

An Open Letter to my Constituents, Rogersville Ward I
From the desk of Alderman Gelz
March 30, 2021

I was first elected as your Alderman in April 2018 and then reelected to a 4-year term in April 2019. When I started, I hit the ground running. Alderman Fore and I were determined to represent the citizens well, so we teamed up Ward I and Ward II and held multiple Vision 2025 meetings and conversations to better understand and define what exactly the citizens wanted for Rogersville. The response from citizens, business owners, and various community members was fantastic. We were able to identify several areas to address, including more retail, more commercial, a sit-down restaurant/more food options, upgraded park equipment, enriched park activities, things and events for the community to do locally, as well as better planned infrastructure, strategic design to handle and accept the coming growth but protect the small town feel of Rogersville, and for the city to address areas around town that had been overlooked or poorly designed with minimal functionality, like missing sidewalks and lack of safe pedestrian accessibility. Stormwater control was also high on the list.

In order to accomplish as many of these goals as possible, over the past three years, I diversified my tasks into a variety of areas, gathered mass quantities of data and information on strategic growth planning, and have taken on many rolls, including being involved in as many areas as necessary, while also looking into what was non-functioning within the City that prevented these goals from being accomplished in the past. My involvement included attending monthly Chamber of Commerce meetings, as attendee and presenter, taking part in the monthly City engineering meetings, being part of Rogersville Planning & Zoning, attending the Missouri Main Street Conference for economic revitalization, attending multiple Conservation Department seminars on stormwater control design and abatement measures, going to SMCOG meetings, Greene County P&Z meetings, speaking with Springfield City Council members and area economic developers, meeting with the Missouri Regional Economic Developer, meeting and speaking with multiple Greene County officials including the Commissioners in regards to fixing the highway access at Jamestown, incentivizing Jamestown, the HWY125/60 interchange project, and various other involvements.

My accomplishments include capturing a \$20,000 CDC grant which was used to create an overlay pedestrian map for the entire city plus projected growth, to fill in all the missing sidewalks, specifically in areas like along Hwy VV to connect Watts Road to CHC. This plan includes all missing sidewalks as well as a long-term regional trail plan to connect Rogersville proper to the LR High School for student safety and ultimately connect to the Greenway trail network. With this grant we were able to purchase eight sidewalk benches, signage, planters, and hanging flower baskets. I worked with the City Engineer on a grant project to define the 20-yr growth projection for future sewer needs. I have pushed for the City water services to be extended to HWY 125. In Planning & Zoning, we were able to finish the Comprehensive Plan, add the CDC grant funded sidewalk/pedestrian plan, and restructure density requirements to aid in functional population growth. We split the one-size-fits-all C1 commercial zoning into a more strategic 5-part commercial zoning that will better allow growth to be structured functionally. I introduced the concept of a Commercial Overlay District which would allow for commercial business and retail growth, specifically addressing Rogersville's needs while solving the population milestone hurdles preventing such growth. To create community events, I had a Christmas tree planted at the Caboose park for annual tree lighting ceremonies, participated in Rogersville Friends of the Park, the Bandit 5K, Farmer's Markets, and helped Alderman Fore fund the future Splash Pad, resurfacing of the park basketball court, and new trail along the ballfields. To combat stormwater issues, I planted eighteen street trees along Sentry Drive where stormwater is a known issue. Alderman Fore and I also pushed for more resources for the Police Department, including pay raises, more personnel, a pay scale to help with retention, and to install missing but necessary equipment in patrol cars. There are more accomplishments but that's enough to list.

As time progressed, layers were peeled back and many internal City Hall issues became readily apparent. Several easily-solvable problems had been left unaddressed for years. Alderman Fore and I began experiencing the same problems and the same hurdles and barriers. Several of these issues are outlined in Closed Session Minutes which are available to the public. Relationships that had been positive turned sour due to the issues regarding employee behavior, non-management, a lack of transparency, and failed leadership and accountability. It became even more clear that there were divisions not only within departments but also between departments which was affecting the city as a whole. After more than a year of following standard channels and discussing issues with supervisors and the Mayor, it became evident that no resolutions were going to be pursued by them.

It became glaringly clear that many of the problems in the City are simply ignored or deemed non-issue by a small group of individuals who have held positions within the City for years. Any attempts to remedy known issues has been met with fervent backlash. Alderman Fore and I were labeled as liars and spreaders of half-truths. Requests from me to Mayor Hill, in open meetings and in person, to address the issues and to reassure the business community were, and continue to be, disregarded. Alderman Fore and I began to be referenced as the "two female Aldermen". Alderman Fore has had family members harassed by City employees. My personal character and integrity has been called into question. Both of us have been personally attacked as well as professionally.

It is for these reasons, I have chosen to walk away, vacate my term early, and resign. I have put my heart, time, and effort, as well as my family's, into making Rogersville a better functioning city only to have my integrity maligned and my contributions belittled to the point of being labeled as only caring about prettying up the City. My hope with this statement is that a broader group of citizens will be made aware of the issues and will step up and ask the City of Rogersville to remedy these issues and work with the people to make our town function better as a whole. It is time for others to lead Rogersville into a new era.

Marjorie Gelz