the snow, we have many hard working public works crews who have been working long hours to keep our streets clear of snow so we can all get to work and school each day.

Thank you to Downtown Beloit Association Executive Director Shauna El-Amin, all five Department of Public Works divisions (Engineering, Operations, Parks and Recreation, Transit, and Water Resources), Beloit Public Library staff, and all clubs, organizations and departments that help maintain and enhance the quality of life in Beloit.

An important project for city operations, the installation of an extended fiber optics network, was completed to provide a more reliable phone and data connection, eliminate downtime, increase security, and provide backup redundancy. Installation of utility poles help provide faster data connections and save the city significant dollars over time. Thanks to Information Technology

Director Ray Gorsline and team.

The City Council meetings are paperless thanks to the efforts of our City Clerk-Treasurer Lori Stottler, who worked with our IT team to install iPads in the forum so each councilor can quickly pull up any document for the meeting. Lori's team will soon undertake our spring election and we appreciate everyone's efforts in her office to serve all our residents.

We are seeing new ways to engage our residents through the use of social media, our website, surveys, and more. We want to hear from you, and we want you to know that your voices are heard.

From sharing snow emergency information to increased tips to the Beloit Police Department via Facebook and from providing info on events to sharing videos from the Dirty Dash, our city staff has found unique ways to have meaningful conversations about issues that matter to you.

We've also been able to share all of the great things Beloit has to offer with the stateline community, Wisconsin and Illinois, and the entire nation. Our Public Works Department went viral with their version of "Ice, Ice, Baby" (and yes, Janesville, your remakes were good but ours were better). MSNBC's Your Business featured Beloit in its Small Business Saturday episode.

Do we value diversity? Of course we do!

This year we renamed the Portland Avenue bridge after Mr. Walter Knight, a man who built bridges to connect the working class to businesses, and the U.S. Navy decided to name one of its future Littoral Combat Ships the *USS Beloit* as a nod to our city's historical connections to the U.S. Navy through Fairbanks Morse. We're also excited that retired Major General Marcia Anderson was chosen as the ship's sponsor. Anderson lived in Beloit as a child and still has family connections here today.

Thank you to everyone who has been a bridge from where we were to where we are going.

As we continue to move forward, I would like to issue a few challenges in a few areas where I am particularly passionate.

1. I want to look at ways to address the homeless population. I know we partner with agencies and there are even people who do not want assistance, still, we must push forward. I would like us to keep this in the forefront of our minds and conversations.
2. I want to look at ways to work with individuals who are returning to the area after being incarcerated. I want to see these individuals being connected to programs that help them become a contributing member of society instead of becoming a repeat offender.

3. I want to continue to look for ways to develop a workforce to be ready as we continue to recruit new businesses.

4. We must stay the course, as we are moving in the right direction. The City Manager and her team continue to look for ways to move the organization forward. We need to continue to support and challenge them to take the organization to the next level.

As councilors, we must continue to ask the tough questions and be prepared to make tough decisions. We must continue to partner with the School District of Beloit to promote a positive image for the city.

Let's continue to tell the world that Beloit is a great place to live, work, and play.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as president the past two years. When I accepted the position I knew it would be a challenging and time demanding position. I appreciate your partnership and ongoing dedication to this great city.

Sincerely,
Kevin D. Leavy
Beloit City Council President