

The Odessa File

Guest Column: Mayor Gerry Messmer

“My main focus is on four things”

ODESSA, July 17, 2018 -- As I close out my first 100 days as the Mayor of Odessa I would like to thank some very special folks in our community. First and foremost is a huge thank you to the former mayor, Keith Pierce. Odessa was very lucky to have Keith for a long time and as I take the reins and see the things he and the Board accomplished over the last decade I am amazed! What a great treasure for this community, and the Fire Department will certainly continue to be a superb organization with him as an Assistant Chief.



Next I would like to thank the Board for entrusting me with this great responsibility and standing next to me at every meeting. Your Board is made up of very fine folks who are only interested in keeping Odessa a great place to live and helping make it a better place to raise our families through their continued efforts and hard work every day.

Cathy and I have lived in many villages across the country throughout our military career and never have we lived in a place like Odessa with so many services. Leaf removal, free leaf bags delivered to your door, branch removal, DPW will even leave a truck if you have a large amount so you can fill it and then they will haul it off, village funded recycling, snow plowing and salting to keep the roads open, and free mulch for our gardens. Simply superb by Steve and Ty in DPW. They work long, hard hours and are two folks that would be hard to replace!

Last, but surely not least, a huge thank you to our Village Clerk, Kristi Pierce. You work hard to keep the Board and me up to speed, and to keep the daily tasks moving

in the office. To list everything you do for us, the residents of Odessa, would take another whole article! You do amazing work, thank you!

As a background, I am a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel with over 31 years of service, who has served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan. In Iraq I managed a budget of \$600 million and was responsible for the entire Baghdad Province, to include being the "de facto" Mayor of Baghdad. Tasks included standing up 23 highway departments modeled after the Steuben County Highway Department, repairing infrastructure like water and sewer lines, and other requirements to help return Baghdad to some level of normalcy. I did the same thing in Kandahar and Urzgon Provinces in Afghanistan.

Here in Odessa my main focus is on four things.

1. Repairing or replacing our antiquated water lines to bring clean water to the entire Village. We are working with Fagan Engineering Company to submit a grant with two parts. The first part is a planning portion to give us a complete plan of what we need to do starting with the oldest and worst water lines in the village. The second part is to request funding to immediately address the worst issues with replacement water lines.

2. Bringing in natural gas to help us all convert from the expensive fuel oil. Converting the school alone would save our school between \$100,000 and \$120,000 per year in heating costs! The village has attempted to work with NYSEG, which has simply stonewalled us for five years and, quite frankly, does not have any desire to bring natural gas to the village. Instead we are now focused on a more forward-thinking company, Corning Natural Gas. We have several options with them, and thanks to Joel Moore, a local resident, we are making some progress. Joel and I will meet with CNG in a couple weeks to move the efforts along. Additionally, last night (July 16) the Board approved a Natural Gas Committee to champion the efforts.

3. We will be breaking ground on the sewer line along Main Street next summer. While it seems a ways off, the process to get to this point was even longer! We will start with our "commercial district" to help our businesses grow and to attract new businesses. The system we are putting in place is easily expandable to other streets as we move forward.

4. Engaging our state- and federal-level representatives to gain support and funding for the village. I am working to meet with them all to make them aware of the issues small villages face when trying to rebuild, repair and replace infrastructure in hopes that they will, in turn, work to free up funds to be redirected to the communities in need. Our tax dollars must be put back into our communities in ways that will

improve our quality of life as well as improve economic development to attract growth.

Finally, some other things the Village would like to do: create a park in Mill Creek, put flags on the overpass and dress that up as a beautiful gateway to our village (Eagle Project anyone?), replace our banners on the light poles with pictures and information of Veterans who hailed from or now live in Odessa, and repair the sidewalks as we can free up DPW time.

Our Board meets the third Monday of each month and we would love to see folks attend. We are looking for help with grant writing for the park and to lead a Park Committee as well as other efforts. Please contact us if you wish to become a part of our efforts.

Odessa is a great place to live and raise a family, and your Board is doing everything possible to improve things each and every day.

--Gerry Messmer