

## Musings by Mayor Dave

A column by Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (February, 2010)

As I write this the snow continues to fall, so before I need to shovel my driveway, I'd like to share some personal musings:

- I've found that being an elected official at the local level has a lot more 'ups' than 'downs', especially when you consider the hyper-partisan, negative attack politics we often see in St. Paul or Washington, D.C. I've had the privilege of working for a Governor in St. Paul and a Congressman in D.C., and my experience is that local people are generally pretty civil and fair and will appreciate and consider your response, even if they don't end up agreeing with you. That being said, there are always a few that must get all jazzed up from listening to talk radio and then assume that every 'politician' is in it just for themselves. The funny part is that even those fellow local elected officials that I disagree with from time to time are good people – they're not 'evil'-- we just see different routes to improving our community. But that's a lot different than folks who just want to rant and rave without offering reasonable alternative solutions, or who don't even see the value in improving our community, our schools, our lives. Those folks I never do understand.
- Isn't it amazing what a good job our city staffs do in plowing the streets? I was recently in Fargo visiting my parents and those streets were nowhere near as well maintained and drivable as our streets – same with being in northern Minnesota for my son Kyle's hockey tournament this past weekend. Even when working within tight budgets, our city plow drivers do a pretty darn good job. And who was out during all of that snowfall on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, keeping our streets passable while we were relaxing with family? That's right, those same 'government workers' who often get more grief than the appreciation they deserve. I know they get paid to do the job, but it never hurts to also say 'Thanks' for a job well done, just like we do at work or at church.
- One of the toughest parts of the 'Mayor' job is balancing short term and long term planning and spending. Streets are a good example: Times are tough for many residents, so reconstructing their particular street and assessing them 25% of the cost would be better for them personally if it could be put off for a few years. But 75% of the street reconstruction costs are shared city-wide by all residents, so if tough times means that bids and costs may be up to 20% lower now because contractors are hungry for work, it may be that this is actually the 'best' time financially to do a needed street project. Putting it off just makes the price rise and costs go up for everyone. And all of this happens within a 20-year strategic plan that spreads out street projects every couple years, to cover the ones in 'poor' condition. The challenge is to carefully balance today's situation with staying on track within a long-term, financially-sustainable plan.

The job of an elected official isn't easy, especially during tough budget times. But we put ourselves through an election process to help our communities to the best of our abilities, and whether it's 'good times' or 'bad times', we need to keep working together for the common good in a civil and respectful way. And we'll leave all of the theatrics for the folks in Washington, D.C.

Well, time to get back to shoveling snow. See you around town!