



CITY OF HUNTINGTON DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

2013



Prepared by the Office of Communications

Big Sandy Superstore Arena

The Big Sandy Superstore Arena's economic impact on the region was reaffirmed in 2013 when Marshall University's Center for Business and Economic Research released a study that stated the arena has a total financial output of \$17 million annually for an eight-county region and sustains the equivalent of 190 full-time jobs.

The SMG-managed arena also received three noteworthy recognitions.

- Billboard Magazine named the arena as one of its "Venues to Watch." The arenas highlighted in the publication either had renovations or brand new construction.
- General Manager Brian Sipe received the "Venues Today Generation Next People's Choice Award," which goes to someone who is younger than 35 and is a rising star in the venue/entertainment business.
- Sipe also won the State Journal's "40 under 40" award.

In financial matters, the SMG management contract was renewed with the City of Huntington through 2024. This will result in a \$250,000 contribution from SMG to the city for capital improvement projects and a booking fund to ensure quality shows come to Huntington. The Big Sandy Superstore naming rights agreement also was extended through 2017. This will ensure a \$150,000-per-year revenue source for the city.

The arena also made progress with renovation projects from the 2011 approved bond. It completed almost all of the convention center renovations and moved forward with planning for the renovation of the plaza.

The arena witnessed its fastest sellout ever with a 14-minute sellout for the Florida Georgia Line concert that took place on Nov. 21. The convention center also hosted numerous community events, such as weddings, proms, workshops, banquets and arts and crafts shows.

Bulldog Creative Services created a new wedding and business event planning brochure for the convention center. Increasing traffic at the convention center will be a priority in 2014.

Development and Planning

The Department of Development and Planning accomplished long-term goals in 2013 and began a few more projects that will benefit the community for years to come.

First and foremost, Huntington City Council adopted Plan 2025 in December. This 10-year comprehensive plan is a blueprint for progress for the next 10 years. It is a collective vision that is intended to guide future planning and development on a wide range of topics, including housing, land use, economic development, public services, infrastructure and transportation. The plan was the culmination of obtaining feedback from more than 500 people at approximately 20 neighborhood association meetings and community forums.

A multi-faceted approach of policing, code enforcement, economic development and community involvement also continued on Huntington's West End. Dubbed the River to Rail Initiative, the project's target area stretches from the Ohio River to the rail line along Van Buren Avenue between 8th and 17th streets. The area became saturated with law enforcement officers using crime data to address emerging trends, and code enforcement officers issued citations for weeds, trash and junked vehicles.

From Development and Planning's perspective, it became apparent that the city needed to renew its focus on the Old Central City business district along 14th Street West. The greatest opportunity was developing a new vision for the city-owned Central City Market. After a five-member panel of the River to Rail Steering Committee took proposals, the Wild Ramp was selected to operate the facility and work with the existing Cabell County Tailgate Farmer's Market.

The Old Main Corridor came one step closer to completion in 2013. Work began on streetscape

improvements between 12th and 13rd streets, and federal funding was awarded for the two-block stretch between 10th and 12th streets. Development and Planning also submitted a grant application for similar improvements between 6th and 8th streets.

Work also began and was largely completed on the first phase of the Paul Ambrose Trail for Health. The \$2.3 million project consists of the construction of three major trail sections including a section through Guyandotte, a section to connect Harveytown Park with Ritter Park and a section along the floodwall from 3rd Street West through Westmoreland.

This past year also found the city making progress on its longtime vision of developing a regional skate park. The city selected a design firm, AECOM/Team Pain, to develop a master plan and construction documents for the park. The master plan for the 10,000-square-foot facility at Harris Riverfront Park was completed and broken into three phases. Plans and construction documents for the first phase are nearly completed, and funding is almost in place.

Finance

The Finance Division achieved several milestones in 2013. Among them were collections, new accounting software, improved customer service and a greater focus on business services.

