

## **An Honor to Serve: Reflections on My First Term as Mayor**

As I conclude my first term as Mayor of the City of East Bernard, I would like to provide citizens with a comprehensive update on the progress that has been made over the past two years. Serving this community has been both an honor and a responsibility I take seriously, and I am proud to reflect on the meaningful steps that have been taken to strengthen infrastructure, enhance public services, and invest in the future of our city.

Over the course of this term, the City completed more than \$684,911 in road improvements—an investment that will benefit residents for many years to come. These projects included improvements to Hlavinka Street, Clubside Drive, Koym Street, Ike Street, Pietzsch Street, Cabinet Road, and several key intersections throughout the city. Each of these upgrades was carefully prioritized based on need, safety concerns, and long-term durability. Maintaining and improving infrastructure remains one of the most visible and important responsibilities of local government, and these projects reflect a strong commitment to that priority.

The City has used 310,100 pounds of asphalt over the past year and a half to repair potholes throughout the community, with each load carefully shoveled and applied by hand by our dedicated crews. Maintaining safe and reliable streets is a top priority, and pothole repair remains an essential, ongoing responsibility.

An Animal Welfare Committee was established with the goal of improving animal services and increasing dog registrations throughout the city. This committee has worked diligently to create solutions that are both practical and compassionate. Efforts are currently underway to host a citywide rabies clinic, which will provide convenient and affordable access for pet owners. In addition, a partnership with SPOT has significantly reduced the dog population at the city pound to nearly zero—an achievement that reflects responsible management, community cooperation, and a commitment to humane treatment of animals. And for that we want to give a big shout out to SPOT!!

The city's dog kennels were also upgraded to provide safer and more humane conditions. Previously, the kennels had asphalt bases and were covered with tarps to shield animals from the elements. Concrete foundations have since been poured, and permanent coverings installed, creating a cleaner, more durable, and more comfortable environment for the animals.

At the City Park, three new pickleball courts were installed in response to growing community interest in recreational activities. Lighting was added to allow for evening play from dusk until 10:00 p.m., expanding access for those who work during the day and creating more opportunities for residents to stay active. The courts are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and reservations are not required, making them easily accessible to all.

Through successful grant funding efforts, two new police vehicles were acquired. The previous vehicles had become increasingly costly to maintain, with repair expenses outweighing their value. By securing \$112,012.40 in grant funds, the fleet was upgraded without placing additional financial burden on taxpayers. Reliable equipment is essential for effective public safety, and these new vehicles ensure officers can continue serving the community efficiently and safely.

When Hurricane Beryl impacted the area, immediate action and coordinated efforts were critical to ensuring the safety and recovery of our community. In the aftermath of the storm, the City invested

\$25,256 in debris removal to clear roadways, restore access, and help return normalcy as quickly as possible. The recovery process required persistence, communication, and close attention to documentation requirements. As a result of these efforts, **100% reimbursement** from FEMA was secured for debris removal expenses. While the storm presented significant challenges, valuable lessons were learned regarding emergency preparedness, response coordination, and contractor management. Contracts are now in place for both debris removal and debris monitoring services, strengthening readiness for future weather events and ensuring a faster, more efficient response should another storm occur.

To better safeguard important records and improve operational efficiency, all City Hall files were transitioned to secure cloud storage. This modernization effort ensures that essential documents are protected from potential damage caused by fire, flooding, or other unforeseen events. It also enhances accessibility and organization, allowing for more streamlined record management and greater long-term security.

New registration requirements for food trucks and food trailers are being explored as part of an effort to improve organization, oversight, and public safety. As mobile food vendors continue to grow in popularity, thoughtful guidelines will help ensure fair standards, proper compliance, and a positive experience for both vendors and residents.

An Event Coordinator and supporting team have been added to help expand community programming and strengthen civic engagement. Planned activities include Movies in the Park, summer city bike rides, a Fourth of July fireworks show, and a Polar Plunge. These events are designed to create more opportunities for families, friends, and neighbors to gather, build relationships, and celebrate community spirit. Investing in community events helps foster pride in the city and strengthens the connections that make East Bernard such a special place to call home.

