



CITY OF GALION, OHIO -- OFFICE of THE DIRECTOR of LAW  
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## **ANNUAL REPORT**

### **Director of Law, City of Galion**

The following Annual Report is submitted at the first regular meeting of Galion City Council in January, 2017 pursuant to Section 733.62 of the Ohio Revised Code, which states:

*The city director of law shall make a report to the legislative authority of the city, at its first regular meeting in January, of the business of his office, the moneys by him collected during the year preceding, and such other matters as he deems proper to promote the good government and welfare of the city.*

This report is divided into the following sections:

- A. Business of the Law Department during 2016
- B. Monies collected by the Director of Law during 2016
- C. Other matters relating to good government and welfare of the City of Galion

I want to state at the outset that I remain grateful for the strong working relationship I have with the other three members of my office – Attorney David Keller, Barb Letizia, and Julie Bell. I am also thankful for the ongoing, positive interaction I have experienced throughout the year with City Council, other elected officials, department heads, and many of the top notch City of Galion employees.

This office is part of a governmental team that has the best interests of the citizens of Galion as its primary focus. That shared, there have been challenging moments during the last twelve months, but none has served to derail the process of local governance. This is reflected in the strong record of accomplishments during 2016 which include projects and initiatives detailed below.

### **A. BUSINESS OF THE LAW DEPARTMENT DURING 2016**

**First, some numbers that reflect some of the basic operations of the Law Department:**

CASES HANDLED IN THE CRAWFORD COUNTY MUNICIPAL COURT, EASTERN DIVISION  
BETWEEN JANUARY 1, 2016 AND DECEMBER 31, 2016:

- Criminal: 442 (43 under City, 399 under State of Ohio)
- Traffic: 850 (421 under City, 429 under State of Ohio)

- Small Claims: 170
- Evictions: 82

WORK OF THE VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: The Victims Assistance efforts under Barb Letizia have been undertaken in some 63 cases during 2016, which include:

- 57 domestic incidents
- 4 assaults
- 1 aggravated trespassing
- 1 telephone harassment

PROVISION OF LEGAL ADVICE OR ASSISTANCE: I have provided approximately 200 to 250 separate instances of legal advice for the offices of the Mayor, Auditor, Treasurer, Safety-Service Director, Council President, Council members and City Council as a whole, Clerk of Council, Building Inspector, Design Review Secretary, and Department Heads.

LITIGATION: The City of Galion is currently involved in two primary non-foreclosure-related cases in the Crawford County Court of Common Pleas. One of those cases has to date involved a large amount of discovery and pre-trial work, all conducted in coordination with co-counsel.

**Second, following are some of the accomplishments of the Law Department during 2016:**

***Budget Submitted for 2017; Costs Remain Constant***

The end of any calendar year for the City of Galion brings with it the need for the creation, submission, and approval of a budget for the succeeding twelve month period. After the prior year saw a decreased budget request for the Law Department, the Department was able to live within those means and actually returned an amount of unspent funding at the end of the year. Discretionary areas of the latest Law Department budget request saw no increase for the coming year.

Even with the sizeable increases in benefit costs experienced for all City employees, Law Department reductions and savings have resulted in a decrease of over 13% from the budget submitted prior to my taking office.

***Assistance with Several Key City Initiatives***

The year brought with it steady stream of City projects that created a heavy workload for the Law Department, including assistance in several initiatives that helped to spur the largest private economic infusion in Galion in some time, together representing over \$12 million in investment and dozens of new jobs.

Those included the following projects, among others:

***Central Hotel Renovation*** – Additional work took place during 2016 on what turned out to be a \$5 million project to “re-renovate” a landmark on Public Square. This included final work on loan and mortgage documents as well as local ordinance and review questions. The project was completed in the fall after generating tax revenue through construction and bringing back 30 units of senior housing to the heart of our community. As noted last year, the Law Department took on the involved approval process for these funds in-house – an effort which would normally have been accomplished through outside, contracted assistance and at a sizeable cost to taxpayers. Loan terms were negotiated between this office, the building owner, and investor; and significant protections were included to maximize opportunities and minimize risk for the City of Galion.

