

# City Council Infrastructure Report



**2022/23**

## Capital improvement projects then and now

Infrastructure projects have been the council's focus for more than the last five years. Infrastructure projects have been approached aggressively and strategically. The post-COVID climate has disrupted everything from processes, to supply chain issues, staffing shortages, and overall confusion. This last year has seen Community Development Block



Grants (CDBG) move from an infrastructure focus to community development projects such as playgrounds, parks, and pools. Grants now seem to be available across any government department at any time. All of these changes also come with drastically accelerated timelines for grant submissions, changing processes, reporting, and requirements. The push and funding supporting major capital improvement projects is unprecedented since FDR's New Deal.

### Struggles:

**Lack of consistency** – with grants being offered by so many different government agencies there is no real consistency with grant requests. Each department has a different application process and a different administration process. The government runs on paper and process and right now there is no process leaving everyone involved with a grant recreating the wheel for every project.

**Timelines** – the feeling of push is more than a feeling. Departments are pushing for grants, and grants are being released with often a maximum of a 30-day response time. This is coupled with commitments of 30-day award notice response times. Experience so far has shown, holding applicants to tight 30 responses for applications but extended award response times. This creates a bottleneck of projects. The hesitation to wait on an award notification before applying for another project is frustrating. The concern would be being awarded numerous grants. While this sounds exciting the downside, is strained budgets to meet the match, and having enough staff to handle the workload.

**Administration** – Where grant administrators could handle more grants because the grants followed the same process, and awards were announced at the same time creating a rhythm to handle a larger workload. Now, the consistency is gone, each grant has different processes, and awards announcements could happen at any time. This bogs down the grant administration reducing the number of grants an individual can handle. In addition to workflow and workload challenges staffing shortages are impacting grant administrators as well, there are fewer grant administrators and Northwest Kansas Planning and Development (NWKPD) has yet to be able to hire grant administrators and staff have left and not been replaced. This shortage has NWKPD stretched to thin with no real capacity to support Oberlin's needs.

**The upside:**

**Matching funds** – infrastructure projects the city has completed in the past have seen anywhere between 40% - 60% matching funds requirement. Matching for grants associated with the Infrastructure Bill (BIL) are requiring matching funds ranging from 10% - 25%. Reduced matching funds are incredibly helpful and can position Oberlin to complete more large capital improvement projects for the same money it would be to complete one project with CDBG. So far in 2023 Oberlin has applied for three projects funded by the infrastructure bill and has not been awarded any grants.

**More grants** – there are numerous grant opportunities, and there is potential to apply for more grants and complete more projects. It is difficult with numerous grants and NWKPD being so understaffed. And each grant has different parameters and requirements.

**We did this in 2021? No, we applied in 2021, and completed in 2022...I thought we were going to do it in 2023...no we plan to do it in 2022, applied in 2021, were denied applied again were awarded...Really? Yes,...wait what? Exactly.**

The projects Oberlin completed in 2022, were directly in-line with planned budgeted items as well as Oberlin’s overall long-term plan for infrastructure projects. However, with all the funding changes, and potential grant awards for projects it can feel a little more than confusing. In an effort to clarify project funding and potential projects, we are going to use the help of baseball analogies. Any project under the, already scored section will be completed projects. At bat, projects scheduled for 2023, and any project listed on deck are grants the city is looking to pursue when they are available. It has been decided to include projects that are “in the hole” are administratively impossible to list at this time.



**Already scored**



The already-scored projects will highlight the major capital improvement projects of 2022. There are so many grants addressing so many different projects it is easy to have project processes overlap administratively, especially for the council during crucial votes. The intent is to help keep everything sorted to provide clarity and facilitate good choices the council is confident in that best serve our community.

## Baseball Fields - scored

### Baseball fields

Sticking with the baseball theme this report covers the project completed at the Oberlin baseball field. The project replaced scoring booths, fencing, scoreboards, and safety tops on fencing as well as dugouts and dirt work. This project highlights a lot of good wins. The city and the county

working together on a project, along with volunteers, and working to find grant money (thank to the generosity of GROW) to help reduce budget costs. The end result, kids had a more enjoyable season on safer ball fields.



**Issues** – the ballfield project or even the need to do a ballfield project shows where lines get blurred. Who is responsible for what, and the plan for long-term maintenance? The county administers the summer recreation baseball program, volunteers run all teams and administer most of what needs to be done, the Lions Club owns some fencing, concession stands, and other equipment, and the city owns the physical land. With this many groups involved communication is practically nonexistent and making the simplest thing happen at the ball fields is so cumbersome and frustrating it typically just does not get done. Untangling this process leads to much larger community conversations.

