

Rental Inspections –

Landlords have been vocal concerning rental property inspections, both from the nature of the inspections (standards) and cost increase for the service. I'll provide as much background as I have on the issue and provide more information as it becomes available.

The standards for the inspections has not changed – the same criteria remains from when inspections were performed by the City of Manistee Building Inspector. Those standards are available on the City of Manistee web-site or in brochure format from City Hall. Some landlords have questioned the practicality of those standards since the inspection process was contracted to the Spicer Group and deficiencies being identified that were previously not cited during the inspection process. There is a review of standards to be discussed and I'd anticipate notice of an opportunity for landlords to be present and voice their opinions and concerns. I'll always support and encourage public input and forums for items of interest and concern from parties that are involved and the general public.

The decision to not replace the retiring City of Manistee Building Inspector was based on economics. Declining construction within the City of Manistee and fees charged for Rental Inspections fell far short of meeting the costs of the Building Inspector position and staffing – fees met only about 25% of the position expenses. Complaints have been made to City Council about the increased costs of Building Permits from the State of Michigan Building Inspector and delays in what was once pretty much a 24 hour service by the city. Complaints have also been addressed on the time and expense of Rental Inspections. It was pointed out by one landlord that his five structure, 23 rental unit complex was previously inspected in one morning session at a cost of \$540 and now takes significantly more time and slightly in excess of \$2000.00 for the same inspections. The previous City Manager did not feel it appropriate for the taxpayers in general to subsidize the costs of maintaining the Building Inspector position and made the change to contracting the service. Bids were received from the Spicer Group (City Engineer of Record) and the previous Building Inspector. These bids were reviewed by City of Manistee staff and the City Attorney and while the bid inspection fees were very similar, the recommendation made to award the contract to the Spicer Group due to staffing (I don't know the specifics because I don't review bids). The costs for Rental Unit Inspections would have been the same regardless of who was awarded the contract (or nearly so).

The State of Michigan states that the Building Inspector function should not be a "revenue generating" function, and our service was at a significant loss – even with the increased fees being charged for Building Permits and Rental Unit Inspections, revenue would fall far short (around 50%) of meeting the expenses of a full time City Employee Building Inspector. Again, the voices of the community have been heard and our interim City Manager and staff have agreed to meet and discuss the issue – as I get more information, I'll pass it on.

City Manager –

The 1st candidate (of 5 interviewed) that was offered the position of City Manager withdrew his tentative acceptance and accepted a position with Wexford County. A 2nd candidate, Kevin Bookout from Missouri has been made a tentative offer (and accepted) subject to a comprehensive background check and agreement of an employment agreement. I voted against this candidate based on information provided by the Michigan Municipal League in closed session and information from personal research, but City Council voted 6 – 1 in favor of making the offer. I've pledged my support and

willingness to work with this candidate if the background check prove favorable and an employment agreement is reached for Mr. Bookout to become the next Manistee City Manager. Very few citizens took the opportunity to attend the “meet and greet” held at the Bluefish on August 10th or the full day City Council interview session that was open to the public. I’ve publically stated my concerns during the post interview rating of candidates that narrowed the field of 5 interviewed candidates to 3, and at the City Council session (and subsequent interview by the MNA). There is information available on line (Google Kevin Bookout – Missouri) or refer to the Real Manistee Facebook page for added information. If you have an opinion, the best way to make it heard is to contact your City Council representative and share that point of view.

Streets –

With some added funding from the State of Michigan, we have nearly \$600,000 for local street maintenance this year – a vast improvement from the past. This does not solve our local street issue. It is projected that we will need \$600,000 a year to keep our streets from deteriorating from their present condition and there is only Major Street funding in the Capital Improvement Plan for next year, and no funding in our years. This means we must still find the resources to continue maintaining our streets (and hopefully improving the overall condition). It is not a forgotten subject and I’ll continue working for this funding as a priority.

Bravo Troop and Manistee Armory –

Having attended the public event hosted by Representative Franz where General Stone spoke I’ve contacted Representative Franz, Senator Booher, Governor Snyder’s office, and U. S. Representative Benicshek. Representative Benicshek’s office assured me last week they had “just spoke” with the Governor’s office and the decision on Bravo Troop has yet to be made. I’ve requested a “resolution of support” from City Council that will be on the September 1st agenda and interviewed on radio station 94.1 with Dave Ohman attempting to raise public support to retain this part of Manistee’s heritage in our community and ask your support in this effort. Bravo Troop was established in 1950 and the current Armory was constructed in 1955. The community was tasked to provide “matching funds” of \$50,000 in a one month period of time, which was built with an additional \$350,000 of Federal funds and \$25,000 of State of Michigan funding. The \$50,000 raised in Manistee is the equivalent of \$400,000 in 2015 dollars. The Citizen Soldiers who make up Bravo Troop are our friends, neighbors, and co-workers. I can’t believe recruiting and retention will be improved by moving the unit to Grand Rapids and will resist any efforts to impact the culture and economic value they bring to our community.

Open Meeting Act Violation Allegations –

The Wexford County Prosecutor found the allegations (complaint filed by MNA) to be unsubstantiated and declined to issue any warrants against Council members. He further stated that dissatisfaction with the former City Manager was well known within the community and that removal should not have been a surprise. The Prosecutor’s letter was relief after the MNA simply reported there was “insufficient evidence” to bring charges against City Council members. Had it not been for the unfounded allegations of a single Council Member in the meeting where the City Manager’s separation agreement was accepted, there would have be no issue in the first place. It was an unnecessary expense in legal fees to the community and a cloud over Council Members that is now past us. I continue to wish our former City Manager success in the future.

Committees, Commissions, and other Public Meetings –

We continue to have vacancies on various committees and commissions in the City of Manistee. We need citizens to apply and fill these vacancies so they may function with diverse opinions and expertise. It is the responsibility of a committee or commission chair to schedule meeting and post them for public attendance. Open meetings with public posting will allow greater participation and transparency. Some have suggested that my lack of posting suggest I have “something to hide” – but that is far from the truth. You can call or email me just about any time. If I’m busy at the moment, I’ll respond as quickly as possible. I can’t solve every problem, but can contact the appropriate agency to assist with your concern. Take the time to look at some committees and commissions and then look for the meeting dates/times and review the minutes of those meetings. Some have not met for months and have no minutes posted at all. Attend a City Council meeting and meet the City Council members, some are up for re-election this year and if you have issues, find out where they stand (only one member is opposed). You have a right to representation on the City Council and to have your voice heard!

Thanks for your continued support and contact - Jim