Plans are underway to install a “Welcome to East Bernard” sign at the four-way intersection. This project will serve as both a point of pride and a warm greeting to visitors entering the city. Efforts are being made to complete this project in the coming months, and it is hoped that the new sign will reflect the character and hospitality that define the community.

Significant progress has also been made in addressing citywide nuisances. Abandoned vehicles, deteriorating structures, and other property concerns have been systematically reviewed and are being addressed. These efforts not only improve the city’s appearance but also enhance safety and encourage continued property maintenance and investment. Cleaner, well-maintained neighborhoods contribute to stronger property values and overall community pride.

In an effort to improve efficiency and streamline operations within City Hall, an automated system was implemented for uploading vehicle citations. Previously, each citation had to be manually entered into the system, a time-consuming process that required significant staff attention and increased the possibility of clerical errors. With the new automated process in place, citation information can now be uploaded directly into the system, reducing administrative workload and improving overall accuracy. This modernization not only saves valuable staff time but also allows daily operations to run more smoothly and efficiently.

A comprehensive work order tracking software system has also been implemented to enhance efficiency, communication, and accountability across city operations. Previously, field personnel were required to return to City Hall to pick up physical copies of their assigned work orders, which consumed valuable time and limited productivity in the field. With the new system in place, work orders are now accessible through a mobile application, allowing staff to receive assignments instantly without interrupting their workflow. This improvement reduces unnecessary travel back and forth to City Hall and enables crews to remain focused on completing projects and addressing service requests throughout the community.

Grant funding has been instrumental in advancing many of these achievements. To date, the following grants have been secured:

- **\$116,953** to support Main Street revitalization efforts, enhancing economic vitality while preserving the character and charm of main street.
- **\$112,012** to purchase two new police vehicles.
- **\$411,000 TXDOT Transportation Alternatives (TA) Grant** to fund the planning phase of additional Safe Routes to School improvements. Proposed projects include new sidewalks along Pietzsch Street, Clubside Drive, Edgeview Drive, and Seydler Road to improve pedestrian safety for students and families. The grant would also fund engineering work to create park access without requiring pedestrians or cyclists to cross Highway 90, significantly improving safety and accessibility. A separate grant will be pursued to fund construction of these enhancements.

The following grant applications are currently pending:

- **\$1,000,000 Main Street Revitalization Grant** to supplement the existing \$110,000 downtown improvement project, greatly expanding the scope and long-term impact of Main Street enhancements.
- **\$200,000 Resilient Communities Grant** to develop a Comprehensive Plan for the city. This plan will provide residents with the opportunity to share their vision for the community's future. As growth continues, the Comprehensive Plan will empower citizens to help guide development and shape the city into what they want it to become.

These grant opportunities have been pursued in order to continue bringing outside funding into the city and reduce reliance on local tax revenue whenever possible. Proactive grant seeking remains a key strategy in maximizing resources and investing in meaningful improvements.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the aldermen who have served alongside me over the past two years: David Tomchesson, Richie Domel, Brad Crist, Ryan Woodward, and Andrew Webster. Their knowledge, thoughtful input, and unwavering dedication to our city have been instrumental in the progress and successes we have achieved together.

I also want to recognize the heartbeat of our city — our city employees. These individuals work diligently behind the scenes to keep operations running smoothly each and every day. Renee Norton, City Secretary; Sarah Barker, Deputy Court Clerk and Permits Manager; and Rachel Scott, City Clerk, ensure that City Hall operates efficiently and professionally. Their commitment and attention to detail are vital to our daily success.

Finally, I would like to thank the men who work in the field, often in challenging conditions, to keep our city functioning and looking its best. Mark Moreno, Joel Torres, and Kain McPaul work tirelessly in all types of weather, and their efforts are visible throughout our community. Their hard work does not go unnoticed and is deeply appreciated.

The progress achieved over the past two years reflects thoughtful planning, responsible financial management, and a deep commitment to the well-being of East Bernard. While much has been accomplished, there is always more work to be done. Continued focus will remain on infrastructure, public safety, community development, and long-term sustainability.

It has been a privilege to serve as Mayor, and I remain dedicated to leading with transparency, accountability, and a vision for continued growth and improvement. East Bernard is a strong and resilient community, and the future remains bright.