## Oberlin City Library - scored

### Oberlin City Library

The City Library saw a lot of upgrades in 2022. The projects finally lined up with budget years, after waiting on grants that were not awarded, below are the projects completed in 2022.

**Parking Lot** - The parking lot was repoured with new concrete to keep the entrance safe and accessible for all citizens as well as a much-improved exterior appearance.



**HVAC** – We kept this city hobbling along as long as possible, maybe even a little too long.

**Fire Alarm System** – while fixing the A/C units it was discovered the fire alarm system was outdated. The entire system was replaced with a new maintenance contract to stay in compliance.



## Oberlin Storm Drainage

The storm drainage study was completed in 2022. The sticker shock is significant for these projects as well, in total, today it is an estimated \$20 million. If inflation continues it is anyone's guess as to what a project might cost. It is anticipated this project will be like other significant infrastructure projects. Find the most impactful project the city can afford and complete the project. Storm drainage projects will probably also rely on approved grant submissions as well. The good news, the BIL



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funds are beginning to be earmarked for storm drainage. The BIL grants are becoming more and more competitive, and grant award committees are also looking to make the biggest impact with grant dollars this often tips the scales in favor of more densely populated areas leaving very few dollars being awarded to any rural community; Oberlin included.

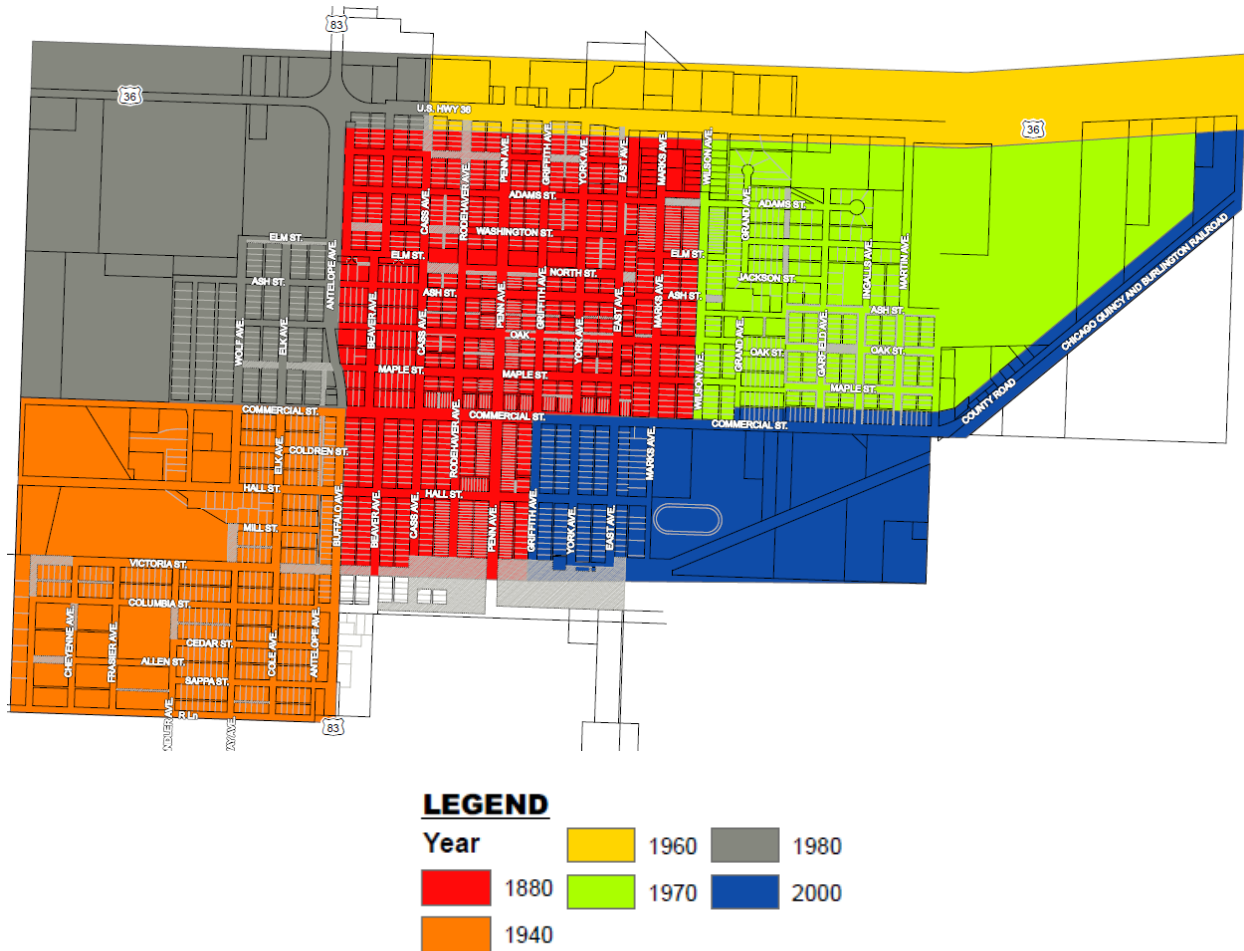
