



Speech: [State Of The City 2018](#)

Speaker: [Mayor Rod Davies](#)

Good afternoon and thank you for coming today. Before we get started, I want to thank the people who have made this event possible. I want to thank Amy and the Chamber for hosting this event. Stan thank you and all the people at Security Savings Bank for sponsoring this event again this year.

I would also like to take a moment to thank my colleagues on the City Council. It is a great honor and privilege to work with a team of people who are so dedicated to improving our community. Having served in public office for almost 30 years, I am extremely proud to work with this group of council members to move our City forward.

We face new challenges with varying degrees of difficulty every day. The financial crisis in Springfield is causing all units of local government serious financial difficulties. I certainly don't deal with those problems alone. I want to thank our staff for all they do to make our City run so smoothly. The City of Monmouth is very fortunate to have such a dedicated staff of people who strive each day to improve the lives of our citizens.

I also want to thank our public works and public safety departments for their dedicated service. Our Public works and public safety deal with emergency issues around the clock every day.

While the faces may change from time-to-time, our core value of quality, friendly service to our residents remains at the foundation of what we do.

When I decided to run for Mayor more than a dozen years ago, I felt that Monmouth's best days were ahead of it. Even though we've grown hundreds of new jobs, invested tens of millions of dollars in new infrastructure, and had hundreds of millions of dollars invested in our City and at Monmouth College I still feel as that even better days are still ahead of us. We have many important projects coming on line, and we have a well-prepared City staff with experience and the institutional knowledge to finish this work.

Before we look at our own community, we have to pause and take stock of what's happening in Springfield. We still have a very serious budget crisis with no real solution in sight. All Communities are receiving ever shrinking amounts from our shared local revenues as well.

For years, we have been promised genuine pension reform, but no solutions have been delivered. We are continually being told pensions are a local problem. How can these unsustainable costs be local when we are mandated by the State what we, as a City must pay, what our public safety workers must contribute, and what our pension funds can and can't invest in? 55% of our public safety pension assets are required to be invested in fixed income investments which guarantees we cannot meet the investment rate of return used in the actuarial assumptions. Until there is real pension reform, all cities in Illinois will continue to struggle. The Governor's plan to incorporate our local pension plans into the IMRF Fund which would save management costs is the best option I've heard. It is an established and well managed multi-employer plan that would protect retiree and current employee retirement benefits, while creating a new defined contribution tier for all newly hired employees.

In an era of ever-shrinking federal and state assistance, our State of Illinois is still issuing unfunded mandates. It's certainly a challenging time, and it once again reminds us that to prosper and to grow, we must look to our own strengths and create our own opportunities.

In spite of the challenges provided by Springfield Fiscal Year 2018 was another good year for Monmouth. The City of Monmouth continues to receive interest in new commercial development both in the downtown and on the north side near the intersection of State Highways 34 and 67. There already exists a strong commercial base of retail, restaurants, gas stations, and lodging accommodations around the by-pass and that area added a new Casey's General Store. There has also been a new restaurant added in the strip mall near Shopko and another just east of Smithfield Foods. That part of town is looking to have a promising future as we have had other inquiries from developers for commercial development projects in that area.

Downtown has seen the renovations and repurposing on several ground floor storefronts with the opening of a new ice cream parlor, barber shop and restaurant. The City undertook a beautification project in cooperation with the West Central Leadership Class of 2018 to landscape a city-owned vacant lot on South 1<sup>st</sup> Street to accent nearby downtown

businesses. We are encouraging the adjacent businesses to utilize that space for cooperative outdoor events. We have also seen a number of businesses change ownership as the original entrepreneurs retire and a new generation grabs the reins and continues to invest in our community.

Another family owned business, Fareway Grocery, decided to move into our community. With the cooperation and assistance from Monmouth College, they purchased the College's maintenance facility at Highway 34 and 6<sup>th</sup> Street, where they will build a new 21,000 square foot grocery store with a \$5 million investment and will be creating approximately 75 new jobs in the Monmouth community.

Monmouth College completed a \$5 million major renovation of Grier Hall in an effort to provide modern accommodations to successfully recruit today's young college students.

Smithfield Foods and Cloverleaf Cold Storage continue to provide a strong economic and employment base for Monmouth and constitute the foundation for much of the direct and indirect generation of financial resources that support municipal services delivered to the City's residents. Smithfield is currently involved in a multi-million dollar state-of-the-art expansion and modernization of their hog processing facility.

In response to ensuring an adequate supply of safe, drinking water to all residents and businesses, the City completed a \$2.8 million project this past year, to drill a new municipal water well, construct a water transmission main to pump water from the new well to the municipal water treatment plant, and install a new water softener at the treatment facility. This project now provides a reliable and redundant water source to industrial users and our citizens for daily consumption and public safety in the event of a well failure in the system. Because of the new well, a shutdown of our main well for two weeks has gone unnoticed. We have been able to replace a well pump and other aging components in the well and not experience any interruption in service. These needed repairs to the primary well have strengthened the redundancy of the water supply and distribution system.

