



A NOTE FROM THE CITY MANAGER

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Thank you Mary Carol! I want to thank Mary Carol Garrity for her 35 years of entrepreneurship and service to Atchison. Mary Carol took a gourmet food store concept and evolved it into a multi-state empire. Atchison was blessed to be the birthplace. After 35 years of bringing bus loads of people to Atchison, Mary Carol has decided to slow down and concentrate on the store in Kansas City. I want to thank her for the courage to be an entrepreneur and her courage to say it's time to slow down.

So, what's next for Atchison? Does this mean the mall is done? Do we need to reduce City Staff? These are some of the questions that I have received in the last few days as the news has become public.

What's next for Atchison? This is why we are doing our comprehensive plan,

we know retail has changed faster than anyone could imagine in today's age of Amazon. So, this means that our retail needs to focus around things that cannot be purchased on the internet. The easy way to frame it is an experience. Our retail needs to be focused on service and entertainment. It is easy to say that this is the direction that we need to go, it will be a challenge to cultivate the next generation of risk takers.

Does this mean the mall is done? The City is still paying debt on the project that was completed in 2008, and it would be very difficult to convince the state and federal government to let us rip up the large investment they made eight short years ago. The cost to remove the mall is roughly two million dollars, and that would mean a roughly three mill property tax increase to pay to remove it. The question that I keep

asking myself is: if someone handed me \$2,000,000 and told me to improve retail in Atchison, would I spend the money on ripping out the mall? Is it better to create business incubators, grants, and loan programs to encourage entrepreneurs?

Do we need to reduce staff? There is a perception that Nell Hill's generates a lot of sales tax, and don't get me wrong they have been an important driver for Atchison. But, the truth is in the numbers. Last year, Atchison had \$163,122,282 in retail sales and, according to information from Nell Hill's, a little over \$1,000,000, or about \$10,000 in sales tax revenue, can be attributed to Nell Hills. So, with good financial management, the City's budget will continue to be strong without the need for any reduction in personnel.

- City Manager Trey Cocking

City/County Discuss Neighborhood Revitalization

City and County Commissioners met on Monday, May 2nd, to discuss joint efforts between the two Commissions on a variety of topics. The biggest topic on the agenda was the discussion of modifying the current Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) in Atchison. With this program, the two local governments are hoping to create a more competitive incentive for the redevelopment of properties and vacant lots in the oldest parts of the City, including downtown and historical neighborhoods.

Unique to Kansas, the NRP is a property tax rebate program that incentivizes improvements and development. Improvements can include but are not limited to, new roofs, windows, siding, exterior features, interior remodels, new structures, and new additions.

The existing program allows for 95% of the taxes that result from the improvement of a property to be rebated directly to the owner for at least the first two years after the project is completed. The owner then continues to receive tax rebates on a sliding scale over a 7-10 year period, depending on the type and size of the project. The tax rebates are based on a valuation increase as a result of the

improvements made. For example, if your home is worth \$100,000 and you do a \$50,000 remodel, your tax rebate is on the additional \$50,000.

The purpose of the proposed changes is to incentivize development in historic and downtown areas. If the changes are approved, the new program will allow owners to receive higher rebates for a longer period of time, thus providing more of an

incentive to invest in properties. The program could also give existing historic commercial buildings, such as the Royal Theatre, the extra push they need to become a feasible venture for a developer or local contractor.

City staff is currently working on revisions to the proposed program and details of the target area based on feedback from Commissioners.

For the program to move forward, it will require approval from Atchison County, USD 409 and the City of Atchison. If other cities in the County choose to participate in the enhanced NRP, their respective taxing entities will also need to approve the program changes. The City of Atchison is offering technical assistance to any cities interested in participating.



EVENT CALENDAR

June 3

Golf Ball Drop
After Chamber Golf Classic
Ends
(Bellevue Country Club)

June 3 - June 5

BMW Motorcycle Rally
(Warnock Lake – Closed to
the public)

June 4

BMW Bike Show
11:00 am - 1:00 pm
(Farmers market parking lots)

June 4

City Wide Garage Sale
8:00am-5:00pm
(400 Block of Main Street &
all around Atchison)

June 6

Atchison City Commission
Meeting
4:30 pm
(City Hall)

June 11

Building Better Bones 5K-
10K/Pancake Feed
5:00 am - 2:00 pm
(Jackson Park)

June 13

Parks & Forestry Board
meeting
6:00 pm
(City Hall)

June 18

Church Carnival
11:00 am – 2:00 pm
(Commercial Street Mall)

June 20

Atchison City Commission
Meeting
4:30 pm
(Atchison Event Center)

June 25

Cecil E. Woods Lodge #119
Kids Fishing Tournament
7:00 am – 4:00 pm
(Warnock Lake)

Property Maintenance Survey Results

In April, The City released an online survey to receive public input on property maintenance issues in Atchison. The survey was designed to discover what citizens believe to be the biggest concerns and priorities for code enforcement. The survey has been excellent, with 201 responses received thus far.

