



## **What's Happening?**

Items of Interest from the Desk of Honorable Mayor Tom Meyer

### **2008 City of Altoona Budget Summary**

Welcome to the second edition of "What's Happening?" For this edition I would like to provide an overview of the 2008 budget recently passed by the Altoona City Council.

The Altoona City Council began the 2008 budget process with a planning meeting, wherein City staff presented the Council with an overview of priorities for their departments. Among the priorities identified were the need for additional staffing, deferred maintenance of existing City facilities, diversification and growth of Altoona's tax base and exploring opportunities for shared services. The priorities were consistent with those identified in a strategic planning session in June 2006.

The 2008 budget adopted by the Altoona City Council on Tuesday, November 20<sup>th</sup> does a commendable job of addressing the priorities identified and I would like to thank everyone that worked on the budget including staff, the budget committee and the Council.

#### Staffing

The most immediate staffing need identified during the budget process was for additional administrative support both in the Public Safety Department and at City Hall and the need for an additional police officer.

Staff reported that because the City is short-staffed in the administrative support area, department head-level employees sometimes find it necessary to complete administrative tasks instead of focusing on higher level operational and planning issues.

To address this problem, the 2008 budget includes two additional half-time administrative support positions for Public Safety. The new positions will allow more focus on the critical business of providing police protection, fire suppression services and emergency medical services to Altoona's citizens.

The new positions will further allow the Parks and Recreation Coordinator and the City Hall Administrative Assistant to focus fully on their department missions. There will also be more opportunities for cross training and support during emergencies.

The Public Safety Building customer service area will also be reconfigured to improve customer service and security and to provide better training opportunities. This change will also provide more space for Parks and Recreation operations, which currently does not have sufficient room to operate.

The 2008 budget also includes an additional patrol officer. This position will significantly improve officer safety and improve response times because the officer will be available to cover leave schedules and fill in at other times when there is not double coverage in patrol. The Department's goal is to have two patrol officers on at all times.

The City is continuing to explore other opportunities for addressing staffing deficiencies as well. Areas that are being examined include engineering and planning.

### Expanding and Diversifying the City's Tax Base

The 2008 budget includes funds to continue the City's efforts to develop the River Prairie property located at the intersection of new Highway 53 and River Prairie Drive. The City has been working with CottageRidge Group, a local developer, on a project that would provide both commercial and residential development on the property. A site plan may be viewed on the City's website at [www.ci.altoona.wi.us](http://www.ci.altoona.wi.us).

The residential development includes both single family and condominium units, while the commercial development includes a mix of retail, office space, restaurants, a hotel and a convenience store. The City is getting close to finalizing a sales agreement with CottageRidge.

The City has retained 10 acres in the southwest quadrant of River Prairie and also still owns the northwest quadrant. Marketing of these properties will continue in 2008.

The City is also marketing the Altoona business park property located off of Devney Drive near Charter Communications and NBI. I hope there will be interest in the property from businesses similar to NBI and Charter.

Finally, the City is exploring opportunities to expand its City limits to the east adjacent to the Highway 12 corridor, which will lead to future development.

### Deferred Maintenance

The 2008 budget includes several projects to take care of the City's existing facilities to assure they will be usable for Altoona's citizens well into the future. The City is investing over \$66,000 in parks and recreation projects including the following:

In partnership with the Altoona School District and Altoona Youth Baseball, the City will refurbish Bement Field. Improvements include installing a grassed infield and an irrigation system and adding red rock to improve both drainage and the playing surface.

The budget also includes funds to replace damaged fencing on South Field. This is part of a multi-year project to assure the City's ball fields remain in good condition and that the safety of all users of the fields is preserved.

Funds to replace the broken aeration system at the handicap accessible fishing dock are also included. This investment will help prevent damage to the dock by winter ice so fishers can continue to enjoy the excellent fishing Lake Altoona offers.

The cracked tennis court surface at Devney Park requires attention before it gets to the point where it will need to be replaced at significant cost. Money is included in the 2008 budget to fill cracks in the court and repaint the surface.

Another badly needed project included in the 2008 budget is the purchase of playground equipment and reconstructing some of the recreation courts at Highland Park in the Addition near United Parcel Service. The old equipment was removed last year because it was unsafe for children to use. The City has received a 50% matching grant from a playground equipment manufacturer, which will allow the City to purchase a nice piece of playground equipment for the children living in the area.

The budget also includes over \$335,000 for constructing new bike and pedestrian trails. The funds come from state and federal grants matched by Altoona Outdoors, a local nonprofit organization committed to promoting healthy lifestyles for Altoona's residents. This is the same group that provided 50% of the funding for the Lake Road Trail completed in 2007. Altoona Outdoors receives their funding through both corporate and private donations.

The funds budgeted for trails will be used to complete the Eastern Loop Trail, beginning at the eastern end of the Lake Road trail, traveling easterly to the Railroad Bridge on KB, and turning westerly along KB to its end point at the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street East and Bartlett Avenue.

While the City did not appropriate general fund money for the trail project, significant staff time will be dedicated to managing the project, similar to the Lake Road Trail Project. The City will also be responsible for continued maintenance of the trail, and funds are included in the 2008 budget to purchase a new snow blower and broom attachment for the skid steer to clean the trails.

In 2008 the City is taking a different approach to road maintenance. The budget includes \$37,000 for chipsealing roads that are in decent shape to prevent the roads from deteriorating to the point where complete reconstruction is necessary. Again, this falls into the category of taking care of the assets we have. The \$37,000 budget will allow for preservation of approximately one mile of City streets. I hope this program continues to be funded in the future because this is a wise use of your tax money.

I also know continued investment is needed to reconstruct streets that have deteriorated to the point where preservation is no longer possible and that need to have water, sewer and storm water facilities replaced. To this end, the City is planning to complete a street and utility project in 2009 on Bartlett Avenue in front of the school.

Shared Services

The City continues to look at opportunities for improved efficiency by considering shared services with neighboring jurisdictions. The City currently shares a fire inspector position with the City of Eau Claire, which has resulted in significant savings. The City has also partnered with Eau Claire to provide treatment for sewage generated in Altoona.

Other areas being explored for partnership opportunities include Altoona's first responder program and ambulance service. The City is looking at a potential partnership that could reduce the direct cost of ambulance service to our citizens while improving response times.

In 2008 I plan to continue to explore other opportunities for regional partnerships that would maintain or improve City services at a lower cost to the City's tax payers.

Another program I would like to highlight that is included in the 2008 budget is the Real Adventures In Learning summer education program that was initiated two years ago as a partnership between the School District and the City Recreation Department. This program provides quality educational and recreational opportunities for area children at a very reasonable cost. Feedback on this program has been overwhelmingly positive

If you have anything you would like to see discussed in this column, please email your ideas to [cityhall@ci.altoona.wi.us](mailto:cityhall@ci.altoona.wi.us). Thank you for the opportunity to serve you.

Mayor Tom Meyer