

# LUEBKE SEES CONTINUED PROGRESS FOR BELOIT

February 14, 2017 at 4:00 pm | By AUSTIN MONTGOMERY Staff writer

BELOIT — Beloit City Council President Dave Luebke will close out his third term after April's municipal elections with optimism for local government and expanding development in Beloit.

Luebke gave his final "State of the City" address at last week's council meeting, and touched on the expanding industrial and technology-based industries operating in Beloit, while touting the continued streamlining of day-to-day efficiencies within city operations.

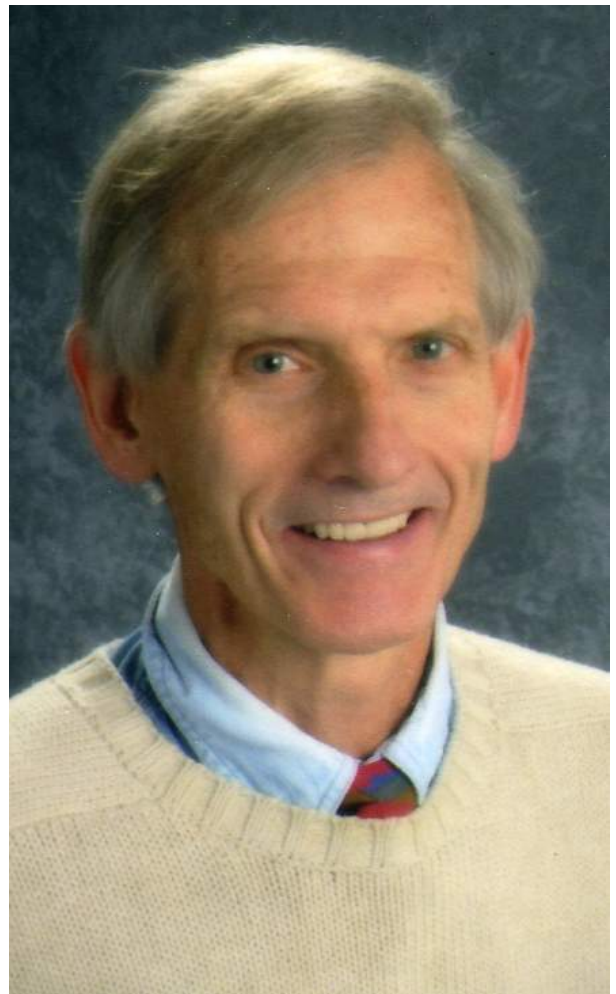
The longtime public leader said he was most proud of the work done in hiring current City Manager Lori Curtis Luther in 2015, saying the new manager has helped maximize the city's potential while helping each department manage operations by identifying ways to consolidate or update staffer roles.

"She guided us through a collaborative strategic planning process that clarifies our mission to provide outstanding public service, and helped us establish clear and concise goals to guide us in the future," Luebke said.

Hiring and recruiting new city staff under Luther had helped solidify the council's confidence in the new city manager.

"Her ability to approach problems and to find solutions that work for everyone, while improving our city shows why she is a highly valuable asset to our city," Luebke said.

The city recently combined its city clerk and city treasurer position, with City Clerk Lori Stottler set to take on the former treasurer's role, and no positions were lost in the organizational change. Stottler had previous record-keeping experience during her time as Rock County Clerk. The shift added various billing responsibilities for utilities to be handled by accounting staff, and the vacant position will result in a pay increase for clerk staff. Aside from hiring Luther, the council also went through a highly controversial and emotional replacement of the police chief — something which Luebke said could have been handled differently to prevent rifts from forming between the city and the Police and Fire Commission.



Luebke

"I wish we could have worked closer with the Police and Fire Commission," Luebke said. "I think we should have shared some of our expectations with them for the very start of that process. I can see why there were ill feelings. We could've done some things differently."

The first recommendation for chief made by the commission was not well received by the city, prompting the commission to reconsider its candidates until a final selection was agreed upon. The city eventually hired David Zibolski as chief, and since being officially sworn in the new law enforcement leader has implemented organizational changes to staff and also the approach to community relations, recruitment and preserving public safety.

"We felt it was time for a change in the department, with an emphasis on more community policing and more collaboration," Luebke said. "We wanted the department to be seen as guardians for our city. I have seen a very positive response to our chief."

Development of the Ironworks campus and the continued expansion of the Gateway Business Park were keys for the city as it moves forward, he added. Multiple IT companies have relocated or opened offices in the Ironworks campus, while the site also supports the CareerTek business incubator space at Ironworks.

"All of the industrial and other information-based companies coming in is a strong sign for us," Luebke said. "We are really excited for everything from the new brewery plan to the Frito-Lay expansion."

He also stressed the importance of small business growth in the city, while pointing to the continued redevelopment of Beloit's downtown district. Luebke praised the city's Farmers Market and Beloit International Film Festival as ways to keep drawing people to Beloit, in turn boosting tourism and sales tax revenue for the city.

"Downtown Beloit is booming," Luebke said. "It's thriving and there's so much going on. Creative growth spurs other things. Fifty years ago, there were virtually no businesses downtown."

As he prepares to walk away from council service, Luebke said he believes the city is moving in the right direction.

The former school administrator said he ran for office initially to support the community which he loved and wanted to see thrive. He said his time working at various schools in a leadership capacity helped him see how administrators were tasked with making consistent, informed decisions — something which translated to cultivating a healthy municipal environment.

"I wanted to give back to my community," Luebke said. "I wanted to represent Beloit and I wanted to share my ideas."

He urged all new councilors to trust experts, but ask informed questions. Luebke also urged new councilors to field calls from all residents and respond to each situation with composure.

"I hope we find more people who will want to serve their city the way I have," Luebke said.

Six candidates will face off for three open seats on the city's top board, with Clinton Anderson, Sherry Blakeley, Nancy V. Forbeck, Jeanette Hansen, Ana Kelly and Rose Richard set to go head-to-head. Current board members Regina Hendrix and Luebke did not file paperwork with the city clerk ahead of the Jan. 6 deadline, and Marilyn Sloniker filed a notice of non-candidacy in December, and resigned last month for personal matters last month.