The division, through its contract with Rossman and Associates, grossed \$1.24 million in delinquent fee collections (\$677,000 in municipal service fees and \$563,000 in refuse fees). The Finance Division, working with the Legal Division, filed more than 1,500 liens representing more than 2,500 delinquent accounts of \$500 or greater. It also prepared more than 2,000 courtesy letters for Legal Division collection efforts. A part-time field investigator also was added to track down bills that are returned to sender, and the division began delinquent reporting and assessment of Business and Occupation taxes during the latter half of 2013.

The much-needed installation of New World Accounting software was completed for accounting, purchase orders and payroll. Licensing, permitting and miscellaneous billing remains a work in progress. . The software allows the city to meet state accounting requirements, offers improved data review for budgeting and purchases and results in more detailed payroll reporting.

The division also improved customer service by introducing customer bills with return envelopes. This replaced the postcard-formatted bill that had been in use since the 1960s. The envelopes also provided a vehicle for the Office of Communications to begin inserting a monthly newsletter to nearly 19,000 households.

The addition of the business services advocate aimed to address a long-standing concern of making sure businesses are served efficiently and promptly when they come to City Hall. Business Services Advocate Sharon Pell is the first stop for all new businesses in the city. She guides owners through the zoning, permitting and fee/tax payment processes. In the first four months with the city, Pell provided more than 200 services to 69 new businesses.

Fire Department

The Fire Department in 2013 was marked by a series of administrative changes with a focus on improvements in building maintenance, outside funding sources, safety and training. Carl Eastham was named fire chief in February 2013 and, with the assistance of administrative Deputy Chief Dave Roberts, filled several vacant staff positions through reassignment.

The Fire Department responded to 3,550 calls during 2013. The breakdown is as follows:

- 1,275 rescue/EMS calls (35.9 percent)
- 960 false alarm and false calls (27 percent)
- 383 hazardous condition calls (10.8 percent)
- 343 good intent calls (9.7 percent)
- 300 fire calls (8.5 percent)
- 248 service calls (7 percent)
- 24 weather and natural disaster calls (0.7 percent)
- 9 explosion calls (0.25 percent)
- 8 special type calls (0.25 percent)

Under Capt. Steve Ellis, the Fire Marshal's Office completed a combined 601 total inspections. Ellis worked with the Unsafe Building Commission to hear testimony from 221 property owners as to why their structures should not be condemned. Of those properties, 119 were ordered demolished while others were awaiting restoration. The Fire Marshal's Office also handled 52 preliminary fire investigations with cause and origin determinations, several of which led to arson convictions.

Under the supervision of Deputy Chief Roberts, several neglected maintenance issues were repaired at many of the fire stations, including replacing the roof at University station and repairing the kitchen and dining area at Station No. 1. Numerous repairs were made in-house both by firefighters and with the addition of a civilian maintenance person, resulting in significant savings. The same can be said for equipment. Twenty-two breathing apparatuses (SCBA) and a \$20,000 aerial master stream nozzle were both returned to service utilizing the department's in-house repair technician

The Fire Department also had a renewed focus on seeking grant funding in 2013. Under the direction of Capt. Shawn Willis, the department applied for nine grants totaling nearly \$2.5 million. It was awarded a \$569,000 grant for a fire rescue vessel that will be delivered later this year. The department is still awaiting approval of approximately \$1.9 million in grant applications. Capt. Willis also has completed various major repairs on fire apparatuses and reinstated a preventive maintenance schedule.

Human Resources

The Human Resources Division conducted orientations with 46 new, full-time hires and exit interviews with 16 employees, 11 of whom were retiring. It also coordinated tobacco cessation classes with representatives from the Wellness Council of West Virginia; Money Magic/Habitudes classes with Ursulette Huntley, CEO of Fresh Horizons; a health fair with St. Mary's Medical Center; and wellness lectures by Dr. Elizabeth Martin.

