

About Mayor Rick Sollars **About Mayor Rick Sollars**

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Rick Sollars is the seventh Mayor of Taylor, first taking office in November 2013. He is serving his initial four-year term.

Mayor Sollars served two terms on the City Council previous to being elected to the top spot in the City. He is a lifelong city resident, a 1992 graduate of Taylor Center High School and a highly successful local businessman with KRMC, LLC, which is a family-owned and operated partnership of a trio of Romulus manufacturers (KutRite Manufacturing, Elkins Machine & Tool and Multi Machining Capabilities) located near the corner of Northline and Inkster roads.

Mayor Sollars previously served on the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Taylor Housing Authority and the Master Plan steering committee. He is the chairman of the Downriver Utility Wastewater Authority, which represents the water interests of the communities of Allen Park, Belleville, Brownstown Township, Dearborn Heights, Ecorse, River Rouge, Riverview, Romulus, Southgate, Taylor, Van Buren Township and Wyandotte.

He is a current member of the Board of Directors of the Taylor Reading Corps, a 501(c)(3) non-- profit that was created two years ago to recruit, train and supervise a force of adult reading mentors to work with lower elementary school students in the Taylor School District. The TRC is one of the community's most successful programs and was recently honored statewide by the Michigan Reading Association.

Mayor Sollars' family includes wife, Alicia (another Taylor Center HS grad), sons Ashton and Carson and sister Peyton.

Mayor Sollars says that, as a father with a young family, he can relate to the frustrations of many residents who want to see a "cleaner, safer and always improving Taylor."

"We do not need to run the city from behind closed doors – and I will not do that," he said.

Mayor Sollars is an active resident. In addition to those groups previously mentioned, he's been involved with the Taylor Conservatory & Botanical Gardens; a Henry Ford Community College manufacturing technology advisory board member; a former Little League coach; and a member of the Sons of the American Legion and the Democratic Club of Taylor.

Mayor Sollars is very active in raising charitable donations and volunteer causes. After reinstating the "State of the City Address" in 2014, all the proceeds from the event have been earmarked for organizations like the Taylor School Foundation for Educational Excellence, Penrickton Center of Blind Children and ChristNet. The annual luncheon is run through the Rotary Club of Taylor.

[Michigan Municipal Guide](#)

VIDEOS:

[Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters and Millwrights video presentation of the Taylor Veterans Home Program featuring Mayor Rick Sollars, Home Depot's Tom Gibbons and many others along with the Christopher and Darcy Holcomb Family](#)

2015 IN REVIEW (written in December 2015)

Nearly a year after the City of Taylor worked its way out of the red and a state-mandated Deficit Elimination Plan a full year ahead of schedule, leaders have continued to move cautiously forward from a financial standpoint, while accomplishing dozens and dozens of important goals that translate into improved services, more programs and better quality of life for residents.

FINANCES AND KEY GRANTS: The City's general budget has gone from a \$5M deficit to an approximate \$4.2M unassigned fund balance. To achieve true financial stability, the unassigned fund balance should equal 20 percent of operating expenditures – in Taylor's case, about \$6M. So there is still plenty of work to be done.

The due diligence of the Sollars' administration and the increased financial stability has resulted in improved bond ratings, reduced audit findings, an ability to refinance bond issues and a continued increase to the general fund. In early 2015, Standard & Poor's upgraded the City's outlook on tax-limited general obligation debt (along with the similar debt of the Taylor Business Association and Taylor Brownfield Development Authority) to "positive" and "BBB-." Those ratings helped translate to a refinancing that saved \$8.1M in total through 2034 on those specific bonds.

Later, Moody's upgraded the City's outlook on \$14.8M in bonds to Baa-, moving Taylor from "speculative" to "investment" grade. That



difference improves the rating from a being judged to have speculative elements and considerable credit risk to a medium grade of moderate risk, and can often translate to new development.

Adding to the City's new sense of financial stability were several grants and programs that should, over a period of time, help firm up key service programs and the community as a whole. For the third time in two years, Taylor was awarded a SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency) grant, this time for \$4.3M over two years to fund 15 full-time firefighters, guaranteeing a 36-man force. That plan – 36 firefighters plus three administrators – was first promoted by ex-Fire Chief Danny Reynolds and is now fully supported by new Chief Stephen Portis. Safety, stability and long-term financial sustainability were the driving forces behind the new plan. When the plan ends, the City of Taylor expects to be able to fully fund the entire department.

Taylor was no stranger to the SAFER grant process. Its original grant, fraught with controversy, was for approximately \$8M in 2012; the City also received an extension of the original grant in July 2014.

While the SAFER grant will help sustain the fire department for the next two years, two other important grants also were awarded to the City in 2015: A \$2M SAW grant and a \$500,000 COPS grant.

