

# **State of the Municipality Address**

Mayor Nicholas J. Gresock

Municipality of Monroeville, Pennsylvania

January 8, 2019

Section 606 (g) of Monroeville's Home Rule Charter requires for the Mayor to prepare and deliver a "State of the Municipality" report to the citizens of Monroeville.

In 2018, the mayor's office, council, municipal manager, and staff once again maintained and delivered a wide range of services and amenities without raising real estate taxes: General government services, in-house tax office, community development and planning, building and engineering, information technology, public safety, emergency dispatch center, public works, garbage and recycling collection, animal control, an animal shelter, numerous parks, a community pool, recreational programming, an outdoor amphitheater, senior citizen center, library and a public television station.

Financially, Monroeville continues to be stable. In October, Moody's Investor Services upgraded the general obligation rating for the Municipality of Monroeville to Aa2 from Aa3. This demonstrates the stable tax base, good socioeconomic characteristics, strong reserves levels, and low debt burden. This upgrade also recognizes the municipality's sound financial operations and liquidity driven by improved management of expenditures and improved tax collections. This is a credit to Council, Manager Tim Little, Director of Finance Josephine Rock, the tax office, and all of the municipal department heads.

Our tax office staff and Tax Collector Fulkerson, continue to collect taxes at a high level, 98.5% collection of Monroeville real estate taxes. They have also successfully continued the Business Tax Auditing Program generating an additional \$3 million since the program began about three years ago.

Our library and senior citizen center continue to grow while providing a wide range of programming for Monroeville and its citizens. Both have seen strong growth in programming and attendance. Our senior center also continues to expand its fitness offerings for individuals 50 years and older while generating revenue through the SilverSneakers program. The recreation and parks

department continues to provide special programs and events and has overseen the reconstruction of courts at the Community Park along with Public Works.

This past year, 218 building permits with an estimated construction value of \$48.2 million, which is a reflection of the amount of land development projects that were approved. Some examples are the reconstruction of Sheetz convenience store, new construction of JMK Concrete on Old Frankstown Road, a 92-unit apartment building on Evergreen Drive, construction of a new preparation facility at Cochran Repair Center, and a new 96-unit apartment building on Fox Plan Road.

Healthcare also continues to grow in Monroeville with the Allegheny Health Network Forbes Hospital Cancer Center construction, UPMC East Emergency Room expansion, the Healing Center completion and the Dentistry for Kids project approval.

Code enforcement violation letters continue to have increase with 2,734 in 2018. This is a result of code enforcement being more aggressive with identifying violations which are detrimental to neighborhoods, the community and property values. Council and I will continue to support this stance by that department. Along those same lines, I am asking the solicitor, staff, and council to draft and approve a “Vacant Property Ordinance” which would require the registration of all vacant and abandoned building and structures in the Municipality after a set period of time. This will allow the Municipality to monitor these properties, and help us identify available real estate.

We continue to provide excellent public safety with our in-house dispatch center, police, fire, and emergency medical services. Overall, Monroeville’s crime rate remains low thanks to Chief Cole and the entire police force. The department has done an outstanding job patrolling, responding, and keeping our community safe. This past year, we have upgraded our public safety radio system infrastructure and hardware. This improves our emergency communications and makes us compatible with every other municipal police agency in Allegheny County. This system will last many years and has the ability to be expanded and upgraded as technology changes. We have also increased our community wide camera system and license plate readers through District Attorney Stephen Zappala’s office. It remains a significant system to swiftly solve incidents and deter crime. In addition to those

advances, our police force will gain two more officers this year with Council budgeting these hires in addition to replacing any retirees.

The entire country is facing the challenge of maintaining their aging infrastructure. Monroeville is no different and has to find ways to do so. With regard to stormwater infrastructure, some of these repairs will be mandated by the EPA. The municipality has enacted a storm water management program which provides for the operation of a storm sewer system and rules that need to be followed. This program is regulated by the Federal Clean Water Act under a system called the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Separate Storm Sewer System permit, which is commonly referred to as an MS4 permit. Under this program, the municipality is required to obtain an MS4 permit to discharge storm water. The permit stipulates many activities that the municipality must conduct in order to stay in compliance. The ongoing costs for this program lead Council to enact the Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Program and user fee which will be charged to every parcel: every home, apartment, public building, house of worship, hospital, and parking lot including tax exempt entities. This stormwater fee will pay for these infrastructure repairs and maintenance, which are much needed particularly considering the tremendous rain events, floods, and landslides that have recently plagued our region.

Although we saw an increase of 135 business licenses last year, we did lose some businesses and have more vacant commercial buildings than we would like. Over the next year, I will be working closely with municipal staff, the Monroeville Area Chamber of Commerce and real estate owners to match good businesses with opportunities here in Monroeville.

Last year, Council passed our Joint Comprehensive Plan along with Wilkins Township and Churchill. It addresses ways we can further advance our community. I will encourage Council to follow this document to retain our current residents and businesses, and to make improvements to attract new ones. A part of this plan is the Active Transportation Plan which is currently being worked on by staff, it's committee, and I. We have been meeting with Monroeville stakeholders, Allegheny County representatives, PennDOT and others. This plan is to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and access in Monroeville. Doing so makes our community safer for these activities,

healthier, and connects our community in ways it hasn't been. I feel this is one way we can attract the next generation of residents and businesses. We also need to continue our partnership with the Westmoreland Heritage Trail, connect to it where we are able, and support the long-term goal with Allegheny County and neighboring communities to connect it to the Great Allegheny Passage.

Monroeville is a diverse community. Diverse in its offerings, amenities, services, faiths, housing, and people. It has easy access to highways, desirable neighborhoods, a good school district, numerous shopping and restaurant choices, world-class healthcare, employment opportunities, and parks with green spaces for recreation. Maintaining this community takes the efforts of many. I would like to thank council, the entire municipal staff, the business community and most importantly the residents, for it's the people that truly make a great community.