

Mayor's Message *August 3, 2010*



We have had some burglaries in our city recently and some people going house to house supposedly selling things. Since they may be checking to see who's home during the day, I have asked our security officers to find and approach such people and ask to see a Solicitation Permit from our city. Since they won't have one (we haven't issued any), they will then be told to leave the city immediately. You can ask that also, although I don't open my door to strangers at all. The only exception we must make is for the legally protected right of religious freedom. If they're Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, we can't require a permit. I have contacted the Gwinnett County Police to ask for additional patrols here and they have agreed to do that. Additionally, you are invited to a **Crime Prevention Seminar given by the Police at our City Hall on September 16th at 7:00 p.m.** I am expecting not only the crime prevention officer, but also the commander of our precinct. Come and meet him. This will be just prior to our September city council meeting, so it can't go on more than an hour and I hope we'll get good attendance. Remember my police officer friend who referred to "volunteer victims" and learn how not to be one. Surely there are sometimes when crime hits us in spite of all precautions, but there is much we can do to protect ourselves. I ask you again to look out for your neighbors, too. If you see a crime in progress, call 911 and then call our security officers. Their mobile phone is (770) 780-2456.

The City Engineer provided an extensive update at the regular July council meeting on the **dam repair project**. Please review those minutes and his Powerpoint presentation on our website if you're interested. Although no work is visible at the dam, much has been done in the lengthy and complex process of exploration, solution design, and work with Safe Dams. We are now further along than another dam in north Georgia which has been stuck in this part of the process for about 12 years. A parallel effort is finding the money to pay for it. I am pleased to tell you that although FEMA has for months refused to budge on the amount of help they will commit to us and had insisted that amount was final, they have recently provided us with a completely new team of evaluators and are starting over in their considerations. This is quite unusual, and we appreciate it. Our engineers, Rebecca Spitler, Frank Lombardi, Tom Rozier, and I met recently with the new team as well as two representatives from GEMA. A representative of Safe Dams also attended and provided a formal letter supporting our position that the dam was working fine before the storm. This was also unusual. They had for some time firmly resisted my request for such a letter. I am very grateful to have it now and hope it will make a difference in the new FEMA team's considerations. I appreciate everyone who made time to attend one of our four public hearings about dam related issues recently. Having heard from those citizens, council members passed a resolution to explore a tiered tax system through an objective outside agency between now and the next millage rate consideration. It will take time and money to do that, but our citizens want an objective study of tax fairness on this issue.

You can also read the July 15 council minutes to understand more about council's passage of a **new ordinance that forbids feeding of wildlife** except for fish and songbirds. This was quite a contentious issue which has been discussed throughout the community and at meetings for months before passage. At this meeting a mom and her daughter came to speak about a scary experience the young lady had when a hawk flew at her and took her cell phone from her hand. Apparently the hawk thought it was food and had been accustomed to taking food from local humans. A teacher from BL Elementary expressed concern for the children there if large predatory birds and animals are being taught to expect food from people. Many of us have enjoyed feeding the wildlife and I understand the desire to "help" the animals. I have been part of the problem. I have, for example, put tired- looking apples out in the woods near my house and thought, "I hope all you little beasties enjoy this." But the wildlife experts have made a believer out of me. I'm going to have to quit talking softly to the beautiful foxes, and just watch them silently from a distance. Healthy natural boundaries between us humans and the wild creatures around us are in their best interest and in ours. The recent hawk incident demonstrates that clearly, and I fear that if someone is hurt, the backlash on the animals will be severe. Predators in our environment are helpful to us as long as they retain their natural distance. We rarely see coyotes, for example, but they and the foxes are removing lots of rodents which will multiply with the lake down. I'm told that we average 14 coyote attacks on humans each year in this country and that there's never been one in Georgia, whereas there are 4.7 million dog attacks yearly. I've already been contacted about someone's pet which was killed after a neighbor put out poison for rats. If you need to poison, please do it carefully within your house so local pets and children can't get it. We are blessed to live in this beautiful place that provides a rare remnant of habitat for wildlife in the midst of all the development. Let's learn to coexist in a healthy way.