The Stormwater Asset Management and Wastewater Grant (SAW) grant will enable the City to become proactive with its drainage programs vs. reactive in that area. The SAW grants are issued by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to cover costs to start a sanitary sewer system and storm sewer system evaluation study, consisting of sewer cleaning and televising; and the development of a comprehensive asset management plan and the completion of a Geographic Information System (GIS) for sanitary and storm sewer systems. The COPS (Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services Hiring Program) grant, still pending City Council approval, could enable the Police Department to hire four more police officers and enable it to focus them on high-crime areas in the community.

TAYLOR POLICE LEAD THE WAY: While sound financial actions and grant funds have helped solidify the City in many ways, the

various departments that make up the local government were achieving huge individual successes, led by Police, Community Development, Department of Public Works and Golf, Parks and Recreation.

The Taylor Police restarted a successful program that had been previously eliminated by assigning three full-time school resource officers to the Taylor School District. This enabled the department to also start a children's Safety Town Program and a teenagers Youth Police Academy Program in the summer. While continuing to upgrade its fleet of vehicles and expand the up-and-coming Taylor on Watch program, the police set a pace to reconnect with the community in a big way.

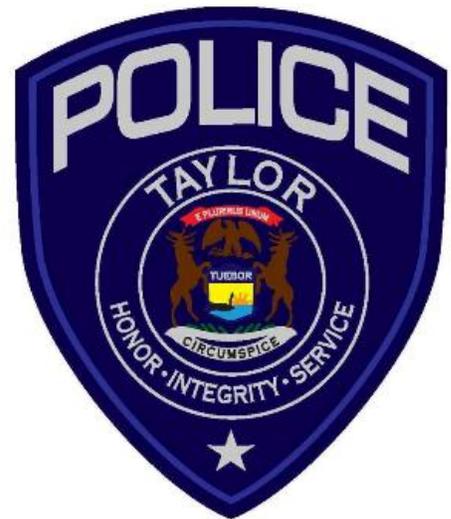
"These types of programs are not PR tools," Police Chief Mary Sclabassi said. "They are ways of connecting with the community and establishing a basis of trust and support, in that in the event of an incident, we have that ongoing support and trust. Police can't be everywhere, all of the time. We need the public's eyes and ears."

No place has that been more evident than with the Taylor on Watch program. Started in 2014, it is an educational, anti-crime project that teaches important techniques, partnering and awareness. It morphed from large public forums in 2014 to an active and evolving Neighborhood Watch program in 2015, with smaller meetings scheduled all over the community through 2016.

Other improvements to the TPD included initiating a reverse 911 emergency call system; plans to renovate and secure the department's main parking lot behind City Hall; instituting electronic traffic signs in neighborhoods with high traffic issues; adding "Simon," the second K9 unit donated by Atlas Oil; and assigning a motorcycle patrol on new vehicles. But likely the most important "improvement" was the fact that crime statistics continued to fall throughout 2015.

Through October 2015 (and analyzed on a year-over-year basis), total violent crimes were down 1.03 percent, including a drop of 3.57 percent in robberies and 33.33 percent in criminal sexual conduct cases. Property crimes were down 4.69 percent, including declines of 6.17 percent in burglaries and 12.87 percent in motor vehicle thefts. Drug crime was down 18.15 percent, including declines of 19.18 percent in violation of controlled substance act cases and 10.34 percent in drug equipment-related cases. Total crime in Taylor was down 4.93 percent through October 2015 over the statistics through October 2014.

DEVELOPMENT INCREASES INFLUENCE: The Community Development Department was extremely active in 2015. A new acquisition and rehabilitation program was formed through a unique partnership between the City of Taylor and Realty Transition LLC. The program enabled the City to claim large numbers of foreclosed homes from the Wayne County auction through funds provided by Realty Transition. The firm then maintains and rehabilitates those buildings, improving and bringing them up to code before the City transfers title to Realty Transition. Once that takes place, Realty Transition puts them up for sale on the open market. The program helps clean up the community and promotes home ownership.



The program is still too new to properly evaluate, but in this first round of properties, the City claimed 96 homes off the market as part of the partnership, and forecasts \$80,000 in new building permit revenue (funds that have been traditionally lost during the county auction process).

The plan is predicting \$200,000 in eventual new tax revenue and another \$100,000 in new administrative revenue. It reduces blight across the community. In addition, Realty Transition has also demolished several sites – another “hidden extra” that was part of the partnership.

Because Community Development is so active with federal grant funds, it also took an increased role with other demolitions, parks and recreation improvements, sidewalk installation, general housing rehabilitation, special site condominium rehab, U.S. Housing and Urban Development compliance and non-profit awards.

It funded the demolitions of homes on Cape Cod and Westpointe, as well as the former Fletcher School. It paid for staffing, new flooring, painting and new padding (in the gym) of the Taylor Recreation Center, as well as staffing and deck restoration at the Northwest Pool. About \$15,000 in revenue was gleaned from the business co-op at the recreation center, and the department paid for fencing, playscape and signage at the new Zub Park.

Approximately \$130,000 was used for the sidewalk project on Pardee Road between Northline and Superior, and 16 qualifying homeowners made essential repairs to their dwellings through community development funding.

