

A look back at 2020 in Lake Ozark

That was the year that was

That was the year that was. Yes, it certainly was.

The year 2020 started out with great expectations among most of us, especially the lake-area communities that continued to enjoy revenue increases. There was hope that there would be moderate growth to welcome the 2020s.

But an unwelcome malady that came to be known as COVID-19, aka coronavirus, reared its ugly head in early March. Its fear has now consumed our lives for nearly 10 months and continued to re-chart our paths as we slipped over the divide between 2020 and 2021.

The pandemic was relieved at least in part by vaccines that were developed late in the year. Essential workers and the elderly were offered the vaccines first, with the rest of the population scheduled sometime in 2021.

Sadly, 48 deaths in Miller County were attributed to COVID-19 during 2020. And while those deaths were tragic, life does go on – certainly in their memory.

Yet in the wake of COVID, there was hope and optimism.

The City of Lake Ozark was the first to openly encourage residents and visitors by erecting a banner at each end of The Strip that declared “Welcome. Your Good Health is Important.” Soon after, hand sanitizing stations were erected at several locations along The Strip long before the tourist season began.

City officials were in step with Miller County Health Center, Missouri Department of Health and Human Services and CDC recommendations to avoid the spread of COVID-19 throughout the pandemic.

Lost in the media-driven COVID bombardment was the resilience of the people of Missouri. The Lake of the Ozarks – and particularly the City of Lake Ozark – represented how public health and economics can be strategically balanced. Not only has Lake Ozark survived as a community but it is emerging as strong or stronger than a year ago.

What a year

The year 2020 was monumental for the City of Lake Ozark.

“You have to look at what has been done for our community with a renewed focus on economic development,” Mayor Gerry Murawski said. “We’re one of the fastest growing communities at the lake from a retail development perspective and in terms of population. We’re confident that with the continued vision of our board of aldermen and administration Lake Ozark will continue to show balanced growth.”

In the depths of the COVID pandemic, the city was able to secure the support of its voters who approved two measures in June that over time will lead to the improvement of the city’s 90 miles of streets.

One is the passage of a Use Tax applied to purchases made online from companies that do not have a presence in the state.



The Use Tax is expected to generate about \$100,000 in revenue which would help pay for revenue bonds issued for street construction projects.

The other issue authorizes the city to borrow up to \$6 million over the next several years to improve streets.

Another significant board decision in 2020 was the endorsement of a Transportation Development District (TDD) that would add ¾ of a cent in sales tax charged by businesses within the TDD area.

“We’ve heard from our businesses, our residents and our visitors for several years that our streets need some work,” Mayor Murawski said. “Now, we have the tools we need to make that happen. The city worked hard for several months to provide accurate information so voters could make good decisions. It’s another example of how the city and its residents can work together for the long-term betterment of everyone.”

Highlights

- The Strip saw continued improvements and expansions led by the construction of The Malted Monkey, a unique and family friendly entertainment venue. JB Hooks on Bagnell Dam Blvd. made a major investment in its restaurant facility. Several other bars and restaurants made substantial improvements as well.

- Three street improvement projects took place as the result of a 2019 Road Assessment Study: Overlay of the Horseshoe Bend / Bagnell Dam intersection; resurfacing of Lakeland Road; resurfacing of Old Highway 54 from Rt. 242 to the intersection with Bagnell Dam Blvd.

- Magruder Companies and the City of Lake Ozark kickstarted the first industrial park in the city limits.

- The city saw \$10.3 million in residential and commercial construction which adds to the city’s tax base.

- There were 61 building permits issued for new construction and remodeling projects.

- There were 213 business licenses issued.

- A new, municipal-based website was approved by the board of aldermen. It will offer the public more transparency into city government and be easier for the public to use.

- An online utility bill pay and court

payment system was implemented for the benefit and convenience of residents and others.

- The city’s sales tax revenue showed unexpected growth of nearly 8 percent over budgeted amounts.

- The city was able to leverage and use local and state resources building on partnerships to take on new road construction and other infrastructure.

- The city entered into an agreement with the Lake of the Ozarks Council of Local Governments to update the Comprehensive Plan, which is a steppingstone for the future of the city.

- The board of aldermen approved site plans for a new Casey’s and the construction of a Tiny Homes complex on School Road.

- The city ended the year with positive fund balances in most funds and was able to continue to build its reserve funds.

- The city increased its starting wages for Public Works employees and Lake Ozark Police Department officers and dispatchers.

- The city was able to continue to pay down its debt obligations and should be debt free by 2025 assuming that existing policies continue. The City Hall building will be paid off in the fall of 2021.

- The city expanded its focus on community development by adding the position of assistant city administrator and community development director (Harrison Fry).

- The city contracted with a public information officer (Dan Field) to help keep residents and visitors informed about what’s going on in the city and to manage the city’s website.

- The board of aldermen passed an ordinance that allows golf carts with certain restrictions on some city streets.

- Both water towers were painted inside and out to ensure the longevity of the towers and to maintain the quality of the city’s water supply.

“Look at what’s been accomplished in the last year, which we all know was difficult because of COVID,” Mayor Murawski said. “With the vision of the board of aldermen and our committees and the community we’ve been able to move forward. It’s about building on our heritage and still maintaining a vision of economic development and expanded housing opportunities.”