Human Resources Director Sherry Lewis served as chairwoman of the city's Accident Review Board, Health Insurance Committee, Public Works Safety Committee and Mayor's Property/Casualty Insurance Loss Prevention Team. She also served on the Uniform Committee and Communications Director Search Committee. In addition to these roles, she participated as a member of the city's negotiating team during contract negotiations with AFSCME Local 598. A new collective bargaining agreement took effect July 1, 2013.

Lewis also acted as a liaison during two activities – a safety audit of city buildings in March 2013 and a review of insurance companies that submitted bid proposals for group health plans. She also served as coordinator for the city's United Way Campaign, which was recognized for having the largest percentage increase in contributors and donations among all participating agencies in the 2013 campaign.

Huntington Municipal Development Authority

The Huntington Municipal Development Authority had another successful year in 2013. It sold the City Hall Annex building for \$100,000 to developer Shane Radcliff, who removed the eyesore from the downtown

landscape and turned the property into a parking lot to support one of his residential development projects on 4th Avenue. This was a property that HMDA had been trying to dispose of for at least 10 years.

The proceeds from the sale of the building were used in a positive way, including \$25,000 to the Keith-Albee Foundation to continue restoration efforts of the beloved theatre; \$25,000 to the Huntington Area Development Council for economic development; \$27,500 to City Council members (\$2,500) as seed money for the Exceptional City microgrant program; and \$5,000 each to the Police and Fire departments for safety equipment.

KineticPark, HMDA's long-term focus, had two businesses open at the business park along W.Va. 10. They are Goldy Automotive (40 new jobs) and the Hampton Inn (23 new jobs). The new investment was \$5.18 million, bringing KineticPark's total to more than \$23.5 million.

The Huntington Sanitary Board also relocated the backup power generator on the lot located near the entrance to KineticPark, making it more attractive for prospective buyers. HMDA also received a \$400,000 offer to purchase lot B on the lower level of the business park. The sale is dependent upon the resolution of a lawsuit that HMDA filed against Mountaineer Gas in December 2013 to relocate gas lines on the lot.

In economic development news, HMDA assisted the city in the removal of the marge from the marina at Harris Riverfront Park to the tune of a \$400,000 investment. The Authority also maintains membership with Downtown Huntington Partners and HADCO and will be co-hosting the West Virginia Economic Development Council's annual meeting in Huntington in September 2014. The meeting will bring 125-150 people to the city.

Lastly, HMDA was active with Huntington in Bloom. Huntington's first attempt at participating in the America in Bloom competition netted the city a rating of 4 out of 5 blooms. The city also won an award for the best YouTube video in the competition. Huntington in Bloom now has evolved into a year-round beautification program that includes spring and summer flower plantings and fall and Christmas decorations.

Information Technology

The Information Technology division provided the technical support of the implementation of the New World software financial management module. The division also changed the email and web host servers to WVNET to ensure data integrity, historical information and redundancy. It also has assisted in the development of a new city website that is expected to launch this spring and provides computer and phone support to every department in the city.

Legal

The city's Legal Department was involved in a range of activities in 2013, including collections, litigation, handling insurance claims, drafting new and updating existing ordinances, unemployment and human rights claims, answering Freedom of Information requests, issuing legal opinions and negotiating union contracts.

The collection of delinquent municipal service and refuse fees saw an uptick in activity. The Legal Department collected \$277,329 in delinquent fees and filed 1,577 liens that represented 2,503 delinquent accounts. The total dollar value of the liens is \$4.9 million. It also filed 43 new suits, nine of which paid in full, totaling \$9,628. It also obtained five default judgments and seven confessions of judgment totaling another \$15,377.

Toward the end of the year, the Legal Department ventured into a new realm of collections – the Business and Occupation Privilege Tax. The department approached the issue with two goals in mind: the collection of unpaid taxes and the improvement of overall compliance. To that end, offending businesses were broken into five categories, each group with a separate plan tailored just for their situation. Two parts of the plan have been implemented.