The Pinewood Condominium project, including substantial rehabilitation to the six units through a HOME grant, was completed. All the units were sold to qualifying applicants and the department plans to begin construction on another four-unit site on the same location. In fact, during this process, Taylor was awarded another \$250,000 in HOME grants funds via a proposal to the Wayne County HOME consortia, essentially paving the way for the new four-unit complex.

Fish & Loaves Downriver Food Pantry, The Senior Alliance, Taylor Reading Corps and Taylor Teen Health Center each were awarded \$5,000 grants from the department.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ANIMAL CONTROL: Already an extremely busy division, the DPW was the hub of some of the most important infrastructure changes in 2015. Thanks to the inability of Lansing lawmakers to come up with a voter-friendly state-wide roads’ proposal in early 2015, the City stepped into the void and spent \$2.4M in street improvements across the community. For the most part, the improvements came in two ways: (A) Concrete “cuts” that eliminated deteriorating portions of roadway and are much less costly than complete renovations; or (B) By ripping out the old and laying new asphalt.

Major concrete-cut projects were done on Racho Road between North Line and Eureka (a major feeder of Southland Center and Heritage Park traffic); Superior Boulevard between Telegraph and Racho (which feeds the Sportsplex, Sixth Grade Academy, Kennedy High School, new Heritage Park Senior Village and Southland Center); Pardee Road between Eureka and North line (another important Southland and Meijer feeder); and LeRoy Street between Beech Daly and Inkster (an important secondary road in the area that caters to high traffic volume). Other concrete-cut work dotted the City, but the individual projects were not as large as those previously mentioned.

Newcastle Street, west of Pardee bordering the North Central Little League baseball complex, was asphalted as part of the City program. Allen Road, between North Line and Goddard, was also renovated, as part of a Wayne County-Taylor-Southgate joint agreement.

County renovations to Eureka Road, between Racho and Allen, have been moved up to 2016 in preparation for the huge Trader’s Point development, anchored by Menards.

While all of this work continues, the Michigan Department of Transportation is also rehabilitating the vast sound barriers at Telegraph Road and I-94, thanks to a settlement after the initial work was done incorrectly. Those barriers should be finished sometime in early 2016.

Despite all of that roadwork, it marked only a portion of the DPW’s focus. While roadwork may have been “1A,” the installation of new community-wide water meter technology was “1B.” A new multi-million dollar digital system replaces the old archaic model.

Throughout 2015, the Water Department replaced the old system with new electronic devices, which relay water usage at the location to towers in the City, which are instantaneously accessible by the department. This system has many advantages, from eliminating laborious in-person reads to immediate access of information. As the system is put in place, the result will be better, faster and more accurate water billing.

With 22,000 customers in the City, the installation was not without hiccups. Some users previously receiving “estimated” bills were hit with one-time billing adjustments in the form of higher costs, while others received credits because they had been overbilled. The City has been working through the difficulties, and suggests that anyone receiving an estimated bill or seeing a billing abnormality contact the City immediately at (734) 287-6550.

Other issues of note this year among the DPW/Water Department umbrella were: Two new street sweepers were purchased in



November for the first time in many years; the City's salt storage dome was reconstructed at the DPW yard; 125 dead trees and stumps were removed across the community this year; and the Water Department installed a new storm water drainage system in Papp Park, to eliminate standing water on fields and pathways.

(Note: Under the Parks Department, the City also restarted its previously dormant tree-planting program, using tens of thousands of dollars to plant trees in "public areas" around the community. Taylor has held the designation of Tree City USA for 23 years. As part of that designation, projects that build in the community are required to pay into a fund to replace trees. The program was rekindled in 2015. The areas have to be "public areas," so places like Little League sites and parks were focused upon.

Fifty-six new trees were planted around Northwest Pool and in Northwest Park, located on Van Born west of Beech Daly. Twenty-two went into the Taylor North Central Little League, located on Pardee Road north of Ecorse. Ten were planted in Taylor Northwest Little League, which is located in Papp Park on Wick Road. And four were planted in Taylor Northeast Little League, located on Wick between Pardee and Allen.

Seventy-six new trees were planted at the City's largest park, Heritage Park. That included 46 atop the berm that stands between the soccer fields and the baseball diamonds. Thirty were planted in the Northline Road entrance.

More trees and landscaping are planned at part of this project around the Sheridan Center Open Air Pavilion, which will eventually be surrounded by an inline skating rink, splash pads and a new playscape.)

The Taylor Animal Shelter also falls under the DPW, and it continued to make progress this year. It became a "no kill for adoptables" facility and partnered with the volunteers from Pound Pals of Taylor for needed support and rescue. From January through October 2015, the shelter took in 749 animals, 454 of which were adopted. One hundred eighteen were returned to their owners and 40 were given to rescues. One hundred thirty-seven – or a little over 13 monthly – were euthanized in that period of time. Animals deemed "unadoptable" by animal control officers may be too sick, injured or violent to be part of the mainstream public.