## Electric project



Last year's infrastructure report stated, "With the change from Sunflower to KMEA, it is anticipated the next electrical project will need to focus on Oberlin's main electrical tie-in. The tie-in line is miles out of town and Oberlin has a utility easement. Right now the clearing of 30 feet, as regulations change the easement requirement is 50 feet, and clearing is being extended to 50 feet as well, and the city has numerous large trees to remove in order to be in compliance as well as the protection of our primary lines." This project is now underway.

2024 will be an "off" year for the typical \$150,000 line maintenance project. Since the electric line has moved from crisis repair to maintenance the 150K can be reallocated in 2024.

## Oberlin Water Main Strategic Plan



Above is a map of all of Oberlin's water mains sectioned out in the timeframes the mains were installed. Oberlin has been on an aggressive water improvement plan since the well project 10 years ago. Since then, the council has been dedicated to the replacement of water mains installed in 1880.

**Condition assessment:** The condition assessment is the replacement of the 1880 water mains. These mains are well beyond the expected lifespan. The 1880 mains are beyond the condition where boring is an option, and replacement is the only solution.

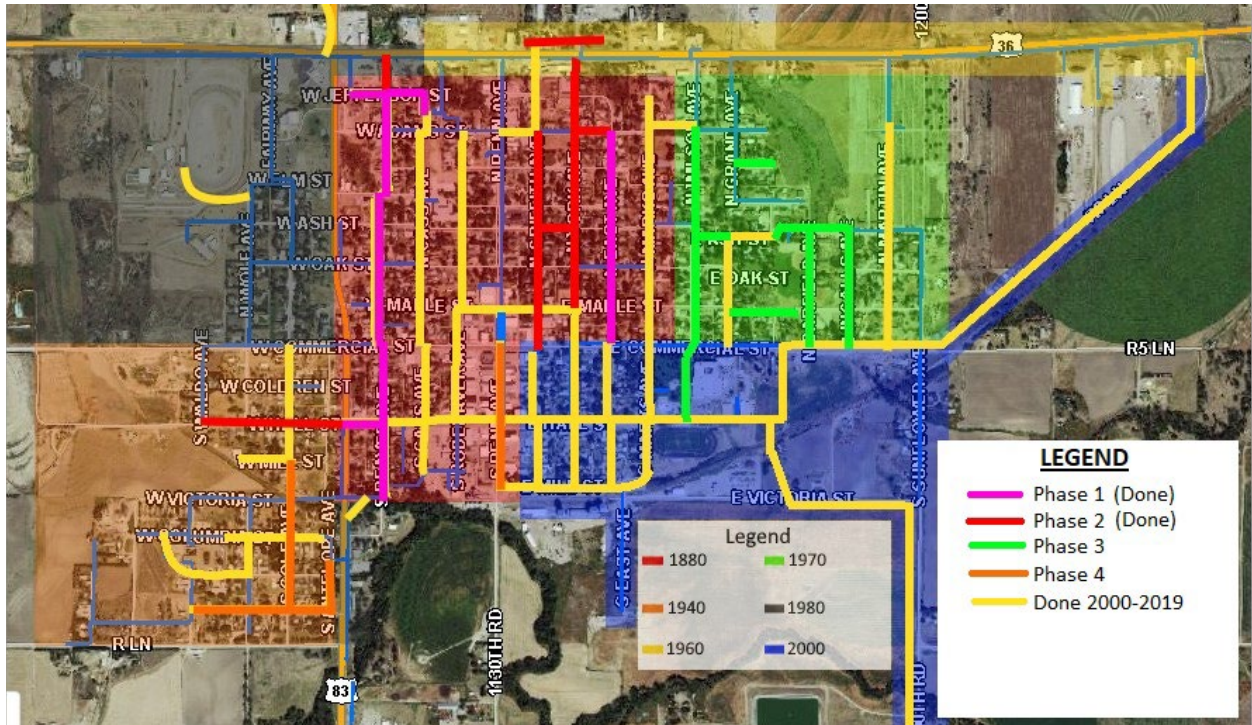
**Project Crossover:** When replacing water mains, it is necessary to coordinate with any street project. The goal is to avoid replacing a street and then having to rip it out to replace an 1880 water main. The reverse is true as well. There is also community involvement in the beautification of downtown. Ideally, the goal is to coordinate the main replacement project for Main Street with a beautification project to reduce costs and the inconvenience of having Main Street disrupted



