



## City of Bronson 2023 Annual Report



## **The Bronson Creed**

I believe in Bronson and its responsibilities; and I shall do my part to make it a better place in which to live.

I believe in good government for Bronson, and I shall assume my share of the civic responsibility that rest on the shoulders of all our citizens.

I believe in supporting local enterprises that make for community development, and shall contribute my moral support and energy to any worthy cause championed by them.

I believe in patronizing home merchants, for they are greatly responsible for our having good schools and churches, better roads and promotion of the general welfare of the community.

I believe in making Bronson clean and attractive, for a healthy atmosphere is an inducement to honest and right-thinking citizens.

I believe in boosting my home town at every possible opportunity; that thinking, talking and acting progress is the quickest and surest way to bring permanent prosperity to Bronson – the best town in American – because it is MY HOME!

**From the Bronson Journal- 1924**

### **City of Bronson City Council Information:**

The City of Bronson has a Council-Manager form of government. The City Manager is charged with the day-to-day operation of the municipality and is appointed by and answers directly to the City Council. The City Council meets at the Bronson City office at 5:00 p.m. on the second Monday of every month.

The City of Bronson is governed by a five-person, elected City Council. Three seats on the Council are open every two years. Two seats are four-year terms and one is a two-year term. Following each election, the Council elects from its members a Mayor and Vice-Mayor.

**Mayor:** Matt Watkins (term expires November 2026)

**Vice-Mayor:** William Earl (term expires November 2026)

**Council:** Wiliam Rinehart (term expires November 2024)  
Rick Johannes (term expires November 2024)  
Larry McConn (term expires November 2024)

#### **Bronson Area Fire Association Representatives:**

City Manager Mersman  
Councilman Johannes

#### **Bronson Community Foundation Representatives:**

City Manager Mersman  
Mayor Watkins

## **2024 City Council Meeting Schedule:**

### **2024 Meeting Dates**

- January 28, 2024
- February 12, 2024
- March 11, 2024
- April 8, 2024
- May 13, 2024
- June 10, 2024
- July 8, 2024
- August 12, 2024
- September 9, 2024
- October 14, 2024
- November 11, 2024
- December 8, 2024

## **City Council Goals 2023-2024 (from FY2023-24 Budget)**

### **Goal: Business Retention and Attraction**

- Continue strategy of focusing on current employers and businesses and working with them to see expansion.
- Continue efforts to attract new businesses and work with interested businesses looking to relocate.
- Continue to implement benchmarks of the Redevelopment Ready Communities Program and engage related MEDC resources.

### **Goal: Enhance and Undertake Bronson “Place-Making” Activities**

- Continue to make Bronson more walkable and bikeable; including updating sidewalk ramps to ADA compliant.
- Develop the former Northeastern Rail Line for non-motorized trail usage and update parks and amenities with increased accessibility. Work towards applying for MDNR grants.
- Work towards evaluating and updating City Zoning Ordinances and the Master Plan.
- Continue working with supporting the Downtown Development Authority (DDA).
- Continue working with community partners (DDA, Chamber of Commerce, Polish Festival, etc.) and businesses to expand and better market downtown activities:
  - August Memorial Park Concert Series
  - City Wide Garage Sales/US 12 Sales
  - Polish Festival
  - Farmer’s Market
  - Bronson Theater
  - Other new events

### **Goal: Infrastructure Improvements**

- Apply for infrastructure grants as they become available (MEDC Infrastructure Grants, MDOT, others).
- Work with EGLE towards addressing Inflow & Infiltration, including necessary sanitary sewer system improvements.
- Work towards implementation of improvements outlined in the City's Capital Improvement Plan.
- Continue collaboration with Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study and Branch County Road Commission for street improvement targets and work.
- Increase annual road preventative maintenance work using additional General Fund Contributions.
- Continue coordinated approach for infrastructure improvements.

### **Goal: Optimize Organizational Efficiency**

- Consider energy-efficiency projects in coordination with Michigan Gas Utilities and Consumers Energy to improve facility efficiency.
- Work with Consumers Energy on potential street-lighting improvements as programs become available.
- Better plan for equipment purchases and uses across departments.
- Continue public outreach efforts using the City's website, Facebook pages, and Instagram account.