GOLF, PARKS AND MUCH MORE: Golf, Parks & Recreation remained one of the busiest departments in the City, and continued improvement across the board. It accepted a new fleet of 185 electric golf carts this spring, along with two new gasoline beverage carts and two new gasoline Ranger carts – in all, a \$55000 investment in Taylor Golf.

Golf also launched "Golf Now," a new online program that includes 60,000 email blasts. The Lakes of Taylor added a new roof, siding and stain. Taylor Golf participated in the 2015 Detroit Golf Show at the Suburban Show Place. Golf paths were repaired and resurfaced, along with the parking lots.

The Taylor Sportsplex, Downriver's largest hockey and indoor soccer facility, added a new ice plant controller for energy savings and reimbursement from DTE. Highlights at the TSX included a mixed martial arts' fight card; TOHORS Roller Hockey National Tournament; and it secured the Michigan Amateur Hockey Association's AAA state hockey tourney the 2016-2018 seasons. During 2015, the Detroit Red Wings and other NHL teams started practicing from time to time at the facility because of its proximity to Metropolitan Airport.

The Taylor Recreation Center, reopened in October 2014, continued to grow in memberships and programs as the facility steadily improved. The TRC added new flooring throughout and the gymnasium was completely renovated. Four units inside the Taylor Business Center (within the TRC) were leased, and the recreation center added a popular childcare program.

The William Ford Senior Activities Center saw its pavilion updated and WiFi added in the common area. The center, an extremely popular spot for the elderly, held 11 monthly parties, 17 game socials and went on over 75 day trips (the program also added two new SMART buses late in 2015 to help in this area). Highlights at the center included an event celebrating the Detroit Tigers home opener and a Michigan-Michigan Tailgate Party, sponsored by the City's elected officials. The annual Senior Picnic, sponsored by The Lodge of Taylor, Howe Peterson Funeral Homes and Masco Corporation, was another well-attended success. Two new computer classes were offered and "Jackpot Bingo" (with prizes ranging from \$25-\$50) became a popular affair.

The Sheridan Center Open Air Pavilion continued its facelift throughout 2015. Landscaping and irrigation was added to the front of the building; the inline hockey rink was moved from Northwest Park to the back of the Sheridan Center in the fall; and the new splash pad and playscape located between the building and the Activities Building were under construction. The splash pad, made in a unique baseball design, will be dedicated to the late former mayor, Jeffrey Lamarand. The splash pad is tentatively scheduled for a spring 2016 opening.

Pond restoration was completed at the always popular Heritage Park Petting Farm, and nearby Coan Lake was restocked with fish. Bubbblers donated by Angler's Marine Prop 'N Sail helped oxygenize the water during the winter months.

Zub Park (north of Kinyon Elementary School) was totally updated and dedicated to former Mayor Donald Zub. Improvements continued at Northwest Pool, the only outdoor swimming pool in the City. After reopening in 2014, 2015 saw a tripling of attendance and the pool deck was resurfaced and stained in the fall.

FIRE NEWS: While the top story surrounding the Fire Department involved the new SAFER grant and the stabilization of its workforce (previously mentioned), the department also was scheduled to accept delivery on a new fire truck in November; purchased a new thermal imager; and plans to open up the fourth-grade smoke house again, once some housekeeping is done, according to Chief Portis.

LIBRARY CHANGES HANDS: The Taylor Community Library in 2015 exited the Wayne County system and returned to the City of Taylor. As that somewhat lengthy procedure was taking place, the Wayne County Library for the Blind/Handicapped was also transferred to Taylor after previously being housed in Westland.

Other 2015 library accomplishments included participating in the Macy's Reading is Fundamental Program and the Fish 'N Fun

Ecology Center's Rotary Reading Challenge, along with hosting another successful summer reading program. During this holiday season, the knitting groups of the Library for the Blind and the regular library accepted a large donation of yarn and knitted caps and scarves to be donated to the Penrickton Center for Blind Children and ChristNet.

23RD DISTRICT COURT: The court was one of only four Wayne County courts scoring above average in all categories of the 2014 Customer Service Survey administered through the State Court Administrative Office.

The Downriver Regional Driving While Intoxicated Treatment Court (formerly known as the 23rd District Drug Court) increased to full capacity during 2015. The Goodwill Garden at Heritage Park completed another successful year, with all produce donated to local food banks.

The community service program in the court expanded in 2015, with several community cleanups supervised by Judge Joseph Slaven and the overall program expanding to six weeks, year-round.

Improvement in the court's website included greater public access to case information. Digital warrant accessibility increases public safety and decreases costs. With Vicky Bowman retiring in December after 34 years, Deanna Warunek becomes the new court administrator.

CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER: Thanks to new click-through options, expansion and additional staff, telephone calls entering the CSC at City Hall now have an average wait time of less than five minutes. Other improvements in the department include increased internal communications through weekly conference calls; morale and teamwork projects; and training, and recorded calls for training purposes.