***Assistance with the Tax Increment Financing District and public infrastructure improvement documents for the Brandt Road/Sleep Inn development*** – The Law Department was involved in the creation of a Tax Increment Financing (“TIF”) District for the Sleep Inn Hotel development. This work included the review of TIF legal documents on behalf of the City and coordinating execution of documents. As the first development of its type in the county, and as multiple steps needed to be taken in a precise and detailed manner, it was a complex process which took a great deal of time to accomplish.

This office also oversaw the review and execution of all necessary planning and platting which affected the hotel developer and five separate property owners. Public improvements involved the creation of roadway and the extension of utilities; those improvements are now complete, and the \$5.5 million hotel is nearing its opening day.

***Creation of Crawford County’s first citywide Community Reinvestment Area*** – In the summer of 2016, the City of Galion’s current Community Reinvestment Area (“CRA”) was expanded to include the entire city. This move will allow both residential and commercial property owners to benefit from tax abatement opportunities for investing in remodeling and in new construction.

Galion became one of the first cities in north central Ohio to undertake the substantial paperwork to make this a reality. To date, three businesses have sought and obtained CRA agreements with the City as a part of their investment – Tim Hortons, Arby’s, and Longstreth Memorials. In the latter case, Galion’s oldest business decided to re-invest here. In each case, the CRA Agreement was drafted by the Law Department, thereby saving taxpayers additional funds.

***South Street Commerce Center Lease*** – The Law Department reviewed and worked on lease documents for the South Street Commerce Center, acquired at the end of 2015 through a charitable donation. During 2016, that lease provided net revenue to the City of Galion; that lease is being renewed for 2017 on a month-to-month basis.

### ***2016 in Review***

The end of the year seems an appropriate time to review other aspects of this office’s operations and work with other City departments and boards. This year:

- At the request of City Council, the Department drafted a change in City ordinances to enable a new manufacturing facility to locate in Galion, and assisted in team efforts to enable two existing businesses to remain and expand locally
- Interfaced with the City Building Department on planning and zoning issues, and worked with the Uptowne Design Review Board as they updated guidelines and procedures
- Worked with the Communications Director to review and fulfill a very large number of public records requests. During 2016, some 112 such requests were received, several of them asking for large quantities of documents
- Drafted and reviewed contracts for various City departments
- Worked with the Mayor’s office on other economic development and community betterment projects
- Provided legal advice and counsel for the Civil Service Commission, Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, Health Department, Freese Grant Advisory Board, and CRA Housing Council

## **B. MONIES COLLECTED BY THE LAW DEPARTMENT DURING 2016**

The Law Department does not directly collect money in the course of its business. To the extent that any money was collected through the auspices of this office, it is fully detailed in the reports of the City Auditor.

### **C. OTHER MATTERS RELATING TO GOOD GOVERNMENT AND WELFARE OF THE CITY**

Ohio Revised Code Section 733.62 does not specify what is meant by “other matters...to promote the good government and welfare of the city.” I continue to monitor governmental operations to the extent that my office has a role for doing so under the Ohio Revised Code. That has included providing Council with recommendations on the legislative process and answering specific procedural and legal questions during meetings; I have also had dialogue with Council about the continuing challenges posed by fiscal emergency and staff turnover in the Auditor’s Office.

The processing of public records requests continue at a pace higher than many other Ohio communities, which is an ongoing challenge. It is my impression that we maintain a track record of timely response, and interface with the new Communications Director position has been a good one in this regard.

I will close with a personal anecdote. At a seminar early in 2016 for Directors of Law, one workshop dealt with economic development tools for Ohio communities. The session leader remarked, “Many of you will have the opportunity to work on one of these during your time in office.” At that moment, I chuckled to myself; at that moment I was working on three of those tools at the same time, with exploration being made of a fourth. The Mayor, myself, and others have backgrounds in such areas that have assisted in that process; the bottom line, however, is that I am proud to be part of efforts to recognize and capitalize on opportunities to generate investment, create jobs, and improve local quality of life.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas N. Palmer  
Director of Law, City of Galion