

# PRAIRIE TOWNSHIP NEWSLETTER

Volume 1X Issue

1

## Trustees TALK

Joe Wharton



Joe Wharton



Doug Stormont



Teresa Keller

*In letter to the editor in Westside This Week;*

(Arguing against the "if it ain't broke" philosophy, March 17, 2005) the author wrote: "It is time for the residents of this township to stop thinking of themselves as second class citizens – worthy of only the bare minimum of services that affect their quality of life." Let me expand; this thought to say our township is at a cross-roads. Either we see ourselves as a community and unite, or as individual pockets of self-interest and continue to be 2nd class citizens.

Clinging to last century's township government; ensures failure for this century's township government. Business as usual in awarding contracts, providing only basic services and telling' a resident there's nothing we can do was the norm in 2001. Today your township government has a limited Home Rule authority, a senior citizens center, playground equipment and walking paths in our parks, a Township website to keep residents informed of the Township's activities, expanded services to Township residents and equal and fair enforcement of the zoning regulations.

When I arrived three years ago, a second class underdeveloped township government was barely providing basic services. These services included snow plowing of roads; good emergency medical services, but questionable fire protection; enforcement of **the Township's**

zoning, depending on whether you were a buddy" of certain trustees; and awarding Township contracts, some for as much as the; cost of your house, without competitive bidding, as required by law. While in a reactive mode, the eastern border of the Township was allowed to be annexed into the City of Columbus for new development, benefiting the city's tax base, and leaving the already developed; portions of Prairie Township as an island surrounded by the City. Pull out your Franklin County map and you will see that Lincoln Village North, Lincoln Village South, Little Farms, Rome Heights, Garden Heights, Mix Avenue Addition, and Village Park are surrounded by the City of Columbus.

Concerning contracts with the Township, one of the first things I did after taking office was to eliminate the grass cutting contract that was originally awarded to a former Fire Chief, while he was employed by the Township, and continued to be awarded after his retirement at a cost nearing \$100,000 for five months of annual service.

The second contract that was not renewed concerned the Township newsletter. Previous board members contracted with a news reporter, who covered Township news for the lo-

cal paper, to produce the Township's newsletter. I found it hard to believe that a reporter could be objective at covering the Township when being paid to produce the Township's newsletter.

The responsibility for cutting grass was brought under the direct control of the Township and the newsletter is produced internally (with the help of local volunteers) and all costs are covered up front.

To grow beyond a second class township government, a couple of things need to happen:

Water and Sewer: For the past three years I have been focused on developing a partnership with Ohio American Water to provide sewer and water for the undeveloped portions of the Township. This will allow development to occur in-side the Township in accordance with the comprehensive plan, developed with Township residents' input and adopted by the board in 2003. Why do we need water and sewer?

First, without water and sewer, the only alternative for development is annexation of Township property into the City of Columbus. Once the property is within the city limits, it will be developed in accordance with the standards of the Columbus Development Department. The Township's comprehensive plan will no longer apply.

Second, without sewer and water, as the vast majority of Township land is annexed into the city, the tax base supporting the current level of Township services becomes smaller and smaller. The services that the Township provides today cannot be supported if the only remaining portions of the Township after annexation are the areas that are developed today. Providing an alternative source for water and sewer other than annexation insures the township financial viability and development in accordance to the Township comprehensive plan.

Property Maintenance Code: There has been a lot of public discussion concerning the property maintenance code passed by the board in December. I am a life-long resident of the Township,

and it saddens me to say that areas of Prairie have deteriorated to the point that it is having an impact on the resale value of homes in the Township. Prior to 2002, the former board had chosen not to enforce the Township's zoning resolution in all instances, thus picking and choosing who will receive violation notices and when. When I arrived in office in January of 2002, I directed the zoning officers to enforce the zoning resolution fairly and evenly across both residential and commercial property. I am not bothered that a group of citizens circulated a referendum petition to place an option to repeal the property maintenance code on the November ballot. The maintenance code, as written, parallels the Township's existing zoning resolution with very few additions. The major difference between the zoning resolution and the property maintenance code is that the code allows the Township to issue modest fines against violators, whereas the zoning resolution only allows us to take action through the court system- at great expense to the Township. There is nothing in the code that dictates the style or color of your house. I encourage you to read the maintenance code before you decide to repeal it by voting "yes" or allowing it to take effect by voting "no" on the referendum. I am in favor of the property maintenance code and will be voting against the referendum to repeal the code.

In closing, the Township is at the crossroads of developing in one of two directions. Either your township government stands up and perpetuates the growth and vision of the comprehensive plan developed by Township residents by pursuing alternative sources for water and sewer and having a basic maintenance code; or, the Township is annexed, much like our neighboring Franklin Township, where the only remaining portions of the Township are islands surrounded by the City of Columbus. Don't let grumblings of a few residents sway your opinion; **review the facts, read the maintenance code and make up your own mind.** Participate in Township meetings and activities. Don't let loud speakers talk you out of your quality of life.