**Funding:** Water main projects are an expensive undertaking. The expense of the water main extends beyond the project itself; it includes the additional personnel for the project, administrative and engineering costs as well as required out-of-town meetings. To replace one mile of the 1880 main it is an estimated cost of \$1,200,000. In the past, Oberlin has used Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to fund this type of project. As stated earlier in the report CDBG funding is now being allocated to more community amenity projects such as pools, parks, and playgrounds. The BIL is where grant funding is now available. There are fewer criteria to qualify for these grants but this increases competition for federal dollars. Oberlin has applied for two different BASE grants, each grant request totaling \$2.5 million to fund a water project, large enough to finish the replacement of the 1880 water main. Neither grant request was awarded. The city will continue to look for different grant opportunities to complete the 1880 replacement project.

The plan for the remaining 1880 water mains is to continue to apply for grants to fund the remainder of this project. There are approximately 2.5 miles left of the 1880 water mains to be replaced.

Below shows a map of the latest completed water main project, as well as a highlight of the water main replacement projects remaining.









## Manhole Revitalization - on deck

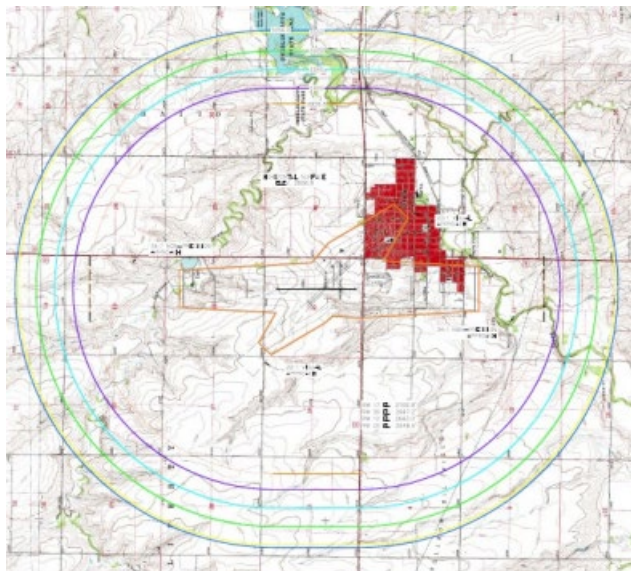
The manhole revitalization project was officially funded in February 2022. The project is engineered by Miller & Associates and the bids came in lower than the total grant funds awarded. Working with the Department of Commerce, Northwest Kansas Planning and Development, and Miller & Associates Oberlin was approved to extend the project to include camera



scoping of sewer lines. The camera work started in early May 2023, and the project is scheduled to begin in mid-June. The completion of this project will provide much-needed information on the condition of sewer mains, keeping staff and citizens safe by preventing a manhole collapse.

