

Manchester Message column, May 2021

Mike Clement

Change

After a harsh and bitter cold February, our March and April days have increasingly felt more springlike. This change is good and welcomed. Besides warmer days, our winter landscape has come to life. Combine the beauty of spring with the hopefulness of a receding COVID-19 and these days feel pretty good; much different than a year ago. The awareness of a safer year; a year when virus fear and worry is replaced with growing confidence of more normalcy is perhaps the most significant change, we are all feeling these days! My wife and I have had our shots. Many of you have, too. We are feeling hopeful and strong. I hope you have had your vaccinations, too!

This column is going to focus on a variety of changes that I want to acknowledge and praise. Some of them warrant a special “thank-you.” Other changes just deserve our awareness that Manchester continues to change in positive ways. I acknowledge, too, that some changes trigger differing opinions amongst us. There is nothing wrong with a difference of opinion.

Some Changes. . .

Thank-you Paul Hamill. I want to express a big thank-you to Alderman Paul Hamill, Ward 1. He chose not to seek reelection this year. Paul has served Manchester since 2008 as Alderman. He’s also served as the Board of Aldermen’s liaison to the Planning & Zoning Commission for multiple years. Paul has been influential in many ways during good and very challenging periods for the City, particularly during times of Board of Aldermen strife. Paul has always been an advocate for balanced budgets and fiscal restraint by the City. City reserves, today, are healthy because of Paul’s call for limited spending. Paul believed in the vision that Manchester Highlands (Costco, Walmart, Best Buy, etc.) was key for the future of Manchester. His support of that vision has proven to be on-target and critically important. The Board of Aldermen and the City will say good-bye to Paul at the May 3 Board of Aldermen meeting.

Welcome Carl Hudson. While Paul Hamill is leaving the Board of Aldermen, a new man felt the call to serve his community. Welcome and thank-you Carl Hudson! Carl is a long-time Manchester resident. His family home has been in Chadwick for 40 years. Carl shares stories of playing ball on the Manchester Athletic Association fields and having fun in Schroeder Park. He graduated from Parkway South High School (1985). Almost all of Carl’s career has been spent supporting the educational needs of the region, including Normandy, Kirkwood and Parkway School Districts. He is currently Assistant Principal at Marquette High School. Earlier, he served in a similar role at Parkway South High School. Carl knows this community well.

A new City Hall. I’m sure most of you are aware that the City has purchased the former Commerce Bank Building to use as its new City Hall. By late April, the City will have ownership of the building. All inspections have affirmed that it’s a structure in very good condition. Once Manchester owns the building, the City’s architect will begin drafting final construction drawings. When plans are complete, the City will go out for

bid to find the contractor that will remodel the interior to meet City needs. Our current timeline indicates that move-in will happen in the first quarter of 2022. Watch for an invitation to our Open House! City staff moving out of the two-story Lyceum prompts mixed emotions. For decades, it has represented the City's image and history. Today, though, staff need a more functional City Hall. This change is good.

New families. New homes. Manchester is often viewed as land-locked with no space for new residential developments. In recent years/months, homebuilder, McBride Homes has identified two large parcels suitable for redevelopment as new residential communities. McBride has acquired both parcels. One development, immediately north of the City's Justice Center is a bit less than twenty acres and has satisfied almost all of the City's redevelopment requirements. By end-of-year, approximately 60 new homes will begin to be built there. The same developer has also acquired the former John F. Kennedy High School/Fontbonne University property. That proposed development is at an earlier stage. It will begin Planning & Zoning review in May. If it receives necessary approvals, it will offer new homes for another 68 families.

Manchester is recognized as a desirable place to live. I believe that desirability is a result of our City's small-town feel, a government that delivers excellent services, and superb school districts, fire districts and places of worship. We are a strong community.

Why are these things ok? Sometimes, the changes we see trouble us. A recent letter from a resident expressed her concerns that two old homes, one fronting on Manchester Road had deteriorated terribly and now were a City embarrassment. A decade ago, both homes were beautiful properties. Today, both are condemned. She asked me, *"Why are these things ok?"*

(Residents that write me to express concerns or anger are valuable! Their concerns mean they care for their City.)

Here is my answer to her question: *"You ask, 'Why are these things ok?' They are not OK, but neither the City, nor you, nor I, own the properties you reference. Their owners have property rights. You can drive through any community and see homes that are in decline, deteriorating. Those owners probably don't want the deterioration of their property, but if they don't have the money to fix things up, the decline in appearance happens. I don't wish financial hardship on anyone.*

I'll offer you another view to look for: Drive the City. When you do, you'll see street after street of well-maintained homes. Their lawns are turning green and spring flowers are bright in the sun. Kids are playing. Our schools and churches are opening up. Schools and parents have done wonderful work, educating children under the most difficult circumstance. Almost all of Manchester's commercial businesses and restaurants have opened back up. Costco and Walmart are healthy with full lots. The view you are choosing to see is a very small part of Manchester."

Friends, this year will be a year of change for Manchester. I hope, most of the time, you will view the changes in a positive, proud light. I am excited to be part of a changing community; a community that continues to get better.

Call or e-mail me your comments,

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