



City of Independence, Ohio

"THE HEART OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY"

6800 BRECKSVILLE ROAD

INDEPENDENCE, OHIO 44131

(216) 524-4131

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz
Members of Council

From: Finance Director Vernon Blaze

Date: Wednesday, December 30, 2020

Re: End-of-the-year Reflections

There seems to be almost universal agreement to label 2020 as if not "*the worst year ever*," then at least "*one of the worst years ever*."

Without intending to diminish or minimize the pain and suffering (physical, economic, emotional, etc.) that many have had to and are still dealing with here in this unique year, I would like to close out the year with some of the positive aspects of 2020 that I have experienced and observed – both professional and personal – that I am both grateful and thankful for:

- I inherited a highly functioning Finance Team, making my first full year in the Finance Director's position as seamless as could be. I am sincerely grateful to Maggie, Dennis, Renee, Carrie and Molly – and the voters who put their faith and trust in me.
- Municipal Income Tax Revenue (MITR) actually exceeded 2019's MITR by a few hundred thousand dollars – totally unexpected around March and April of this year given the drastic shut-down and closure measures in affect.
- With the receipt of CARES-Act funds and Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (OBWC) dividends, those two unanticipated revenue sources helped to make up for the drop in Amusement Tax and Hotel/Motel/Lodging Tax receipts.
- The ability of many office-type employees to work remotely from many/any locations now has allowed our son Ethan to spend more time living with us this year than not.
 - One would think that after four years away at college that I would be more over the whole "*we're going to miss you*" dynamic. But it's still been a pleasure to have him here, with the added benefit that we've now been able to squeeze in a few family meals at home this year too!
- With social activities severely curtailed in 2020, it allowed me to power down at the end of most days when the weather was nice by engaging in one of my favorite "me time" past times – sitting on a rocker on our front porch for a bit before retiring for the night.
 - Others in the community who were also not going out in crowds as much this year were doing their own version of "me time" too, as I noticed on those evening porch sittings so



City of Independence, Ohio

"THE HEART OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY"

6800 BRECKSVILLE ROAD

INDEPENDENCE, OHIO 44131

(216) 524-4131

many more walkers, runners, bikers, roller bladers, skate boarders, and families pushing strollers than I have in past years.

- It was very rewarding to see so many people enjoying the outdoors in close proximity to Independence's Downtown/Campus Area – shades of the future!
- With the closing of a nearby community's outdoor track this spring, 2020 allowed me to meet a group of guys temporarily running on Independence's track until their regular track re-opened.
 - I now run with this great group of guys most Tuesday and Saturday mornings.
- Continued discouragement of gathering indoors in large groups in 2020 allowed me to stumble upon an eight-episode first-season series called "The Chosen" while watching tv at home one evening this past spring.
 - Yes, it's a faith-based series, but the way it was made and the way it's presented, it has been life-changing for millions of people across the planet – myself included.
- Leadership from Mayor Kurtz and Recreation Director Walchanowicz allowed the Independence Outdoor Pool to open this past summer when many community recreation departments took the easier route and simply didn't open their outdoor pool facilities this year.
 - Perhaps only a "pool person" could relate to this, but another very enjoyable aspect of summer is to stop at the Outdoor Pool on the way home after work, swim a few laps under the setting sun, soak for a bit in the outdoor whirlpool still under that setting sun, listen to some good music on the sound system, while also hearing the sounds of excitement emanating from the baseball and softball games in process in Elmwood Park. Summer!
- With the desire to offer Independence student athletes a different summer training alternative, the Independence Running Club was started this year.
 - Initial expectations were tempered, but on peak days, some 35 student athletes showed up to participate in some physical activity a few mornings a week while also benefiting from guest speakers brought in once a week to bestow wisdom on and motivate and encourage these young student athletes.
- The Independence Middle School Boys Cross Country team came out of nowhere to achieve an undefeated regular season, including winning some large, weekend/Saturday meets, winning the Chagrin Valley Conference Valley Division Championship, and finishing competitively in a post-season, state-wide meet in Columbus (Dublin). What a great group of young student athletes!

So yes, 2020 was and still is very challenging for most of us in many ways. But as I sit here at the end of it, I can't also help but notice, appreciate and be thankful for all of the positive aspects of 2020 too.

My 2021 wish for all of you is that as challenging as 2021 or any year for that matter, may be, that you too can find and experience some positive amongst all of the challenges that life throws at us. The more we invest in others and try to make a positive impact, the more "good karma" will come back our way!