

When I was at the PA Municipal League conference in Penn State last week, at one point I had to review a section of the code and I saw something in the duties of the mayor that said:

“The mayor shall submit an annual report to council and the public that includes recommendations on ways to improve efficiency of the city government based on the prior fiscal year and any other recommendations the mayor deems to be in the public interest.”

So I texted Solicitor Breth and asked him, in the context of the City Code, what does ‘shall’ mean?

He replied “The term ‘shall’ means mandatory...no discretion.”

It doesn’t say ‘when or how’ that report should be given but, with this ‘shall’ in mind, I thought I would put together a few thoughts about this last year in City Government.

The first decisions out of the gate for me and my fellow council members were two of the best ones we made. Faced with an empty seat because of my election as mayor, we began the process to select a new council member and decided on Councilman Dan Herr. Right after this decision, we were faced with another open seat upon the passing of our friend and councilman, Mike Walter. We began the process again and settled on asking Councilman Fred Reese to join us.

These have been important and wise decisions.

Along with Councilman Christy and Councilman Shearer, it has been my privilege and, yes, my pleasure to serve with these men. Our work together has been cordial, productive, and free from the many of the unpleasanties and vitriol that have plagued other councils and governing bodies everywhere. I thank them all for their dedication and time spent in the service of our citizens.

Of course, we can’t get anything done without the talents and hard work of the employees of this city. It is my philosophy to make sure the right people are on board in the right places. Then, the best management style is to get out of their way and let them apply their talents, facilitating and supporting as best as we can, intervening only when called for.

We are fortunate that our City Employees have by and large performed well and have moved this city forward. That is the most fundamental goal I have.

In particular, I thank all department heads including John Evans, Rod Huey, Tom Shuler, Jim Chiprean, Chief Switala, Chief O’Neill, and every employee who works with them in their departments. I extend thanks to Treasurer Linda Graham Greek and Controller Barb Hall. I count on and value the counsel and work of Solicitor Breth; it is vital to our success. And you’ll indulge me if I name the people I work with every day, Kerry Dowdy, Marlys Frederick, and Anna Pritts.

Of course, in addition to our employees, there are our volunteers including commission and authority members and committee members. They also use their talents and work diligently for only the most intrinsic of reward: for the good of the community. On a personal note, I wanted to single out Veronica Walker at the Redevelopment Authority for her hard work and commitment and being another among the many who has taught me a great deal.

I'll close the thank you section with special thanks to Mindy Gall and her commitment to our city and its residents. Meeting in her office today, Rod Huey said that she worries more about things in the city than anyone else. She turned to me and said, "I don't worry that much, do I?" I said, "Yes, you do!" And, even when it drives us all crazy, it's a very good thing. Worrying about the details keeps us all honest and keeps things from slipping through the cracks. Thank you for your dedication..and for worrying, Mindy.

As far as specific accomplishments from the last year, some highlights:

- Approval of a 1.3 million dollar grant to improve our parks and playgrounds, pointing out again that the proposal was put together under pressure but with great professionalism and competence.
- Continued improvements to the streetscape including initiatives begun under the previous administration.
- Completion of the Sullivan Run Project.
- Successful and safe staging of festivals, parades, Foodie Fridays, and other events on our city streets...with more to come.
- Improved communications with state, county, and township elected officials and leaders.
- New businesses, new investments leading to potential high impact development such as the Penn Theater and the former middle school.

There is MUCH more to come.

So much of the future success will be dependent on the work that we've done in moving along the initiative that is the BASA sale. Working in conjunction with other dedicated and talented people in the Township, BASA, and the legal and communications team that we have retained, we stand on the edge of a generational change for the City of Butler. Upon completion of this deal, this city will never be the same. Councilman Shearer has said that the most important decision he will make as a councilperson is the one to select a manager for these assets. If we do this right, they will last far into the future, for generations of city residents. The right investments will bring great positive growth to our city. The benefits of citizenship will exponentially improve while the cost of citizenship will stay flat: there we be more 'bang for the buck.'

There are many NEEDS in this city. There are numerous WANTS. The charge I put in front of this council, our employees, and our citizens is to diligently work to carefully utilize these assets and meet these wants and needs with foresight and fiscal responsibility.

I said often that I have the most selfish of motives: I want a better Butler for my family, my grandchildren and many more for generations to come. That hasn't changed. We ALL want that. The future is bright, filled with potential. I hope everyone connected even in the most remote and distant manner uses their energy to achieve what I KNOW we can achieve."

-Mayor Robert A. Dandoy, City of Butler