

## **2023 LUDINGTON STATE OF THE CITY**

### **February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

As I consider the State of the City and where we are in 2024 it was important to understand where we came from. While thinking through a list of things that occurred in 2023 the obvious first item that came to mind was our celebration of the City's Sesquicentennial!

On March 22<sup>nd</sup> we marked the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the City of Ludington with a "kick-off" event at the historically significant Emmanuel Lutheran Church. This well-attended event included congratulations from neighboring communities, as well as state and national representatives. We were treated to a great performance by the Ludington High School Choir, presentations by individuals who looked back and who looked forward and a historical presentation walking us through the founding and growth of our city.

We celebrated our rich history together throughout the year with many opportunities and events acknowledging where we have come from, and who we are today. During the summer we were treated to a wonderful sesquicentennial street party, walking home tours, historical drama presentations, the Fourth of July Parade & Fireworks, and many other events. These celebrations were experienced by the many of us who live here as well as a great number of guests that joined us in the celebration.

Our "look back" reminds us that people matter in the growth and development of a community. It requires people from all stations of life, stepping up, working together as neighbors, in many cases setting aside personal preferences, to do the hard work of building our community. The Ludington community is a wonderfully generous place to live, work and raise our families!

I can assure you that the team of current and former city employees that you have entrusted your resources to are the same type of people. It is their desire to provide the best public service possible and I count myself as fortunate to be able to serve with them.

2023 saw the addition of Christopher Jones as Ludington Police Chief, Andy Larr as the Department of Public Works Superintendent and the promotion of Andrea Morrell to the position of Senior Center Director, to our team. For those that have met them for the very first time or have known them for a while, I know that you will agree that they fit right in!

City Councilor Les Johnson was appointed to fill a vacant position on the Mason County Board of Commissioners, leaving a vacant councilor position. The city council interviewed five applicants for the vacant position, and they appointed Jeanne Oakes to serve the remainder of term as the third ward councilor. For those of you that know

Jeanne understand that she brings a wealth of talent and experience to the position. I am thrilled to be able to serve with Third Ward Councilor Jeanne Oakes!

Three interrelated issues affecting the Ludington/Mason County area that were discussed in 2023 are:

- 1.) Housing
- 2.) Adequate Workforce
- 3.) Transportation.

The City of Ludington, along with Mason County and other governmental entities worked together to fund a Housing Needs Assessment; the results of which were released in 2023. This assessment revealed the need of additional 2,400 housing unit across the cost spectrum. The occupancy rate for rental units is at approximately 99%, meaning that at any given time very few rental vacancies exist.

The high cost of existing housing, coupled with historically high building costs make it difficult for workers outside of the Mason County area to move here to fill existing job vacancies. The Mason County Housing Needs Assessment informed us that approximately 4,000 workers travel to and from Mason County regularly for work.

The issue of a need for expanded transportation resources impact not only the workforce but also those needing to grocery shop, go to medical appointments, attend social and religious events and other daily activities.

One issue that the City of Ludington has continued to work on in 2023 is the development of a Unified Development Ordinance. This U.D.O. will replace the current Zoning Ordinance and seeks to better utilize the buildable land within the City of Ludington. The intent is to develop housing resources more efficiently and allow entrepreneurial opportunities within the existing city footprint.

During the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024 City Council, Manager Foster, the Mayor, and department heads agreed on the need to create an updated Strategic Plan. A Request for Proposals was agreed upon, sent out, proposals were received, reviewed and a consultant was selected. The process will include gathering ideas and recommendations from citizens, elected and appointed officials and crafting a proposed plan to move forward. The intent is to seek additional input on this plan and then implement it in the July/August time frame. The goal is to use the Strategic Plan as a template for decision making and leading the city into the future.

Some exciting projects from 2023 were:

- The completion of Water's Edge Suites on Ludington Ave and Lakeshore Drive which will offer lodging opportunities for a wide spectrum of group sizes visiting our area.
- The expansion of Flora Craft Manufacturing, the leading craft foam producer in the United States.

- The badly needed removal of the old Michael's Restaurant building and the start of construction of a new multi-level restaurant and entertainment venue, Andy'S.
- The allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (A.R.P.A.) funds based on community input.

To address some quality-of-life concerns Ludington is involved in a county-wide cooperative effort that has begun a Community Center Assessment Study. The goal is to determine facility needs, community desires, location, and a number of other factors in order to develop a plan for funding, construction and operation.

I will tell you that I am very proud to have served with the Ludington City Council in 2023. Your city councilors are:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Ward Councilor Ted May
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward Councilor Kathy Winczewski
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward Councilor Les Johnson, who was replaced by Councilor Jeanne Oakes
- 4<sup>th</sup> Ward Councilor Cheri Stibitz
- 5<sup>th</sup> Ward Councilor Wally Cain
- 6<sup>th</sup> Ward Councilor Jack Bulger
- At-Large Councilor John Terzano

This council has dealt with contentious issues such as the Deer Cull and consideration of paid parking at Stearns Beach among others. It is important to understand that issues such as these come forward because everyday people that have a concern, an idea or just plain want something done, but do not want to lead the charge. That responsibility falls to their elected representative.

It has been a pleasure to work with councilors with diverse interests and opinions, and yet who are willing to work together, listening to each other as well as their constituents and then making the decisions that best serve the City of Ludington.

I am thankful for the staff members that work in the offices at City Hall, the Police Department, the Ludington Fire Department, the Department of Public Works, Utility Maintenance, Lakeview Cemetery, the Waste Water Treatment Plant, the Water Treatment Plant, Cartier Park, both City Marinas, and the Senior Center in addition to the collaboration with the Ludington Acrea School District in the operation of the Recreation Department. Ludington is well served by their team work and helpful attitudes.

I am thankful for the efforts of City Treasurer Virginia Didur related to tax collection, overseeing city investments and pension board work. And I am very thankful for the hard work of the City Clerk Deborah Luskin whose work in budgeting and expenditures, Human Resources and all of the duties related to elections is critical to the success of the city.

It has also been my pleasure to work with Assistant to the City Manager Jackie Steckel since coming to Ludington in 2001. She fills a number of roles and supports the city

manager and the city council. Previously as police chief and now as mayor she has provided me with history and context that factors heavily in many things that are done at city hall.

And I am thankful for the day-to-day leadership of City Manager Mitch Foster. He has a real talent for researching best practices, he is a quick study and has a real desire to help the City of Ludington develop in areas such as housing, quality of life, and business.

In 2024 I look forward to seeing the progress made through Ludington's collaboration with Mason County, the City of Scottville, Hamlin Township, Pere Marquette Township, Amber Township, and other local units of government across Mason County.

So please join me in looking forward to ***“what's in store for 2024!”***

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark A. Barnett', is centered on a light gray background.

Mark A. Barnett  
Mayor, City of Ludington