

Alderman Backes Update

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Hello folks! It's been a bit. My August was filled with a couple trips out of town and a whirlwind of back-to-school preparations, but I'm finally settled back into my normal routine, and it feels good!

So on that note, I'll start with this: happy back to school season! As you may know, my *real* job is that I teach at South Milwaukee High School, and I'm starting year two of teaching in the district and year six of directing the high school's theatre program (we're doing *Clue* and *Legally Blonde* this year—check 'em out!).

There's always a good energy when school starts back up, but also some anxiety. I experienced it from a parent's perspective for the first time this year as well, as my oldest went into all-day K5. I've spent the first several days of school being anxious for him, despite knowing he's in fantastic hands. Just part of being a parent, I'm sure.

So for everyone who went back to school this week (or previously), whether you're a teacher, a student, or have kids in schools, best of luck this year and I hope you smoothly navigate all the challenges to come.

In terms of city updates, it's been a quiet month or so, as we only had one council meeting in August. But budget season fast approaches, and there are some other updates to share. I'll start with the biggest.

Congratulations to our incoming City Administrator!

If you have not heard, City Administrator Tami Mayzik will be leaving her role to take on a new opportunity at the start of the new year. There will fortunately be plenty of time to give her the recognition she deserves for the incredible work she's done over the last couple decades in the position. It's a hard and often thankless job, and I know both from what others have told me as well as from a few years of personal experience now that she's incredible at what she does and that our city has been incredibly fortunate to have her at the helm.

This, of course, left us with an opening at the City Administrator position, and it was rather a no-brainer from the perspective of staff and council who would be the best choice to fill it. Patrick Brever has served as Assistant City Administrator and Economic Development Director for some time now and has earned the respect of everyone who's crossed paths with him. He's going to do an absolutely fantastic job in the role. He officially takes the mantle on October 1, and will have a couple months of direct mentorship from Tami before she departs.

It's difficult to say goodbye and move on from people who have served our city for so long, but I think there's a whole lot of reason for excitement about the future with Patrick at the helm and with some of the other appointments he has in mind for upper-level city staff positions.

With Patrick's appointment official, most of the rest of our meeting on Tuesday night was dedicated to revising some position descriptions, as there will be some shuffling of responsibilities among a few department heads. But things will certainly pick up on our agendas as we head into the fall and start talking budget in October. Stay tuned for much more about that.

City Engineer search still ongoing

While our city has been quite successful at filling some key roles of late (within the last year and a half we've had a new City Administrator, City Clerk, and Fire Chief), the search for a new City Engineer has not been successful to date. The position has been open since the start of the year, and Steve Petery from the inspection department has been admirably wearing multiple hats to fill the role since then, while many engineering projects have had to be outsourced.

From the sounds of it, this is a difficult time for a number of cities who all have an equivalent opening to fill. There is a whole lot of demand but not a whole lot of high-caliber candidates.

The city is working with the same recruiting firm that resulted in us hiring Chief Litchford, who has been really great, by the way. The good news is that the cost of working with the firm is a flat rate regardless of how long the search lasts; they are contracted to assist the city until the search is successful.

The search for a fire chief took a couple rounds of recruiting before we found a candidate we were pleased with. Hopefully this search concludes before too long, because the city has had to defer some projects and outsource others throughout the year.

So, hey... if you know someone...

Open Doors South Milwaukee a hit!

This was the first year I had the opportunity to participate in Open Doors South Milwaukee, and I was so impressed! What a fantastic event to showcase our city.

My whole family went out and made it to seven total stops; not that many in the grand scheme of things out of 20, but about all my young kids were able to handle, hah. I made it to:

- South Milwaukee Fire Department
- South Milwaukee Street Department
- Historical train depot/Benkowski headquarters
- Bucyrus Museum
- South Milwaukee Police Department
- Mill Pond warming house
- Schlaraffia Milwaukia

I'd never had the opportunity to go inside the train depot before, and that was really cool. I had a good conversation with a gentleman who is a historian of some sort who also had personal memories of the depot in his younger days in the 1960s.

I'd also never been inside Schlaraffia Milwaukia, or even had any real idea as to what it was, and I was blown away when I walked in. I had no idea that, just a couple blocks away from where I live, there is a full German club with all kinds of gorgeous artwork and memorabilia, not to mention a fantastic community of people who come in and share stories and culture in the German language. Again, I had a great conversation with a man there who has been involved in the organization for decades, and found it perhaps the most fascinating stop of my day.

The Mill Pond warming house I have not been in since I was a young child and really had no memory of it. What a great, underutilized space. And seeing the lagoon from the perspective of the warming house further emphasized just how much our community has lost by not having that pond cleared and available for recreation.

The folks at the fire, street, and police departments were all very informative and, more importantly, very patient and welcoming with my kids! And the Bucyrus Museum is always a great stop. I'd been up there many times but my kids had not, and they loved seeing all the "toys" (hah) of big diggers in the displays, and playing with the virtual digger.

I was hoping to get into a few other rare gems, but I'll have to leave that until next year. Hope you all were able to make it out for at least a bit on Saturday!

Bucyrus Commons (and other downtown areas) coming alive

From a community perspective, one of the coolest things over the last month or so has been the continued use and success of Bucyrus Commons. My wife and oldest son went to the movie night in August and had a blast. Cheaterama was a great event for the city that I hope returns. The venue has taken the downtown market to the next level. The facility is only going to see more and more use in the next couple years as people become more aware of it.

Additional life will be breathed into the market area this coming week when the mural project kicks off on the side of the Human Concerns building.

There has been a fair amount of negativity about the project on certain corners of the internet, which is about par for the course. But I'm excited for the infusion of art and color that's going to be happening around the city (and it's certainly going to be a massive improvement over the big, blank, brick, windowless wall that currently exists).

The artist for this project will be in town beginning September 13th and start the project on the 14th. It's expected to take about a week to complete, so we're very close to having the first of a couple new downtown murals going up.

Then, just a couple blocks away on the side of the Sorce Martial Arts building at 10th and Milwaukee, a brand new mural will be going up in October.

I LOVE this increase in public art that's happening suddenly around the city, and I hope we get a whole lot more. These first two will only encourage additional projects of that nature. Give me murals, structures, you name it.

That's it for today – I'll be writing a bit more frequently this fall as there will be more news to share and as I'm now settled back into my routine with summer being over. As always, reach out if you have any questions.

If you have any comments, questions, or concerns, email Alderman Backes at tbackes@smwi.org.