I love my community! I truly do! I was born and raised in Simpson County and spent 40 years as a businessman in Franklin. My heart is here and I am very appreciative to have been elected as the Mayor of Franklin. Over the next four years, I would like to work with the county on projects that will benefit all the citizens of Franklin and Simpson County.

January 1st was the start of the New Year and New Leadership within the City of Franklin. Larry Dixon took office as Mayor after having served as a City Commissioner for 8 years. Brownie Bennett and Herbert Williams took office as newly elected Commissioners. Jamie Powell and Wendell Stewart returned to their seats as City Commissioners. In Franklin, the Mayor serves a four year term and the commissioners serve a two year term.

Since the Mayor and Commissioners have taken office, they have been busy learning the duties and responsibilities of their office as well as learning the day-to-day operations of City Government. On Wednesday, January 16th officials toured city departments. They met with department heads and employees to learn about the services and tasks the departments perform. The week of January 21st, new commissioners Bennett and Williams attended the Kentucky League of Cities training for Newly Elected Officials. It was 2 ½ days packed full of information to help them better understand the role of the office they now hold. On Monday, January 28th the Commission met with department heads to review the budget and learn more about the financial status of the City. Commissioner Bennett said, “I have learned so much in the last few weeks. It has been a wonderful learning experience to meet the employees who are in charge of each department, and to see, first hand, how hard and efficiently they work to ensure our city is a safer, enjoyable and more economical place to live. In addition, attending the KLC training sessions and local budget reviews has helped me to understand how difficult the job of City Government will actually be. It has been mind boggling as there is a lot to learn! There are so many Laws, Statutes, and Policies that govern what we must or must not do, as we work on next year’s budget and conduct the day to day business of the City of Franklin. However, I am up to the challenge!”

Keeping You Informed

February 2018 the City printed 6,000 copies and mailed the first edition of frankLINKentucky, a publication put together by city staff. The goal of the publication was to provide information and highlights of projects, work and information about where your tax dollars are spent. City staff plan to make this a yearly project. In February of 2018, the City began posting short informational videos on its Facebook page, website and the city cable channel (channel 3 on Comcast). The videos range in topics on what to do if you’re pulled over by a police officer to the dangers of blowing your grass clippings in the street. The goal is to share information that you may not know and explain why certain things are done or needed within city government. The city also posts the City Commission meetings. These are public meetings and anyone is welcome to attend at any time. However, if you can’t make it to a meeting you can stay informed by watching the meetings on Facebook, the website, or cable channel.
Growing!
2018 proved to be a year of growth. Several industries expanded and new ones completed construction and began production. The construction of single family homes increased 57% over the previous year. New homes also means new infrastructure must be put in place. As a result of the new construction, developers installed 5,675 feet of sewer line and 14 manholes which is a $445,700 infrastructure investment made in our community.

The Wastewater Collection department worked to improve infrastructure in 2018 by upgrading a lift station and 1,100 feet of 6” force main at a cost of $253,300. They also installed 51 new sewer taps. It was a busy year!

Clean & Tasty
Each day, the Franklin Municipal Water Treatment Plant cleans and processes approximately 2,000,000 gallons of water.

Each day over 100 tests are performed to ensure the quality and safety of the drinking water in our City. Class IV Operator Johnie Skipworth performs a manganese test on a sample of water.

Clean & Reuse
The Franklin Municipal Wastewater Treatment Plant treats 2,700,000 gallons of wastewater each day. Prior to discharging water into Drakes Creek, the Wastewater Treatment Plant removes more than 95% of contaminants. The discharge water from the wastewater plant is better quality than the water already in the creek.

Lighting the Way
After 31-W was widened it was apparent there was a need for lighting along the corridor from highway 1008 going south to the Wal-Mart/Lowe’s area. The City partnered with Warren Rural Electric Cooperative to install 20 new lights. These lights will increase safety to motorists and pedestrians. City employees were able to install the concrete bases for the lights then WRECC employees came in to install the light and electrical components. This team effort saved thousands of dollars for the City.

There are 1,295 street lights in the City of Franklin. The installation, maintenance and electricity costs for these lights is paid through the City General Fund at a cost of $123,000 per year.

City Budget
The City’s budget journey is a lengthy and thorough process. The budget process begins in March and is ongoing until final adoption in June. The City follows a “bottom up” approach to budgeting. This means each employee and their supervisors have a say in building the budget for their department. This allows everyone to have a voice in the budgeting process and ensures that City Leaders have a realistic understanding of what is needed to meet the needs of the upcoming fiscal year. Many budget strategy meetings are held, between the employees and the supervisors and then with the supervisors and the Finance Director and City Manager. At least two or three budget work sessions are held with the City Commission. At the budget work sessions, the City Manager and Finance Director discuss all the components of the budget in order to obtain guidance, direction and approval.
Paving the Way

Our streets...something most take for granted until we encounter a large pothole or crack that disturbs our driving. 2018 was a year of improvements in our streets. City Manager Kenton Powell worked with Senate Field Representative Sandy Simpson and Kentucky Transportation Cabinet District Director Joe Plunk for CSX Railroad and the State Highway Department to make over $1,000,000 in needed road improvements. The railroad crossings at Cedar Street and Madison Street had recently been the site of numerous accidents, tractor trailer trucks damaged, and 2 trucks struck by trains after they were unable to cross the railroad.  These crossings were re-worked, allowing an easier and safer crossing for vehicles.  Also, the state resurfaced 31-W at a cost of almost $800,000.

