

. . . from the Mayor

We all remember the neighborhoods we grew up in; the memories of childhood friends, driveway basketball games, and the security of the community that surrounded us. Those neighborhoods serve the same purpose today that they did 50 to 75 years ago. Like everything else, time has taken its toll. Trees grow and push up sidewalks. Streets, utilities, and houses show their age. Communities everywhere are faced with these same issues.

As you can imagine, we compete for shrinking state and federal neighborhood revitalization dollars with blighted, decaying urban communities, far worse than here in Warsaw. We are fortunate to receive federal vouchers to cover rent-assistance through the Warsaw Housing Authority (WHA). Forgivable loans for homeowner occupied improvement projects are also available through Housing Opportunities of Warsaw (HOW). While these programs serve vital needs in our community, we are in need of more.

We cannot count on the federal and state government to improve our neighborhoods. The City must partner with neighborhoods to create solutions where there are problems. From the municipal side, building codes are established to meet community standards and state guidelines. Their sole purpose is to create a level of conformity that fosters safe, desirable neighborhoods. The City Plan Department is charged to maintain an enforceable building code and do just that when a landowner is out of compliance. Our departments of Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Wastewater Treatment, and Public Safety (Police and Fire Protection) are also

committed to improving and maintaining the quality of our neighborhoods.

The private side of that partnership is an essential component of revitalizing our neighborhoods. Formal neighborhood organizations and homeowners associations, along with smaller watch groups and concerned citizens, are very useful as catalysts for improvement. While they often identify specific concerns, it is even more important to be a part of constructive solutions. Neighborhood cleanup days, garage sales and block parties, “Day of Caring,” Habitat for Humanity, and other less formal efforts of neighbors helping neighbors are examples of solutions making a difference.

As your new mayor, I have made it a priority to help these organizations with the tools they need to improve their neighborhoods. We will participate in cleanup days (provide a dump truck). We will help with organization (provide space to meet, picnic tables, block off streets, etc). We will enforce our codes when necessary.

I am looking for volunteers who have skills, some tools, and time to give back to the community. The local Habitat for Humanity chapter is looking to start a program called “Brush with Kindness”. This is a program that uses volunteers to paint and do minor repairs on home exteriors for those in need. We will be organizing in March to prepare for the spring cleanup season. I am hopeful that this project will be inviting to our churches, service clubs, youth organizations, and especially those who have time and talent to lend to our community.

I look forward to using this column to communicate vision and exchange ideas and solutions with our community. I can be reached at City Hall at 372-9595 or [mayor@warsaw.in.gov](mailto:mayor@warsaw.in.gov). In the next column I will be discussing the progress we are making with the bike and walk trails in Warsaw/Winona Lake.