## **City of Bronson 2023 Annual Report Introduction:**

This report provides a brief summary of City projects and accomplishments for the year 2023. As a community, we have made significant progress in addressing infrastructure and equipment upgrades during the year. In 2023, the City was awarded a \$30,000 grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to begin the process of updating its Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The updated plans will serve as a roadmap for land use, development, reinvestment, and housing in the City of Bronson.

In 2023, the City finalized the purchase of the PNC building at 120 West Chicago Street. The building will serve as the new headquarters for the Bronson Police Department, offering a more visible location within the city, making it easier for residents to access police services. The new location provides the Police Department with more space, allowing for additional offices and expanded services. The Police Department has completed the move and is currently working out of the building. Building upgrades will continue throughout 2024.

The City was awarded a \$234,000 Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) Emerging Contaminates Assessment grant in 2023. The grant covers wastewater collection system sampling for PFAS, seasonal impacts on sanitary sewer PFAS concentrations, PFAS source identification, and flow monitoring at source sites. This work helps identify potential contamination within the treatment plant and collection system, and legacy/orphan sources of PFAS use in the City. With PFAS limits dropping dramatically, this would allow us to identify

issues at the plant and other areas where we can work to reduce the PFAS impact to biosolids. There was no match requirement for the grant.

The City continued to work towards addressing the Administrative Consent Order (ACO) it entered into with EGLE in 2022 regarding excessive Inflow and Infiltration in the City's sanitary sewer system. The City is currently working with Abonmarche on project plans to address these issues and meeting with EGLE on funding options to help finance the necessary improvements and repairs. This will be a major project currently estimated at roughly \$5.5-\$8 million dollars.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Brandon Mersman", written in black ink on a light gray rectangular background.

Brandon M. Mersman  
City Manager

## Highlights of 2023 Projects & Accomplishments:

### ***Policy, Planning & Ordinances***

*Golf Cart Ordinance:* In November, the City Council approved Ordinance #222 to allow golf carts on City streets. The City Manager, City Attorney, and Chief Johnson worked together to research and draft the ordinance. The ordinance follows the Michigan Vehicle Code and includes a number of user requirements. The ordinance also provides for penalties that would be treated as civil infractions. The first violation would be \$100.00 and the second and subsequent violations shall be \$150.00. The City designed and ordered annual registration stickers through Sticker Mule that will be issued for \$20.00 following a successful inspection by the Department.



*Decriminalizing Certain Ordinances:* In November, the City Council, with a recommendation from Chief Johnson and the City Attorney, reduced the penalty for several City ordinances. The ordinances were reduced from misdemeanors down to civil infractions, making it easier and less time consuming for prosecution. Ordinance #221 addresses the following sections of the Bronson Municipal Ordinance: Public Nuisances; Streets and Sidewalks; Theaters, Exhibitions and Outdoor Shows; Fire Protection and Prevention; and Chapter 154.99A of the Zoning Code.

### ***Madsen Steel Wire Products***

In 2023, Branch Industrial Park, LLC, purchased the buildings at 211 and 213 Industrial Avenue and seven (7) acres of vacant land between 213 Industrial Avenue and Cronkhite Vault previously owned by the City. This facility at 211 and 213 Industrial Avenue sat vacant since 2009 and required major renovations and upgrades for it to be usable for them.

To help facilitate this development, the City Council approved a Resolution to Establish a Plant Rehabilitation District (Resolution #23-6-5). This incentive allows them to freeze the current value of the building at its current value before renovations, and hold that taxable value for up to twelve (12) years. The value of the land would be separate and would increase over time, while the physical structure and personal property would be frozen.

Madsen Steel Wire Products chose Bronson over a competing site in Indiana due to the ease of collaboration and proximity to its company headquarters in Orland. The project received a \$552,000 Michigan Business Development Program performance-based grant from MEDC. Having this building improved, in operation, and creating jobs will be a great benefit to the community moving forward.