The City and Smithfield Foods also entered into a 20-year agreement to finance \$3 million worth of capital improvements at the North Waste Water Pre-Treatment Facility that exclusively treats the discharge from the hog processing plant, again to ensure continued nonstop operation of this private facility constituting the region's largest employer. A new

force main that carries waste from the processing plant to the wastewater pre-treatment plant was constructed in the spring to replace a 60-year-old unreliable sewer pipe and one of the two wastewater clarifiers was upgraded this summer, to ensure no stoppage of operations of the hog processing facility. Failure of either of these two critical components of the wastewater treatment system would have threatened a long-term shutdown of the Smithfield operation. The City also undertook and completed a \$450,000 road construction project which was made possible by a public private partnership last summer to correct a water drainage issue that was damaging the road, and widened it to support semi-truck traffic hauling agricultural products to a Monmouth grain storage facility.

The City completed a \$2.4 million project to replace an old sewer overflow pumping system with a new larger pump designed to handle excessive water flow during heavy rain events. This project like the majority of our infrastructure projects was mandated by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. The new pump system can handle up to 55,000 gallons of combined sewer overflow per minute, when necessary, and keeps the City in compliance with state and federal environmental regulations. The US and Illinois EPA mandate that we do various projects without any source of funds. We always provide financial facts and statistics that show that the City and its residents cannot afford these projects. We are none the less ordered to do them and its up to us to figure out the best way to pay for it and minimize the financial impact on our residents.

Improvements have been completed at the City-owned Citizens Lake Campground that have enhanced existing campsite spaces and added new campsites serving recreational vehicles. We also completed construction of a new handicapped-accessible fishing pier and parking lot. The Citizens Lake improvements were funded by an OSLAD Grant from the State and a local foundation provided the required local match. The City also received a \$1 million federal Community Development Block Grant to replace sections of water main and fire hydrants on the southeast side of town to benefit a neighborhood comprised primarily of low-to-moderate income households and improve flow of water through the system to other parts of town. That project is expected to be under construction by late 2018 or early 2019. The City was also able to complete over \$500,000 of required improvements at the Monmouth Airport. With State and Federal Aviation Grants we were able to construct a new electrical vault, update and upgrade the navigational aids and complete a security fence.

The City undertook and completed a Housing Needs Study for the Monmouth community which identified and quantified the demand for market rate housing units, including new single-family homes, condominiums and upscale rental units. The study concluded that Monmouth can support 75 new homes which is being used to attract private land developers and housing contractors. This report provides a much better understanding of Monmouth's unique opportunities to address the needs of new perspective home owners and/or residents. The City is currently in discussions with a private residential developer to build a new subdivision for new quality homes. The study further concluded that 60% of workers commute into Monmouth for jobs and that the market could likely support up to 165 new residential units, including apartment complexes and 28 upscale downtown apartments. There is also a market demand for additional senior citizen housing units and the City is having preliminary discussions with a private residential developer on just such a project in Monmouth.

The City received our third Housing Rehabilitation Grant. This grant for \$301,860 will assist at least six homes in the northwest portion of the City fitting the criteria set forth in the grant. Renovation on the homes identified in the grant will most likely begin in the fall of 2018. For those residences beyond repair, the City of Monmouth applied for, and received, an Abandoned Property Grant for \$26,790, which will cover the clean-up or demolition cost for six properties that are in extremely poor condition.

The City is currently working on exterior improvements to the Vaughn's and Halls Shoes Store buildings on South Main Street. These downtown historic buildings have new roofs, tuckpointing, wall rebuilding and the broken or boarded up windows on the second floor were replaced to preserve the building's structural integrity. This work has been followed by interior upgrades in the plumbing and electrical systems. The City has also retained a commercial painter to completely repaint the front of those buildings which will enhance the overall appearance of the building and in-turn that entire block of downtown Monmouth. One of the storefronts has been occupied by a new commercial tenant and preliminary discussions have begun with a developer interested in finishing the upper floor for residential apartments.

We are also reapplying for an ITEP Grant this coming year. We are taking things we learned from our first application to improve our chances for this year's grant application.

That grant would fund a major renovation of the town's central park area in the center of town.

Contractors have begun removal of the abandoned BNSF railroad crossing on North Main Street this week. Through negotiation with BNSF we were able to secure funding to facilitate their removal.

While we can't escape the challenges, we face due to the indecision down in Springfield, we can make great strides by taking advantage of our Midwestern work ethic and rolling up our sleeves and getting down to the hard work of making our community prosper – using our own local resources.

We've done great things here in Monmouth, but as I said at the start of my remarks, I think our best days are still ahead of us. We have the right team in place, and the knowledge to follow through on the important work ahead of us. Thank you all for the honor of letting me serve as your Mayor. Have a great afternoon.

-Mayor Rod Davies