CITY CLERK: City Clerk Cindy Bower became a certified Michigan Municipal Clerk in 2015. The department connected with the Michigan's Electronic Death Registry System for death records. It also hosted another successful Shred Day and supervised several cleanups of City cemeteries. And it implemented new Freedom of Information Act procedures and guidelines.

TREASURER: The department now has a counterfeit detector machine, and recently tested it on seized Drug Forfeiture funds. The machine will eliminate counterfeit money from coming through the department. A hidden plus: It can serve as a quick counting machine, and should help during heavy tax season, speeding up the process.

2015 BUSINESS & DEVELOPMENT IN REVIEW (Written in December 2015)

In the complex world of governmental financing, only one thing is certain: Tax dollars, in some way, shape or form, define the budget. And the budget defines what a government can provide in terms of services for its residents. That fact of life has always existed, whether the government was located in rural Oregon or suburban Detroit.

Finances weighed heavily on his mind of to-be-Mayor Rick Sollars as he prepared to take office in November 2013. The mayor, a former two-term member of City Council, thoroughly understood the task ahead. The City of Taylor, at that time, was in a State of Michigan-mandated Deficit Elimination Plan, created in an effort to erase a deficit that ranged toward \$5M. Staff and services had been cut drastically.

State revenue-sharing aid to the City had declined markedly over two decades – as it had in other Michigan communities. Auditors showed that across approximately 20 years, Taylor had lost some \$22M in just state aid. The global economic recession of 2008 came on the heels of those state cuts. Residential property taxes are the life-blood of government budgets, and in the City, some property taxes fell as much as 40 percent. In Michigan, the ups and downs of the economy are made even more complex by the Headlee Amendment, which prevents property taxes from increasing annually more than 5 percent or the cost of inflation. So, a quick 40 percent decline can only be recovered slowly – at times over the course of decades.



"All of that was very clear to me, even before I took office," Mayor Sollars said. "When something like a global recession hits, property taxes take a large dive. Those property taxes fund governments like ours. Even if the economy makes a comeback, the Headlee Amendment prevents you from recovering that tax base quickly. If you were putting it on a graph, you'd see a quick, hard decline followed by a lengthy, slow incline. We are in the process of that slow incline.

"That's why we have focused so much of our time on business in the City of Taylor. I knew that residential tax base was only going to rebound slowly. But if we made this City more business friendly – and if we were lucky – we could improve the economic picture in the community. Business taxes can't replace all that we've lost, but they ease the pain. Added revenue can help us return services to the residents."

More new business means increased tax base, lifestyle choices and more jobs.

GATHERING FORCES: "Business friendly" is an abstract term that isn't easily defined. In this City's case, it meant focusing on both new and old business activity in the community, from the Mayor's Office down. An all-new City Council firmly supported the effort. Mayor Sollars created a support team to match his focus, adding people like Economic Development Director George Sutherland, Assessor Jerry Markey, Community Development Manager Jeff Baum and Chief Financial Officer Jason Couture, among others, to surround existing Planning Director Lora Fell. They all bring different experiences and viewpoints to the table. The mayor has always been a believer in experience and differing viewpoints, and the group that he created has given him just that.

Sutherland, in fact, doesn't have a true development background. He worked for Michigan-based Murray's Auto for nearly three decades, starting as a stock boy at 16 and worked his way up to Vice President of Operations, a position he held from 1999-2006. He was responsible for \$250 million in sales in over 100 stores in four states, with 14 direct reports and 1,800 staffers working under him. The private equity firm that sold Murray's recruited Sutherland as Executive Vice President of Operations for Brookstone, Inc., where he worked from 2006-10. Before joining the City of Taylor, Sutherland was CEO, Managing Partner of Resurgent Consulting LLC (2013-present) and COO of Strategic Business Partners LLC (2011-13).

To Sutherland, "business friendly" is simple: "To me it means a very down-to-earth, hands-on approach. We welcome new developments to the City and I want them to know that I will do everything I can to help them. That means me personally. Everyone gets my business card, and I consistently tell them that if they have a problem, talk to me, and I'll work as hard as I can to help them accomplish their goal."

Markey worked as a property appraiser for Masco Corporation from 2001 until he took the assessor's position with the City, and is a state-certified Level IV assessor with 32 years of experience in Real Estate and personal property, specializing in commercial and industrial valuation and tax litigation. Mayor Sollars noted that it is to the City's advantage to have a Level IV assessor. It takes a Level IV assessor to certify the city's tax rolls. If a Level IV is not on staff, that certification must be outsourced at cost to the City. While in his position at Masco, Markey successfully appealed property assessments throughout the U.S., generating over \$1 million in tax savings.

Baum was inexperienced in the field of community development when he was hired by the City of Taylor, but brought years of mortgage experience to the table. He was not new to Taylor; having grown up and gone to school here (he still coaches in the public school system). He entered the mortgage firm industry in 2005 at Rock Financial/Quicken Loans. He eventually spent six years with Goldstar Mortgage in Allen Park while finishing his college work at Eastern Michigan University. As community development manager, he works to continuously improve neighborhoods. Community Development writes many of the grant applications submitted by the city and administers the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funded programs to include Community Development Block Grant program, NSP and HOME.