Respondents were given 6 common property violations and were asked to rank their top 3 concerns. The results

showed that dilapidated housing was the number one concern, followed by junk in yards, with inoperable vehicles parked in yards coming in third.

Of the 201 survey participants that own property in Atchison, more than half, or 57%, have felt discouraged from investing in their properties because they feel neighboring properties negatively affect their property value.

The City is appreciative of the number

of responses and the quality of the feedback received.

If you have not taken the survey yet, please do so by going to the City's home page at www.cityofatchison.com. Or click this link: <http://survey.sogosurvey.com/survey.aspx?k=RQsVTPUXsRsPsPsP&lang=0&data=>

This feedback will help the City better align its code enforcement efforts with the needs of its citizens.

Benchmarking Budget Workshop

The first of several budget workshops took place on Monday, May 9th, when City Commissioners and staff met to evaluate the City's current state as a starting point in preparing the FY 2017 budget. City staff presented a collection of data that compared Atchison to 15 peer cities in Kansas, including Coffeyville, El Dorado, Independence and Lansing, just to name a few. All of these cities are of similar size and composition to Atchison. The criteria considered in compiling the data were overall demographics, budget & finance, operations & tourism, and employee salaries.

City staff researched each peer city and determined how a variety of demographic factors influence budgets, revenues, and operations. One major discussion point centered on Atchison's pull factor, which is a number that represents conditions that attract people to a specific area. A city with a pull factor of 1 is neutral. A number higher than 1 indicates the area is attracting retail customers from outside, and any number below 1 indicates that the area is not only losing customers to competing areas, but people within the community are going elsewhere for their everyday necessities. Atchison's close proximity to large cities, such as St. Joseph and Kansas City, makes it easy for Atchison residents to spend their money out of town. This drives Atchison's pull factor number down. City staff found that Atchison's pull factor is currently the lowest of all 15 peer cities, at 0.86. The budget and finance section of the meeting showed that Atchison's average tax rates are similar to the average tax rates of its peer cities. Although property taxes are perceived to be high in Atchison, when compared with peer cities, Atchison's total property tax rate is actually slightly lower than that of the

average peer city. Atchison's valuation is also lower than the average peer city. A lower valuation equates to fewer tax dollars received per mill levied.

In comparing sales tax rates, staff found that although the City of Atchison's sales tax rate of 1% is lower than the peer city average of 1.44%, the total sales tax rate in Atchison is about the same as peer cities. When averaged, the sales tax rate of peer cities sits at 8.73% compared to Atchison's 8.75% rate. Not only is the City of Atchison's 1% sales tax rate lower than the city rates in peer communities, but Atchison generates 22%, or \$417,993, less from its 1% rate than the average peer city's 1% generates.

Cities vary greatly in how they fund operations through sales and property tax. City staff presented a revenue mix to give the group a better understanding of the revenue each city receives from both sales and property taxes. Atchison's revenue mix showed that the City receives 29% of its general fund revenues from property tax and 18% from sales tax, whereas the City of Independence receives 15% of its revenue from property tax and 66% from sales tax.

City staff researched how the peer cities fund their tourism efforts, as this is something Commissioners have discussed during budget development in recent years. It was found that peer cities fund tourism through a combined Chamber of Commerce and CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureau), through a City Department, or through a City CVB Board. City funding for these organizations varies greatly; some city governments fund them extensively while other chambers and CVBs support themselves entirely. Atchison's Chamber of Commerce and

CVB are combined; the same system that is utilized by Fort Scott, Augusta, Chanute, Coffeyville, Arkansas City and Winfield. On average, Atchison's tourism efforts are well supported financially by the City compared to the peer cities. Tourism in Atchison is funded through transient guest tax revenues generated by the local hotels as well as support from the City's general fund.