Those of you who have not given the City an email address have missed several *Mayor's Messages that went out only via email.* I know a few of you don't have access to email and I regret that you've missed these, but I was trying to save money, and will continue to do so from time to time, especially when there is something I need to get out quickly. It takes about a week for this to make it through the regular mail and sometimes there's news that shouldn't wait. If you want to get all information, please make sure the City has your email address, or ask a neighbor who's on the list to share information with you. I always send *Mayor's Messages* directly to all homeowner presidents, so they can get that to you if you ask them. We are also about to finalize the new City Directory, so if you don't send your information quickly, you will be left out of that. Please contact City Hall or complete the contact update form on our website.

August 10 is the **election** runoff, which is important because two candidates for our county commission seat are on that ballot: Lynette Howard and Keith Shewbert. They both came to the recent Saturday morning forum at our City Hall and fielded questions from a full house of our citizens. If you weren't able to attend, please find out what you can about these candidates to help you make a decision. You may be able to ask a neighbor who was there for their opinion. Remember also that we no longer vote at BL Elementary, but at Pinckneyville Community Center.

I have given to council members, P&Z Commissioners, and our homeowner association presidents some information they can share on the **possible privatization and expansion of Briscoe Field**, our local airport in Lawrenceville. Flights are being discussed that would carry

more than 100 passengers. My conversations with other mayors have left me doubtful that the advantages would outweigh the disadvantages for most Gwinnett County residents. In reviewing the effect on areas close to other regional airports, property values have gone down while the benefits accrue largely to areas somewhat farther away. That means it would probably benefit John's Creek (as an example) but could hurt Lawrenceville. We have a council member, Frank Lombardi, on the local airport authority, and you may want to discuss this issue with him as well.

Street repair needs have been assessed recently by our city engineer. The City paid for a thorough professional examination of all roads in the city; and the roads in Miramont and the main road in Berkeley Walk have been prioritized for repair. A Request for Proposal is being prepared by our engineers and the city will put this project out for bid shortly.

Under the leadership of Chris Kimberley **BLEMA** is being reorganized. Tom Kitchens has moved city emergency equipment which had been stored at his house into City Hall's basement. Council and BLEMA members have received 2 full days of emergency management training from an outside professional. You should be hearing more shortly about other training opportunities for citizens that Chris is exploring. He is soliciting support and participation from any citizen who would like to join our First Responder group. This could be very important in a time of community crisis, so if you are willing to help, please contact Chris at (770) 447-2424 or chriskimberley@comcast.net.

I have received information from the Ga. DOT that they will begin construction in early August to convert HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) lanes to **HOT (High Occupancy Toll) lanes on I-85** from Chamblee Tucker Rd. north to Old Peachtree Rd. They plan to avoid lane closures in high traffic hours. Funding for this project includes 36 new buses and 2 new Park-and-Ride lots.

Congratulations to BL Elementary School which has achieved the status of "**Distinguished School**" in recent rankings. Our other local public schools, Duluth Middle and High Schools, were also awarded that distinction, and we are proud of them all. If anyone is interested in volunteering at BLES, please contact me or City Council Member Anne Carpenter. Supporting this school supports your property values, and you could do something as simple as reading to kids at your convenience. I have really enjoyed my time there.

The following changes have been made to our **City Code of Ordinances** since the last *Mayor's Message*. Details are available on the website. On June 3, 2010, City Council passed O-114-10 amending Chapter 42, Article IV, Floodplain Management as required by FEMA as well as O-115-10 amending Chapter 42, Article II, Soil Erosion, Sedimentation and Pollution Control as required by the Department of Natural Resources. On July 15, 2010 City Council passed O-112-10 amending Chapter 10, Animals, to prohibit wildlife feeding with a few notable exceptions.

Spis D. Alter