While Community Development is not directly involved in economic development it can be an indirect driver. More than half of the City of Taylor qualifies for federal subsidies through community development grants. That enables the City to rehabilitate qualifying residential buildings and even public sites in qualifying areas. Therefore, despite the fact that the City did not have general funds – especially when it was in the deficit elimination plan – to renovate things like parks, recreation centers and pools, it was able to do so under federal grant guidelines. By doing so, it theoretically made itself a more attractive landing spot for businesses.

Couture, former assistant director of Budget & Finance for the City for nearly two years, returned to City Hall under Mayor Sollars and offers not only a deep history in the department, but a keen eye for the overall financial outlook in the community.

"The Planning Commission appreciates the expertise and dedication these gentlemen bring to the City and the resulting revival of new business and residential development," Fell said. "George has been a catalyst for new development, and Jerry, Jeff and Jason go above and beyond."

"Everything comes through here, and depending on what they are looking for, they might be passed on to George or to Jerry for more help," she said. "We are pushing more business, at a faster pace, than anytime I can remember. Developers recognize what we're doing. They know we're going to do everything we can to work with them. We strive to do things right and as expediently as possible. And speed makes a big difference with developers."

When you put all of these building blocks into place – a progressive mayor with business background and an eye focused on making the City business friendly, a council that supports the process and key department heads that are constantly seeking the same goal – you end up with a community ready to bust out when it comes to development.

NUMBERS DON'T LIE: The Planning Commission has been a busy group. Based on its 2014-2015 report, a total of 216 projects came through the Planning Department within the past year. Based on the commission's latest reports, overall total projects during the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 period combined have outpaced the progress of the previous three years.

While the majority of the newest business investment targeted Eureka Road, other key improvements were accomplished or are on tap in the Telegraph Road corridor, including a major banquet center and a storage facility. Kroger's expansion keys the Ecorse Road improvements, which will also include a new banquet facility, Meadows Banquet & Conference Centre, on the site of the old FIA Building next to Taylor Meadows Golf Course. Along Goddard, 16 new businesses were approved.

New industrial businesses include Bluestar, World Wide Carriers, Metro International Trade Services, Continental Tire BestDrive, 3S International, Moran Motorsports, SFS Fabrication and SMW Manufacturing. Windsor Engineering started a 40,000-square-foot expansion. In addition, there have been 31 new industrial re-occupancies over the past year, as tracked by the commission.

Residential development news includes new construction at Charter Oaks and Island Lakes along Goddard, and Cypress Gardens (near Holland Road) will soon restart. The Volunteers of America senior development, Heritage Park Senior Village on Superior Boulevard, was scheduled to open in fall 2015.

KEY DRIVING POINTS START WITH MENARDS: There are singles, and then there are home runs. Hit enough singles, and everyone remains happy. Hit a couple of home



runs and the entire game changes.

When it comes to recent Taylor development, there have been tons of singles, doubles and even triples, but potential game-changers come in the form of the Menards Inc. development on the old Gibraltar Trade Center site at I-75 and Eureka Road; 3S International (Trolley Drive near Wallside Windows); Meadows Banquet & Convention Centre; and, of course, Rouse Properties ongoing renovations and reimagining of Southland Center (see related story in this edition). All of these have the type of "above and beyond" potential that Taylor hasn't witnessed in many years.

Contractors started demolishing the old Gibraltar Trade Center in mid-September (it was essentially gone by late October) in preparation for new development. The trade center last year announced that it would consolidate facilities into its Macomb location and the entire 80-plus acre site was sold to Menards Inc. Menards submitted plans that called for the trade center, the old Fandango Hall strip mall and the old fabricating plant (directly to the west of the center) to be destroyed to make way for new development. The new location will be called "Trader's Point."

In preparation for the new development, the mayor addressed traffic concerns along the Eureka corridor. As a result, Wayne County plans to repave Eureka Road between Allen Road and Racho. The City of Taylor will also be redoing all the lighting, traffic signage, and other road-related infrastructure. Superior and Racho Road have already been renovated, and a portion of Pardee Road is also scheduled to be repaved (with sidewalks added).

As part of this review, the City of Taylor is also considering what could be a total facelift over a period of time to the Eureka Road district. The roadway itself is extremely busy and nearly impossible to navigate on foot or by bicycle. Plans, if enacted, would call for massive streetscapes, walkways, signage and even small parks and rest centers tucked into areas like the frontage at Southland Center, the frontage of the Menards development and the I-75-Eureka interchange. Many of these areas are currently undeveloped, unattractive drainage basins that would be well-suited for small park-type space.