For the first group (short-term debtors), businesses that are licensed and have filed B&O returns but have failed to pay in the latest quarter paid \$5,160 between mid-October and Dec. 31. The second group (old debtors) paid \$9,134 during the same time period.

In addition, the Legal Department:

- Updated or drafted 13 ordinances.
- Handled six unemployment claims.

- Responded to 35 West Virginia Freedom of Information Act requests.
- Attended six legal education seminars.
- Issued 10 legal opinions.
- Represented the city's interests in three labor disputes.
- Handled 48 insurance claims

Police Department

The Huntington Police Department continued its efforts in 2013 to be the innovative agency that other police departments across the state strive to emulate. These efforts can be seen across a wide spectrum of new initiatives.

These efforts included the launch of the Heads Up Huntington, a free smartphone application that has had more than 25,000 downloads in the first four months and is now being replicated in two other counties in West Virginia; the deployment of the Isaac H. Mitchell Maritime Patrol Boat; and the establishment of the HPD Code Enforcement Unit. This unit issued 1,726 citations in the first six months of fiscal 2014 with a 76 percent compliance rate.

The Special Investigations Bureau's strategic drug enforcement strategies remained a priority for the Huntington Police Department. In 2013, the bureau was responsible for seizing or executing:

- 1,122 grams of cocaine/crack cocaine.
- 5,500 grams of heroin (up more than 50 percent from 2012).
- 17,343 dosage units of prescription medication (up approximately 42 percent from 2012).
- 85 firearms.
- 56 search warrants, 158 misdemeanor arrests and 156 felony arrests.

Calls for service were down from 45,078 in 2012 to 43,978 in 2013. However, this did not translate to a reduced crime rate. The crime rate showed a slight increase of 4.7 percent for all crimes, or 7,923 reported offenses compared to 7,561 in 2012. This was driven by an increase in property crimes, but still remains below the 2011 crime rate and is still 17.7% below the high experienced in 2006. Meanwhile, arsons were down 72 percent, robberies 10.7 percent, and assaults 10.8 percent compared to 2012.

Efforts in increased traffic enforcement have shown desired results. Traffic citations issued increased by 376 violations over 2012 to 12,674 in 2013. These efforts have shown a decrease in the number of crashes within the city. There were 1,909 crashes reported to HPD in 2013, the lowest number reported in 20 years.

The use of technology also delivered expected outcomes. The use of social media for recruitment yielded 303 applicants in the last recruitment drive, which is the highest number of applicants to the Huntington Police Department since 1999. This allowed HPD to hire 14 probationary officers, bringing the total number of officers to 111. This is the highest staffing level for HPD since 1985.

Public Works

Public Works and the various divisions under it saw many significant improvements in 2013. Public Works Director David Hagley reports that a new contract and ongoing partnership with AFSCME has boosted

morale. As you will see throughout the various divisions, there was a renewed focus on safety and technology in Public Works.

Sanitation and Trash: The most visible highlight of 2013 in Sanitation and Trash was the extra hours that employees worked during the citywide spring clean-up initiative. Over a 10-week period, employees picked up more than 200 tons of loose trash through a partnership with the neighborhood associations and other volunteer groups. Perhaps not immediately seen by the public is that Sanitation and Trash has implemented new schedules for designated trash days, thereby reducing call-ins for pickup service. No longer are citizens

waiting weeks to have items removed. The division is taking a proactive approach and picking up an additional 15 to 18 sites per day as well as any call-in requests that are made.

The division also had a record year in safety with no major injuries or accidents reported. A hard hat policy was implemented, and all employees are now required to wear a five-point, reflective breakaway vest. The division also hired two additional laborers and purchased two new packer trucks, which will be delivered in March 2014. Those improvements will handy moving forward, as the division continues to haul 65 to 70 tons of household garbage six days per week.