## Airport - on deck

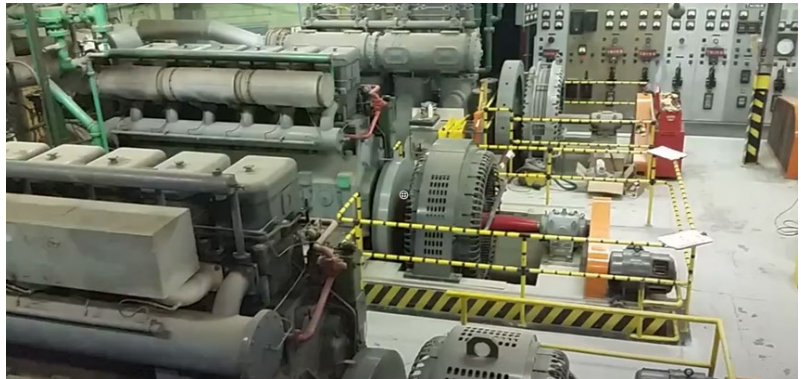
The Oberlin Municipal Airport is a major economic development generator for the entire county and the city continues to maintain and improve the airport. The key projects for the airport are the zoning project to ensure the security of departures and approaches to stay in compliance with Federal Aviation



Administration (FAA) requirements for airports. Jeopardizing either the landing or departure approaches could mean FAA would shut down the airport. Oberlin has been working with the airport zoning board, and Olsson Engineering to design the least invasive zoning regulations possible and still protect this valuable asset. The goal of the zoning is to protect both departure and arrival approaches by limiting the height of the structure around the airport. The height of structures endangering approaches is primarily targeting commercial-grade wind energy generation and large cell phone towers. The picture shows the radius of the zoning as well as how the height restrictions reduce further from the airport.

The second project for the airport in 2023 is to re-seal the runway. This project grant has been requested for the last 4-5 years and rejected. The approval of the runway reseal is another big step in making sure the airport is desirable and safe for pilots making the airport prepared for industry development.

Here is a picture of the inside of the Oberlin power plant, get a good look because it is all about to change! The city switched electric providers almost 3 years ago from Sunflower to Kansas Municipal Energy Agency (KMEA). During this short time, the city has worked with KMEA to bring a truly financially innovative solution to the city's emergency power



generation problem. The original power purchase agreement was the city would purchase power for five cents per Kilowatt (KW). This placed the electric purchase more than two cents per KW cheaper than what the city was purchasing from Sunflower. KMEA is carrying an approximate \$4.5 million bond for the new plant. To pay for the plant the power purchase agreement with KMEA has returned to the previous normal rate of approximately seven cents per KW from KMEA. The two-cent margin per KW will be enough to make the bond payments.

This solves the capability issues of the power plant, below are the capability issues facing Oberlin's old plant:

**Capability of operation:** how long will the engines actually last?

**Capability of knowledge:** training is not available for equipment in the power plant. Everything in the power plant is incredibly manual, requiring 24/7 coverage when the power plant is operating. It is easier to think of operating the power plant as an art rather than a science. Manual adjustments are made to increase or reduce electricity onto the line by the pitch, whine, drag, or lack thereof from an engine. Burn marks on the wall of the power plant serve as a reminder of how delicate of a system the plant is and the finesse required to operate the plant.

**Capability due to legislation:** it is common knowledge KDHE is not a fan of the Oberlin power plant. The city was able to negotiate a \$30,000 fine to \$998 due to environmentally conscious improvements but to be sure this was a tough fight. KDHE recently notified all cities with aged power plants their "...fee model is no longer sustainable...".

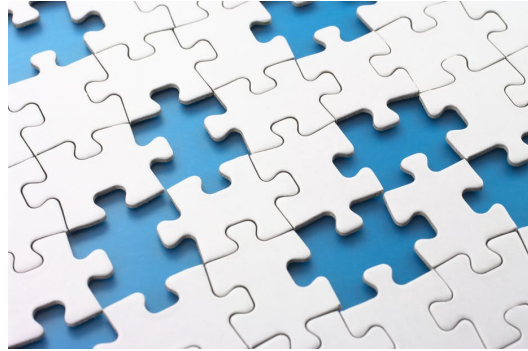


The above capability concerns are eliminated with the new power plant. Additionally, the city expects to see somewhat of a reduction of costs for daily operations, as well as available training, and tremendous decrease in staffing obligations during energy-generating emergencies, as well as reduced costs to run the plant, and an improved relationship with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE)

The efforts put forth to bring fiber internet to Oberlin have been heroic. Challenges continue to persist. With the merging of Eagle, now Vevye hopes were high Oberlin's fiber internet issues would be a thing of the past. While there is an improvement internet performance is not living up to the hype, nor is the internet enough to meet any community's needs. This year the city partnered with NexTech in large



grant application to finally bring fiber to Oberlin. The award committee chose to award the entire county and exclude Oberlin. It is great news people living in the country will now have reliable fiber but it leaves the county seat in a tremendous disadvantage. Yet even with these efforts, it seems apparent the fiber internet to households is lacking in capacity demands for remote learning and working. Remote work and remote education are needs as opposed to wants, there are simply some pieces missing from Oberlin's fiber internet solution. COVID made a new powerful distinction for the importance internet for our lives today. Internet was categorized as utility! During the height of the pandemic water and electricity could not be turned off because they are both a utility; and we saw the internet enter this category as well during the pandemic and there is no expectation for the categorization to ever drop off this essential list.