The City maintains 50 miles of streets. This does not include state roads such as Main Street, Cedar Street, Madison Street, Morgantown Road or many others. The Kentucky Department of Transportation maintains those roads. Each year, usually in February, the City of Franklin street department employees carefully inspect each street in the city. They count all the defects in the street such as potholes, alligator cracks, patches, etc. This information is put into a computer program that rates the streets from good to bad. From this rating, the streets are selected for repaving. Each yearly budget includes money for street resurfacing and maintenance. In 2018 the City spent $253,979 to repave a total of 3.8 miles on portions of ten streets. As funding allows, the City plans to continue making small improvements each year.

Healthy Changes...Financially

Health care is a major topic in many circles these days. Local governments struggle with the same issues as private business. How do we give our employees quality health care coverage while maintaining a balanced and responsible budget? The City of Franklin has implemented several new programs that have successfully controlled the rise in insurance premiums at both the individual premium level and the overall city budget level. The City has restructured the coverage, added healthy lifestyle incentives, become a smoke free workplace and increased the plan deductibles in order to keep the cost of health care manageable. If the City had not made these changes they would have had to absorb 70% in increases over the last 8 years. This relates to approximately $303,000 saved.

Healthy Changes...Lifestyle

2018 was a year of healthy lifestyle changes for long time city employee Jerry Farmer. Jerry has worked for the City for 29 years and serves as the Superintendent of the Water Treatment Plant. He is dedicated to the City, his work and fellow employees.

In an effort to save money on health insurance premiums, the City implemented a higher premium on health insurance coverage for tobacco users. This increase was effective July 1, 2018. Prior to that implementation, Jerry made the decision to quit smoking. He said, “After a lifetime of smoking, I thought it was time and wanted to see if I could.” He started smoking in 1966 and said he was, “Way too young to be smoking!” Jerry hasn’t had a cigarette since July 23rd and says he feels much better.

Shortly after Jerry quit smoking, an employee at the Water Plant suggested they take their daily morning meeting outside and discuss issues while they walk. So, in September they began walking, as a department, around the perimeter of the plant. Jerry said, “It’s a great time together. We discuss plant operations, ways to make improvements, and encourage each other to live healthy.” Jerry said he now walks 2.2 miles every day. He feels better and has more energy. He attributes this change to a healthier lifestyle. He plans to continue walking and has set a goal of participating in the Garden Spot Walk in August.

Preserving our History

2019 marks the 200th birthday of Simpson County. 2020 the City will celebrate 200 years! As we celebrate it is important that we preserve our past for future generations. The historic courthouse was built in 1882. The buildings and shops that surround the courthouse add to the character and ambience of our town. In an effort to ensure the preservation of our beautiful historic downtown, the City Commission adopted an ordinance in April that allowed for the development of preservation standards and a preservation committee. The committee was formed and has worked to develop Historic Overlay Standards which were designed to protect the historical integrity of Downtown Franklin. The committee has also reviewed 22 requests for improvements to structures in the Historic District since it was formed. "Since 2013, a total of 41 different entrepreneurs have invested in the Downtown Historic District by opening a business. Not all of these businesses have remained open through the end of 2018, but this interest in our downtown has spurred growth and has created what is now a vibrant shopping district," said Amy Ellis, Executive Director of Franklin-Simpson Renaissance. "In addition, we have over 34 apartments and condos downtown. The mixture of living spaces, retail shops, offices and eateries has created an economic boost for our Downtown. The renovation of several downtown buildings has helped to create this environment. Renaissance is looking forward to what is in store for our downtown as we move forward."
Pension Crisis.

What does this mean for our City?

Discussion of the State Pension Crisis was in the news a lot in 2018. A question that has been asked is: “Why can’t the city do something different for retirement for city employees?” The Kentucky Retirement System is governed by the state and state statute (law). Local government employees are required to participate in the Kentucky Retirement System. The Kentucky Retirement Board sets the rate and local governments are required, by law, to pay that rate. Bottom line, opting out, is not an option.

So how does this affect our community? Legislators in Frankfort are currently discussing legislation that will be proposed to address the issue. The City of Franklin’s Mayor and City Attorney both hold seats on KLC’s Legislative Board, so they will play an active role in legislative lobbying efforts regarding this issue. Meanwhile, the oversight board for KRS increased employer contribution rates to help fund the shortfall. The shortfall is a result of years of underfunding at the state level without tax increases which, in turn, created the multi-billion dollar crisis. The City of Franklin will be required to increase their contribution to the state retirement fund by approximately $500,000 from FY2019 to FY2023.

Leadership in Frankfort

Setting policies, proposing legislation, and working with cities has been a task that City Attorney Scott Crabtree has been involved with for the last 6 years as he has served on the Kentucky League of Cities Legislative Board of Directors. The past 4 years he also served on Kentucky League of Cities’ Executive Board which is responsible for the day-to-day workings of KLC. During that time, he has written or co-written many pieces of legislation that have benefited cities and, more particularly, Franklin.

Mayor Larry Dixon was also appointed to serve on the Legislative Board of Directors in December. This is the first time in the history of the City of Franklin that we have had two members on this Board. Crabtree and Dixon will work together with other elected officials and leaders from across the state to set the legislative agenda to help lobby for, create, and advocate for legislation to assist municipalities. The Board also reviews laws that are being proposed to the State Legislature that affect cities. After careful review they may suggest modifications to the law or advocate for or against the proposed legislation.

Being a part of an organization for 6 years, Crabtree has developed many working relationships across the Commonwealth. He said, “I have a network of people to bounce ideas off of and a great opportunity to learn from others.” He has also played a part in developing and re-writing the statutory scheme for code enforcement, a program now used across the state. Crabtree sees his involvement as beneficial in many ways. He said, “Not only am I fortunate enough to be able to make a difference and help our City, but I’ve been able to propose ideas for bills and statutes every year that help cities across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.”