City Commissioners and staff discussed the other arrangements that were common in the peer cities, such as separating the Chamber and CVB by creating a City department for tourism or a board that operates independently from the City, much like Atchison's Library Board.

The last part of the presentation consisted of a comparison of the City of Atchison's employee salaries to that of the peer cities. It was found that the City of Atchison's salaries are on the low end for most positions, and there are more City of Atchison employees that receive low end salaries than high end salaries. City staff found that 62% of City of Atchison employees receive salaries between \$20,000 and \$40,000, compared to the average 43% of city employees in the same salary bracket for peer cities. Furthermore, 13% of City of Atchison employees receive salaries between \$40,000 and \$60,000, compared to the average 20% of employees, and 8% City of Atchison employees receive salaries of \$60,000+ compared to the average of 15% of city employees for peer cities.

The data analyzed for the benchmarking budget workshop and the feedback received from Commissioners will serve as a baseline for the development of the 2017 budget.

Community Input Sessions

Now that the 2004-2015 Comprehensive Plan has expired, it is time for the City to develop a new Comprehensive Plan. The City of Atchison hosted two community input sessions at the Atchison Event Center in May, which sought out the feedback and ideas of the public for the 2016-2030 Comprehensive Plan.

Jonathan Morris, with the KU Public Management Center, facilitated both evenings by creating an environment that welcomed community engagement through strategic planning.

Both sessions focused on a series of discussion questions, and groups worked together to answer

the questions and engage in productive conversations. All of the groups provided great feedback and ideas for the future. When the groups were asked what they would like to see accomplished for Atchison in the next 1 – 5 years, some responses included: increasing recycling participation, developing a wireless community, increasing available jobs, and new downtown housing. The groups were also asked what they would like to see accomplished by year 2030. These responses included: a thriving community, elimination of all unsafe housing, an increase in population, and constructing a street to run through the mall, among others.

Ribbon Cutting at the Dog Park



Clinton McNemee, City of Atchison Deputy Public Works Director, cuts the ribbon to the Fetch & Stretch Dog Park, located at 14th and Laramie streets, on May 10th. McNemee was joined by city officials, members of the Parks & Forestry Board, Chamber Ambassadors and members of the community for this exciting day in Atchison. The park has been open for a couple of months, but was officially recognized during the ribbon cutting. The project was designed and completed entirely by Public Works Dept. staff.

The City of Atchison’s Planning Commission and staff will be taking the ideas generated at these sessions into consideration when

developing the new Comprehensive Plan that will aim at guiding future progress in Atchison.

Fire Chief to Retire in June 2016

Fire Department Chief Mike McDermed has announced that he will retire from his position with the Atchison Fire Department on June 17, 2016. Chief McDermed started his career with the Atchison Fire Department on February 16, 1971, and was promoted to Fire Chief 35 years ago on June 1, 1981. In his time as Chief, McDermed has served as Interim City Manager of Atchison four times. He attended Kansas State University, where he studied Art and was a student athlete on the Wildcat Gymnastics Team. Chief McDermed is looking forward to spending more time with his wife, Diane, who resides in Atchison as well as his son, Brandon, and grandchildren, Elliot and Ronan, who reside in Florida. “Mike has been a tremendous

public servant for the past 45 years and has served as Chief with honor for the past 35 years. I want to thank him for his outstanding service to the citizens of Atchison”, said City Manager Trey Cocking. Ted Graf, Fire Captain, will take on the title of Interim Chief beginning June 18, 2016. Graf was selected after an interview process with the City

Manager, Assistant City Manager, Fire Chief, and Police Chief. Captain Graf was hired on March 16, 1993, and was later promoted to Lieutenant on February 22, 2007. His most recent promotion came on January 21, 2012 when he was promoted to Fire Captain. “I am looking forward to assuming the leadership role in the Fire Department; however, there is

no way to fill Chief McDermed’s shoes”, Graf also served as acting Fire Chief from December 5, 2015 to February 27, 2016. City Manager Trey Cocking said “I appreciate Ted stepping into the role as Interim Chief once again and I have confidence in him as he leads the Department for the next few months.”

Graf will remain as Interim Chief until a permanent Chief is selected. In early fall, City staff will conduct a search for a full-time Fire Chief. The position will be open to internal and external candidates. The City plans to hold an interview conference in October, with the hopes of announcing the permanent Chief in early November 2016.