### **Options and opportunities:**

The \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill hopefully will continue to offer funding opportunities to bring fiber internet to Oberlin. It cannot be overstated how hard NexTech worked on Oberlin's behalf on the grant awarded to the county





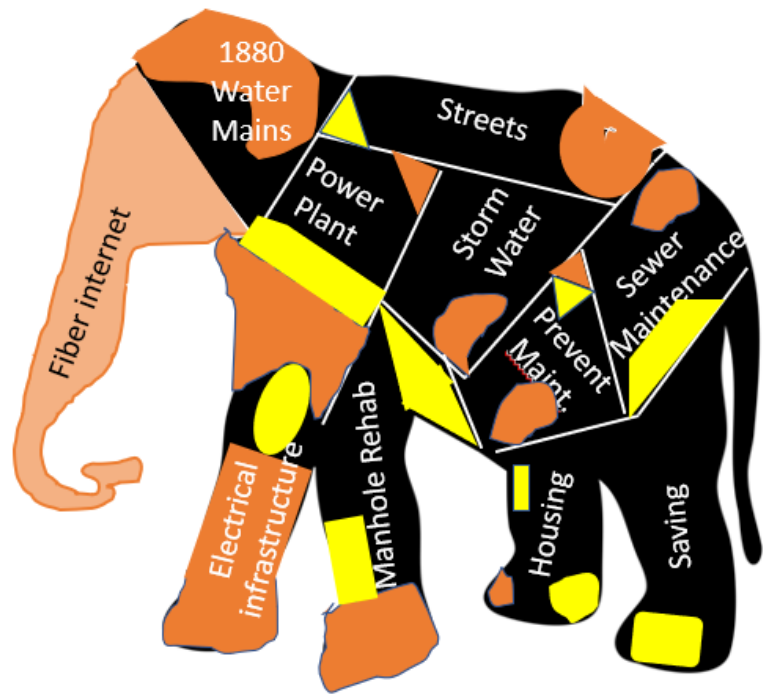
The housing study was written about 2 years ago and with the heightened awareness of the housing shortage in Oberlin, this report also includes the steps taken so far because of the housing report data.

<b>Wins of change</b>
<b>Removed blighted manufactured home from commercial</b>
<b>Assisted residents with utility challenges and prevented homelessness</b>
<b>Instituted a housing board</b>
<b>Started an administrative board hearing process:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Improves communication regarding compliance</b></li><li>• <b>Reduces municipal court's sense of obligation to "work with" or attempt to function as code enforcement</b></li><li>• <b>The goal is to keep people out of court and bring properties into compliance</b></li><li>• <b>Face-to-face communication about incentives</b></li><li>• <b>Connecting property owners with state and federal assistance programs</b></li><li>• <b>Bringing solutions to properties struggling with blight</b></li></ul>

A copy of the housing report is available online and please refer to this for more in-depth information regarding Oberlin's housing crisis.

Where are we now

Here is our award-winning elephant! The yellow highlighted portion shows what projects are in progress for this year. Please notice a newly added portion of the elephant, one of the back legs, designated as savings. Saving for projects, equipment purchases, and materials saves Oberlin the money spent on interest. Lease purchases are a great way to get needed equipment and distribute payments to keep tax revenue needs consistent. As the city gets on top of more projects allocating funds to future needs saves the city anywhere between 3% - 5% on interest, this savings can be dispersed to other areas of need and alleviate taxpayer burden.



Each yellow highlighted portion is explained in more detail in the above report.

While there is tremendous focus on infrastructure projects, it is worth highlighting the projects where the elephant “not” in the room. There are a significant number of projects completed that add greatly to the community but do not necessarily qualify as infrastructure. These projects were listed previously in the report, below highlights these milestones as well.

Elephant	Elephant not in the room
Streets	Parking lot chip seal
Power Plant	Baseball fields
Tree electric tie-in	Library
Manhole rehab	Airport
Housing	Housing
Savings	
Sewer maintenance	