Streets: The Streets Division graded and graveled more than 150 alleys in the city and patched hundreds of potholes. In addition, it repaired 25 catch basins that have been in need of repairs for years, replaced two major drain lines that have helped tackle street flooding, repaired several sinkholes and removed numerous dead trees that can create safety hazards for pedestrians and motorists.

Stormwater: The Stormwater Division proposed three ordinances to City Council in 2013. The erosion and sediment control and illicit discharge ordinances were approved and are in the process of being implemented, while the stormwater management ordinance is pending in the Finance Committee.

The division also compiled the annual MS4 report and submitted it to the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection in November. Meanwhile, all supplemental environmental projects that were required as part of the agreement to reduce the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's fine were completed. Other highlights include:

- 360 Engineering Division sewer maps were scanned and digitally stored.
- Trained 60 members in Public Works on how to identify stormwater pollution and steps to take when reporting incidents.
- Responded to more than 50 complaints regarding catch basins, storm lines and sinkholes.
- Reviewed and approved 10 sediment and erosion control plans for development/redevelopment projects.
- Conducted 14 public education events to meet requirements of the MS4 permit, sold 66 rain barrels as part of the public education events and distributed more than 750 brochures to residents on stormwater education topics.
- Partnered with the Planning Office and applied for a technical assistance grant through Smart Growth America. Huntington was one of 18 communities selected among more than 100 that applied.
- Assisted in the placement of 20 pet waste signs throughout the Southside and West End.

Motor Pool: The Motor Pool Division reached a full budgeted staffing level in 2013. Safety was a key initiative addressed in the division. Employees now wear glasses and gloves, restricted areas were marked off, walking aisles were established and the floor was painted. The division also is in the process of creating a computer/research zone, and fleet management software is being purchased so routine maintenance on the city's fleet is computerized. Three training classes also were offered through NAPA, and an ASE/worker retention program is being created.

Inspections and Compliance: Inspections and Compliance implemented new technology in 2013 by supplying inspectors with tablets. This promotes efficiency in the field, because it allows them to see all of the data submitted through the permit office in real time with the click of a button. This will translate into greater accuracy when dealing with both inspections and complaints. The New World software, meanwhile,

will help cut down on the time contractors have to spend in the permitting office. The program also will allow other departments to share information on licenses, rental property and certificates of occupancy.

Floodwall: In addition to ongoing maintenance and repair projects to the pump stations, pumps and floodwall joints, the Floodwall Division continued work on items recommended by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in its 2012 inspection. The Division also completed FEMA certification for the Guyandotte section of the floodwall and started work on the certification for the Huntington section.

Traffic Engineering: This division, which is responsible for maintaining 124 traffic intersections, 744 street lights and more than 21,000 street signs, completed work with the contractor Bayliss & Ramey and the Rahall Transportation Institute on the update project involving 60 intersections in the central business district.

Purchasing

The Purchasing Division in 2013 conducted auctions that netted \$27,062 for the sale of obsolete or surplus vehicles. Purchasing Director Darryl Miller also updated the city's property and vehicle schedules and partnered with Partners Insurance Brokerage on the city's property and casualty insurance.

After having extreme claims the past two years, Partners Insurance has provided coverage of \$1.238 million for the city and \$317,000 for city agencies. By comparison, the State of West Virginia offered much higher deductibles. The city also partnered with local banks to obtain lower-than-market interest rates. Special recognition is given to BB&T, which gave the city favorable interest rates on purchases of several vehicles and pieces of equipment.

Among several partnerships with various businesses, Mead & Hunt contracted with the city for several phases of FEMA certification of the floodwall. The three contracts for the Guyandotte River levee, Ohio River levee totaled \$585,000. Other notable contracts procured through the bidding process included work for the repair of a landslide on Ridgewood Road (Thaxton Construction and Potesta & Associates, \$157,000); a 35-foot rescue vessel for the Fire Department (Lake Assault Boats, \$584,600); and a new city website (Bulldog Creative Services, \$6,250).