

2020 State of the County Montgomery County

On behalf of County Commissioners John Frey, Jim Fulwider and Dan Guard, the County Council, our other elected officials and our 200 plus employees, we present the 2020 State of the County.

2020 was a year in which we all faced unexpected challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, County officials provided for the continuity of government operations and our employees rose to the occasion and provided important services to our citizens.

At the beginning of 2020, some of us were making plans for spring break, others were wondering who the Colts quarterback would be and some were wondering if their high school basketball team would win the Sectionals.

The virus changed all of our plans. Like everyone, we assessed this new reality, changed our strategies for the delivery of services, and learned new ways to do our jobs. Our employees know that their first duty is to protect our citizens, and they found a way to do so.

Every facet of County government was affected by the virus, and every department rallied in order to meet this challenge.

Our County Commissioners declared a public health emergency which allowed County, City, school, utility, transportation and medical officials to share information and resources, coordinate responses, and quickly react to immediate challenges of the pandemic. The County Emergency Management team coordinated this effort and conducted over 40 meetings in 2020.

Our Health Department acted fast to provide information to the public and to reduce the spread of the virus. They took the lead in testing our residents by setting up a test site within 3 weeks of the start of the pandemic. Then they developed a site to deliver vaccinations to our first responders and elderly residents.

With the help of all of the citizens of Montgomery County, we fared better than many communities because of these extraordinary efforts.

Despite the pandemic, there was still much to do. And all departments continued to provide the services all of us have come to count on.

Our Sheriff's Deputies continued to protect our citizens by responding to over 18,000 calls for service.

Our centralized emergency dispatch service, in partnership with Mayor Barton, answered over 77,000 calls.

Our Judges, Prosecutors and public defenders worked together to ensure that our justice system continued through virtual trials and worked with the Sheriff to safely reduce the jail population to reduce the risk of spreading the virus,

Our Probation officers secured over \$380,000 in grants to provide services during the pandemic,

Our Treasurer and Auditor worked together to collect property taxes safely and distributed over \$50,000,000 in revenue to fund the operations of our schools, towns, townships, libraries and the City of Crawfordsville.

Our Clerk supervised the largest turnout for a general election with 69% of the registered voters voting.

Our Highway Department continued to improve our infrastructure by paving 12 miles of roads and sealing cracks in 30 miles of our newest roads.

Our Weights and Measures staff continued to ensure that our citizens were not cheated at the gas pump by conducting over 600 inspections of them,

Our Veteran Service office assisted 219 veterans in filing claims with the Veterans Administration,

Our Building Department helped keep our economy moving by issuing 45 single family residential building permits and conducting 705 inspections of new businesses and homes.

Our Zoning Department implemented standards for solar farms and won the Wind Farm court case,

Our Commissioners and County Council worked together to prepare our community for economic growth through the extension of water and sewer lines to the Nucor Road/State Road 32 area and worked together to improve our infrastructure through the issuance of a bond to reconstruct Bridge 79 on County Road 100 West, north of I-74.

Our Engineering Department secured state funds to improve our roads by paving 8 miles in 2020 and secured additional state funds to pave 7 miles of road in 2021. The Department also developed a 10- year plan to repair 50 bridges.

While this list is just a glimpse of our services that we provided to our citizens, it provides a good snapshot of what was accomplished in 2020 in spite of the challenges caused by the virus.

As we enter 2021, the state of the County is good. County officials continue to be engaged in strategic planning designed to improve the performance of County government, to expand our tax base and create jobs and opportunity for our citizens, and to work hard to make Montgomery County a great place to live and work.

We are blessed with many strengths which will help make this possible. Our citizens are both hard-working and willing to help their neighbors. We have exceptional schools for our children. We are the home to one of the best liberal arts colleges in the United States. We are located near major transportation arteries. We have one of the most vibrant agricultural industries in the State, and we are home to significant industrial and commercial businesses.

All of these strengths make us well-positioned for success, and we are committed to do all we can to help the citizens of Montgomery County. We believe 2021 will be a year in which we all can get back to the business of helping each other.

We would be remiss not to recognize a few elected officials as part of this State of the County. First, we want to remember long time public servant Terry Hockersmith who died in 2020 after a long battle with cancer. Terry was a faithful servant of our community as he served as County Commissioner for 8 years and as a County Council member for 16 years with many of those years as Council President. Terry also served on many Boards and Commissions for the betterment of our County.

Second, we want to recognize Judge Peggy Lohorn who retired at the end of 2020 after serving as a County judge for 18 years. She provided fair and impartial justice and served our community in so many other, important ways.

Third, we want to recognize Greg Morrison who finished his service as a County Council member at the end of 2020. Greg brought to the Council his considerable business experience and a strong sense of making decisions that furthered the best interests of the people of Montgomery County.

As we begin 2021, we want to wish you the best for the new year and we want you to know that our elected officials and employees will continue to be good stewards of tax dollars and we will continue to protect our citizens through the services of the County.

Finally, our County is named for Revolutionary War General Richard Montgomery. General Montgomery was born in Ireland and lived in New York at the time of the War. He led the Continental Army in its capture of Montreal and was later killed in the Battle of Quebec. The motto of his Coat of Arms was "guard well". And that is really the job of County Government – to guard well. We will do our best to do just that.

Thank you and may god bless our county, state and nation.

Tom Klein, County Administrator