While Menards controls the entire parcel and has withheld public comment surrounding specific details for the huge development, some issues are clear. Menards plans to build its facility on the southern-most reaches of the property. At least two other major retailers will be on the site. Other smaller retailers and restaurants will be located on the north edge of the property, nearest Eureka Road.

OTHERS LOOKING TO MOVE INTO REGION: Crain's Detroit Business recently wrote a story on retailers and restaurants hoping to expand their presence in Michigan – and many of those could be fodder for any discussion of Trader's Point, as well as the greater Eureka Road business district. For instance, the bar and grill Bubba's 33, Brickhouse Tavern + Tap, Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurants, Dinosaur Bar-B-Que and the women's boutique, Versona, have all been looking to move into the region, according to a roundup at the International Council of Shopping Centers' recent Idea Exchange. Pittsburgh's legendary Primanti Bros., among those discussed at the exchange, is already said to be moving into the Ruby Tuesday location at Southland and the City has approved its plans.

According to that same Crain's story, others already in Michigan but looking for more locations in the area are: Golden Corral (which has already scheduled its seventh of 20 new Michigan sites for the old Fire Mountain location on Eureka Road; look for a late December opening); Kirkland's home décor, gifts and accessories (planning six more Michigan openings by the end of 2016); Little Caesar's Pizza; Panda Express (five new stores planned in 2016); PetPeople (six new stores in 2015); Planet Fitness (five more locations planned in the tri-county region this year); and Save-A-Lot Food Stores (planning 10 more Michigan locations).

Kroger Co. of Michigan, already expanding its Ecorse Road and Monroe location in Taylor, is another popular chain on the move, thanks to its highly publicized conversion of five former Hiller's locations. The Taylor location plans a \$10M expansion which will take over the old Big Lots building next door. Some of the key features included will be increased retail offerings, a fuel station (those locations usually feature customer discounts) and virtual shopping, where customers will be able to shop online, pull into strategically located loading zones and accept curbside service. Technology is being used to speed every aspect of the customer's time in the new stores from wait times in line to product fulfillment at the shelves. The newer, larger marketplace stores often offer massive foyers and floral sections right up front. According to one story last year, Kroger claims to be the world's largest florist based on volume alone.

UNIQUE 3S INTERNATIONAL SETS BRISK PACE: After heavy media speculation, 3S International LLC moved into a 68,000-square-foot property at 27050 Trolley Drive, near Wallside Windows. Unless you really followed the business pages or the electronic component recycling world, this wasn't earth-shaking news. But to insiders, the City of Taylor was an immediate winner in what could be a lengthy, profitable relationship.

3S offers some of the most unique recycling components in the world. Considered among the 101 Best and Brightest Most sustainable companies in Michigan (2014), 3S (for safe, secure and sustainable) takes "shred technology" to new levels. It uses its own cutting edge recycling technology called Blubox to shred complex electronics into small recyclable pieces while removing toxins like mercury in batteries and lead in solder. Likewise, things like copper, steel, glass and aluminum are separated to be sold for reuse. The facility's offerings are in such demand that it had to re-create and expand as it hit the ground (adding a second Blubox), thanks to heavy demands in the global recycling marketplace.

According to 3S, the vision for the Blubox technology was born out of a growing volume of flat panel displays and lamps containing mercury. The solution called for technology to enable safe recycling without endangering human health or contaminating the environment. 3S, in cooperation with MBT Recycling, developed the Blubox, the first fully automated recycling machine on the market. Taylor will continue to work with the leaders of 3S to bring value-added opportunities to the residents of the community. 3S is currently working on "box programs" that will allow residents to send in items that fit within the framework of the company's requirements. 3S is definitely a business to keep an eye on.

MEADOWS BANQUET & CONVENTION CENTRE: It's not often that you toss together some positives, a few negatives and a big vacant building and come up with a deal that might just change an entire portion of the community. But happened back in April, when City Council approved an agreement with S&B Development of Redford Township.

The plans will create a new Meadows Banquet & Convention Centre in the hulking old Family Independence Agency (FIA) Building (25350 Ecorse). The City had been attempting to market that facility for years, but had failed until Baljit Bains and Rattan Sekhon,

partners in S&B Development, came forward with a unique idea. Over time, they plan to invest \$12 million to \$15 million in the two-story, 61,000-square-foot facility, turning it into a convention center that will feature a rooftop bar fronting Ecorse Road and a large, upgraded patio/terrace area to the back that oversees Taylor Meadows Golf Course.

Taylor has traditionally had two beautiful public golf courses, but little in terms of hotels and/or convention centers. In addition, the northwest part of the community could use a shot in the arm from a development standpoint. One of the hidden selling points was a firm financial commitment by S&B of a \$250,000 non-refundable down payment. That down payment was then used by the City of Taylor to help obtain a new fire truck.

The sale property will go back on the tax rolls and the new convention center will create about 120 jobs. Construction could take up to 16 months and part of the existing building will be demolished, but S&B's long-term overall commitment to the location was the key to the deal, according to Mayor Sollars.

"This is a \$1 million deal, but more importantly, a \$12 million to \$15 million investment," he said. "These opportunities don't come along every day."

