

August 2018 Update

It is a busy time of the year!

Re-election: It is time for re-election with the General Election in November. Four City Council seats are up for re-election; in the 1st District is Council Member Dale Cooper (unopposed), 3rd is Mayor Pro Tem Roger Zielinski (unopposed), 5th is me, with an opponent, and in the 7th is Council Member Erin Martin Pontiac (unopposed).

I would appreciate your support as I continue to work for the improvement of our community. Some of the key issues:

1. Continuing efforts to get more funding for street improvement. Twice I've led effort to increase funding by taking funds from the Oil & Gas Fund. Despite the efforts of those to express concerns about depleting this resource, the fund has continued to grow to over \$10,500,000. No one has been able to tell me what the "goal" is for this fund, \$10 million, \$15 million, \$20 million? It is of little value if a portion of the fund can not be used to meet priorities of the public. I appreciate preservation of the fund, but also see no value in a large bank account if you have pressing needs and available resources to put toward them. I'm pressing for a comprehensive plan that identifies when the last maintenance was done and when a street is planned to be addressed beyond the 5-year plan so people have a vision. Mayor Pro Tem Zielinski led the way to all surplus City property sales being dedicated to additional street maintenance and it made a difference this year.
2. Debt: some is necessary, but some is not. Past Councils borrowed against the Capital Improvement Fund rather than "spend as you go" and I entered City Council with 83% of the available funding obligated to debt service. It will still take 8 years or so to pay those obligations (Marina costs overruns, Ramsdell Heating and Cooling, Boat Ramp improvements). The Motor Pool Fund is another concern, more debt service than purchases and not enough charges to departments to pay for vehicle and equipment replacement. We need to be more business minded!
3. Personnel Costs: Nearly \$5 million of the \$6.2 million-dollar general fund budget this year is Personnel cost. I've proposed moving new non-union employees from the current Defined Benefit Retirement program to a Defined Contribution program. We pay as much as 28% of department salary in retirement cost and have gone from 108% funded in 2005 to around 80% funded with a near \$4 million-dollar unfunded liability. Our cost in 2005 was \$22,500 and the cost this budget year is now over \$418,000 and projected to rise to \$600,000 in 2020 – it is unsustainable. I'm not suggesting taking anything from anyone who is in the current program, but we need to quit adding to our long-term liability. My experience included Financial Advising and there are upsides and downsides – the opportunity for a self-directed and vested retirement fund is an advantage to the employee and offers a fixed cost to the taxpayer without liability.
4. Economic Development: We have seen business open in the community but not at a pace that is desired. We need good paying, family sustaining jobs to spur development. Out of town developers have offered low-income housing financed with State tax credits or have requested tax abatements and Payment In Liew of Taxes (PILOT) that would have given tax breaks in the millions of dollars over the course of these programs. We need to grow the

tax base to provide property tax relief, not surrender it and put money in the pockets of developers.

5. Council on Aging has been given St. Mary Parkway property (14 acres) to relocate and expand senior services, a great gift! That will open a prime piece of property on River Street for development. I keep in contact with Sarah Howard at the Council and fully support the needs of our aging community population.
6. Housing Commission: A plan is incubating to rehabilitate all Public Housing in the City that would spur building activity for the next 4 to 6 years in the community and vastly increase the value of 44 of 48 “disbursed” units in Manistee. It is a Federal program that would provide opportunity to numerous local businesses and skilled trade groups.
7. Vision and Planning: It is disheartening to see the erosion of Council exercising their role as the vision and planning for the future of Manistee (as is stated in the City Charter). It takes many hours of research and preparation to attend and participate in Council meetings. I’ve studied budgets and audit back to 2003 and many reports and studies that have been commissioned over the years. Council is the vision – staff is the day-to-day operation and function of the City. We need to get it right!
8. Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Tax Increment Financing (TIF) renewal: on a work session August 14th. What is the future of the DDA and how will they define development of the district and growth in tax base? Those questions need to be answered.
9. Accountability: everyone is accountable. I’m accountable to the public and readily available to share information and listen to citizen concerns. Ordinances need to be well structured, publicized and enforced. Fireworks, noise, and feeding of wild animals are among the complaints I hear often. Email me and other council Members along with the City Manager (who is responsible for enforcement) so there is a written record, and something written to follow-up on. I have coffee nearly every day at the House of Flavors (7:00 AM). If that is not convenient, call or email for an appointment. I’ll meet with individuals or groups at any mutual agreed location or time.

That starts a list of issue I see for the future.

I’m asking for your support in the November election so the progress that has been made can continue. As a reminder, my history and background include;

A 25-year career in the United States Air Force. Began as a 17-year-old enlisted volunteer in 1966 and ended in 1991 as a Major. Associate, Bachelor, and Master’s Degrees.

Employed by Wal-Mart; associate, department manager, associate manager and assistant store manager.

Allstate Insurance agent; Property and Casualty, Life and Health Insurance, and Financial Advisor (held Series 6 & 63 Security Licenses).

Director of Housing at FiveCAP: primarily involved with and directed low-income Home Weatherization.

State of Michigan Department of Human Resources, Weatherization; trained and supervised Community Action administration of State program for 1/3 of the agencies in the State of Michigan.

Community: Three-time Exalter Ruler of Manistee Elks #250, current Board of Directors Chairman. Past Treasurer at the Manistee Golf & Country Club, Harbor Commission and P.E.G. Commission, DDA, and Oil & Gas Board (Chair) member. I've attended School Board Meeting, met with the School Superintendent, County Commission meeting, Manistee and Filer Township Board meetings, Tribal Council Meetings, Council on Aging Meetings, and all City Committees and Commissions as time allows.

I'm a member of the Michigan Association of Mayor and have not missed a Capital Conference or Michigan Municipal League event and meet with elected officials at the local, State, and Federal level. I am involved and advocate for the city of Manistee. I've missed three Council meetings or Work Session in four years; two while attending Elks Grand Lodge meetings and one for a pre-operative appointment.

I have been successful in a variety of leadership positions and will continue to serve to the best of my ability. Thank you for your support!

What's on your mind? Call (231-690-3948) or email (jsmith@manisteemi.gov) and let me know what your concerns are.

Final note: Every Council Member represents the City "at large" and is elected by all voters, so contact them also. We all have "one vote" and as Mayor I preside over the meeting but can't veto or otherwise change a course of action alone. Jim