

# OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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## MATTHEW T. SHORRAW

**State of the City Of Monessen – January 2021**

Dear Monessen Residents -

I am excited to present to you, this state of the city address for the City of Monessen. In the interest of time and space, this address will summarize accomplishments from August 2020 through present – picking up where I left off from my previous State of the City Address in September of 2020. If you are interested in a more complete list of accomplishments, or details, please contact City Hall for more information. The year 2020 was not an easy year for anyone; however, we have proven again, that Monessen is resilient, and that many residents are interested in improving our City for the better. I want to thank each and every one of you for trusting us to make changes, that we feel will help our city achieve long term success. As always, special thanks goes to our City Administrator, City Clerk, City Solicitor, Clerical Staff, Public Works Staff, our First Responders and their leadership, and all other members of this City Administration, who work tirelessly to accomplish many positive things for our City.

The last few decades have not been easy for our city and its prosperity, nor have the last seven years been easy for our City and its sense of community. I know that for some, I may have personally contributed to that sense of a fractious community. I want to take a moment to apologize for the first two years of my tenure being so chaotic at times. As many of you know, my decision to boycott our Council meetings from Mid-2018 through 2019 was due to several factors. In short, I uncovered corruption in City government, and did not have a council or administration that were willing to support my effort to address the issues I saw. I dealt with antagonistic and sometimes threatening members of council, and I personally wanted no parts of any questionable things that were being done, without my having the ability to rectify the situation, due to a lack of a majority vote on council. I am very glad and relieved that now, I am able to report that over this past year that I have been back, and with new a Councilmember and new staff, we have gotten many things accomplished. We will continue to work to air any corruption or wrongdoing. In terms of any corruption found, when investigative agencies report to us, we will disclose that information. We will also continue to find tangible solutions for the issues facing Monessen's residents, and long-term solutions for Monessen's success.

Here are some highlights of our accomplishments, for August 2020 to January 2021:

- Authorized a collection agency to force the sale of properties that have substantial unpaid garbage bill balances.
- Established rules and procedures for potential new City hires, and appointees to all City Boards, Authorities, and Commissions.
- Began the process of rewriting the City's outdated Zoning Ordinances.
- Promoted Payroll Clerk, Cheryl Gordon, to City Clerk.

- Hired a new City Auditor.
- Hired Tamika Arnold to fill the former payroll clerk position as a General Office Clerk.
- Installed six new LED light fixtures at Monessen Library Parking Lot, improving safety.
- Filled 27 vacant city board, authority, and commission appointments.
- Established a new City Environmental Advisory Board.
- Repaired and repointed the exterior terra cotta walls of the Monessen Library.
- Purchased 20 new radios for the police, replacing 15-year old radios.
- Promoted Todd Carter as full time Code Enforcement Officer. He has 22 years experience and is certified in over 16 different areas. The code office has brought in over \$150,000 in revenue in 2020. He will also serve as Zoning Officer, UCC Administrator and Building Official.
- Approved an agreement for the paving of Euclid Drive from Grand Blvd. to Crest Drive.
- Adopted an Ordinance requiring all purchases of property within the City with Code violations, to bring that property up to code within 12 months of the date of purchase.
- Adopted an Ordinance requiring the registration of vacant, abandoned, and foreclosed property, within the City, and established a City Blight Fund.
- Adopted an Ordinance establishing procedures for declaring nuisance properties.
- Approved the replacement of damaged equipment at Hilltop Fire Station, because the City neglected the station roof for the past 5–6 years. The insurance company refused the claim due to neglect. The roof was repaired in 2020.
- In the process of demolishing five additional properties in the City early this year.
- Paved Overhill Drive, Coolidge Avenue, and a portion of Grand Blvd. In 2021, Maple Avenue, Euclid Drive, and a portion of McKee Avenue will be completed.
- Payments for certain city bills can now be paid online.
- Corrected over 600 city ordinances that were incorrectly numbered from 1968 to 2020.
- Adopted a balanced City Budget for 2021, with no property tax increase.
- Adopted an Ordinance to take effect in 2022, where the Mayor and members of City Council will be compensated on a per meeting basis (based on attendance), rather than a yearly salary. (Salaries were not increased.)
- Monessen is now part of the Mid-Mon Valley Regional Enterprise Zone (REZ), which hopes to use tax credits to attract and expand businesses, thanks to the leadership of the Mon Valley Alliance.
- Rusted and damaged steel doors at the City Park Ball Field were replaced.
- New fencing was installed at Shawnee Park.
- Seeking funding to rehabilitate the Basketball Courts, install lighting, and make other needed improvements at 9<sup>th</sup> Street Park.
- Seeking funding to rehabilitate the City Park Tennis Courts.
- Re-established the City Shade Tree Commission.
- Created a new City Newsletter.
- Worked with residents to implement a humane, TNR program for feral cats.
- Adopted the most sweeping anti-discrimination ordinance in the City, since 1968, filling in the gaps, where state and federal laws do not yet cover certain minority populations, in terms of public accommodations, housing, and workplace. The ordinance establishing the Monessen Human Relations Commission, and joins over 60 other Pennsylvania Municipalities, in order to urge the state to update laws.
- Adopted Monessen's first Comprehensive Plan, since the Parente Administration.
- Had the City's website professionally redesigned to include an updated promotional video to attract new residents and development, and improve the city's image; and to include necessary forms, frequently asked questions, contact information, and other items that are pertinent to residents. (City website is: [www.cityofmonessen.com](http://www.cityofmonessen.com))

- Discovered there are 817 tax delinquent properties in the City of Monessen that are in “unsold status”, with delinquent city taxes totaling over \$1.4M. Interested parties can acquire those properties, usually at a low cost, by working with the County and the City, and signing a developer agreement to rehabilitate the property. Contact the City for more information. We are encouraging the rehabilitation and development of vacant properties in the City.
- The City accepted the cancelation of its former healthcare provider, Benecon, and entered an agreement for interim coverage through UPMC; as of January 1<sup>st</sup>. Negotiations for a long-term solution for coverage are ongoing with the City’s bargaining units.
- Discovered that a poorly negotiated insurance contract cost the city over \$200,000 in taxpayer money in 2020.
- Continued City operations with no interruption, by improving cash flow, and without obtaining a tax anticipation note loan.
- Continuing an ongoing investigation regarding potential wiretapping inside City Hall.
- Current Major Fund Balances as of Dec. 31, 2020:  
General Fund: \$237,410.67 Debt Service Fund: \$91,842.80; Parks and Rec:  
\$29,564.99; Liquid Fuels: \$30,430.67; Line Usage: \$66,940.94.

While there are still many things in our City yet to be accomplished, I strongly believe we are on the right track. We are beginning to see growth in the suburbs and exurbs around Pittsburgh, and that includes in Monessen. We are seeing a steady increase in housing sales in all areas of the City. We need to grow our population, in order to relieve the tax burden on existing residents. We can do this, if we keep promoting our city, and making progress in infrastructure, public improvements, legislation, finances, public relations, and marketing. We have to focus on all of these things at one time, and I think we have been doing a great job at that, lately. I commend everyone who has played a part in making positive things happen in Monessen!

Thank you all. Stay safe and healthy.

Onward!

Matt Shorraw  
*Mayor, City of Monessen*

*\*Please note, this version was updated to include pertinent items approved at the Jan. 12<sup>th</sup> council meeting.*