A QUICK LOOK BACK AT 2015 ... While old Gibraltar Trade Center was demolished in October, workers will continue to raze the rest of the 80-plus acre parcel, which was obtained by Menards Inc. Included in the demolition will be everything on the southwest corner of I-75 and Eureka except for the Sprint and the Vitamin Shoppe locations.

Shortly before the trade center was demolished, the old Ramada Inn to the east along Eureka Road was razed. A developer obtained that parcel and old Taylor Tool location (next to Hooter's). Plans for a Marriott TownPlace Suites were approved by the City for the old Taylor Tool location, but as of this writing, the developer is weighing his options for both locations. Two other major hotel chains are investigating locations in the Eureka Road corridor, as well.

PizzaPapalis (14680 Pardee, in the old Fuddrucker's) has been renovated and was due to open in early November. The company relocated from its longtime site in Dearborn.

Golden Corral (in the old Fire Mountain location on Eureka) was delayed by bankers, but closed on the property in October and plans a grand opening later this month.

PetSmart (23271 Eureka in the Taylor Retail Center) demolished its old building and will rebuild in the same location. The new building will include not only PetSmart, but a secondary tenant. The facility had closed in May 2015 due to structural problems.

A new Huntington Bank site (8233 Telegraph) will locate in what was a Verizon Wireless center.

Pete's Place (12245 Telegraph) continues renovations on a secondary cottage-type building in its parking lot north of its current location. The building will be used for office space and storage.

Gardener White on Telegraph underwent an exterior makeover during the year and was finished in the fall.

VisionWorks (23360 Eureka Road) opened in September, as did Tease Barber & Beauty Salon (25565 Van Born).

Biggby's opened its first Taylor location at 22326 Goddard Road, bringing the Kirklynn Commons Plaza up to full capacity. A second location is opening soon in the Royal Pointe Plaza on Telegraph Road.

The David Pressley School of Cosmetology (21255 Wick Road) completed a remodeling project and added a classroom.

Dollar Tree Inc. announced the early July acquisition of Family Dollar Stores Inc. There were several Family Dollar locations Downriver, including two on Telegraph and another on Eureka Road in Taylor.

Pet Supplies Plus (22124 Ecorse) opened for business.

BestDrive LLC a commercial tire retreader and distributor, celebrated the opening of its newest location in Taylor on the corner of Monroe Street and Trolley Drive in June. BestDrive's parent company, Continental Tire the Americas, LLC, invested more than \$1.5M in the Taylor location. Its building is a 60,000-square-foot facility that aims to produce more than 200 retreads per day by 2020. BestDrive picked Taylor because it is close to Detroit and in the hotbed of the commercial truck market. The facility currently employs 14 people with plans to employ more than 40 by 2020. Today, it produces 60 retreads daily, but plans to produce 200 per day within five years.

O'Samarai steak house opened beside Panera Bread in the renovated Rio Bravo location.

Art Van Pure Sleep moved into the existing strip center east of Belle Tire on Eureka.

Al's Asphalt, 25500 Brest Road, had sought to expand its property for some time. The City owned the property directly behind Al's, a segment that is land-locked and unlikely to move on the market. So the City and Al's Asphalt got together and made a deal to benefit both entities in 2015. The City of Taylor handed over the land to Al's Asphalt in exchange for services that the company would provide. Al's provided a large asphalt pad in Heritage Park, directly behind the Sheridan Center Open Air Pavilion, and the City moved an inline skating rink there. In addition to the asphalt pad for the rink, the deal also solved a long-standing problem with the Michael Street entrance to the American Legion Post 200. The entrance is owned by the post, and had deteriorated over the years. The post is very active and draws a lot of traffic to its facility, but couldn't afford the repairs on its own. So as part of the deal, the City had the company repave the entire entrance, which now looks better than it has in decades.

Windsor Engineering on Northline Road began a large expansion, creating 181 jobs with an average hourly rate \$18.93 and investment of \$2.5M real property improvements and \$220,000 in personal property.

The Vitamin Shoppe opened in February on the corner of Eureka and Racho roads.

Tan Bellissimo opened a café near the active southeast corner of Goddard and Pardee roads in March. It was part of an attractive new development that includes a hair studio and tanning salon, but owners eventually eliminated the café and further expanded their core business. In that same plaza, Brooklyn's Boutique & Baby opened in early May.

Watson Engineering, Inc. (66455 Racho) started plans early in 2015 for an expansion behind its current site, including a near 50,000 square foot building with a proposed service road running parallel to Pennsylvania Road. The proposal also cites future expansion plans of nearly 20,000 square feet on the eastern side of the proposed new building.

DFCU Financial announced in early November that it will expand to a new location in Taylor, taking over the old Sigur's Florist building on Wick and Pardee. It plans a January opening, and boosts 5,000 customers in the City. DFCU has 25 locations from Detroit to Grand Rapids, but the Taylor location will be only the second Downriver.

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