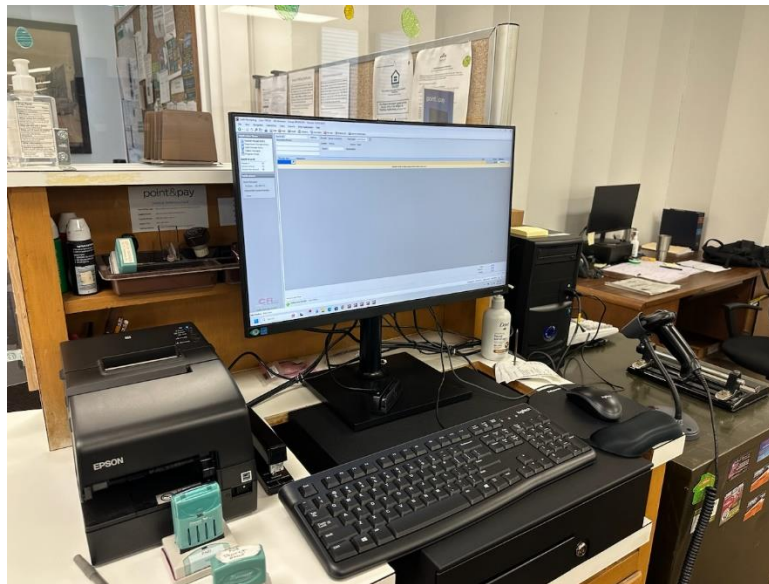


## ***Assessing Services***

In September, the City released an RFP in order to seek assessing services on a part-time contractual basis. Bids were opened on October 3<sup>rd</sup> with the City receiving three (3) responses. R&R Assessing was the low bidder at \$14,400 per year, not including additional charges for splits, boundary adjustments, and combinations. On October 9<sup>th</sup>, Council selected R&R Assessing. The City has been working with Anne Richmond of R&R Assessing since October.

## ***City Hall Point of Sale System***

In 2023, the City went live with a new point-of-sale computer system at City Hall. The system includes a scanner, allowing staff to scan bills and quickly access resident records at the service window. With the new system, wait times are reduced for residents, and City staff can be more efficient when completing transactions with fewer possibilities for errors.



## ***Resolution Authorizing Issuance of Bond Anticipation Note***

In May, the City Council authorized the issuance of a Bond Anticipation Note (Resolution #23-5-4) in order to fund the upfront engineering work to begin to address Inflow and Infiltration in the City in an amount not to exceed \$1,400,000. Project design plans to address Inflow and Infiltration are required under the City's Administrative Consent Order (ACO) with EGLE. The Bond Anticipation Note (BAN) was taken out so that the City could meet the deadlines imposed by the ACO, with the intent that a loan/grant would repay the note.

## ***Zoning Board of Appeals Variances***

The City Council also serves as the City's Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). The ZBA approved one variance request in 2023.

***Walnut Street-*** The Zoning Board of Appeals approved a dimensional variance for the construction of a new home on Lot 18 Schmid Farms Plat No. 1 on Walnut Street (Parcel 200-004-000-183-18). The variance approved was a lot depth variance.

### ***Zoning Amendments***

The City Council approved one petition for zoning amendment in 2023 for 150 Wayne Street. The purpose of the application was to rezone parcel 200-004-000-073-98 from R-3 to B-3, in order to construct a commercial self-storage facility. The applicant, Tyler Stritzinger, plans to construct seven (7) all steel buildings totaling 47,600 square feet (if fully completed). The City Council approved the rezoning at their October 9, 2023 Regular Meeting. The applicant plans to begin construction in 2024.

### ***Site Plan Reviews/Special Land Use Permits***

The Planning Commission received one site plan submittal and considered three special land use applications in 2023. The Commission approved a site plan for Cronkhite Vault on Industrial Avenue (Parcel 200-001-000-276-04) for a new pet cremation facility at their April 17, 2023 Special Meeting. The commission also approved three special land use permits in 2023:

- 201 Compton Street for an at home occupation of a day care.
- 190 Oak Drive for an at home occupation of a day care.
- 224 Shaffmaster for an at home occupation of a day care.

### ***Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) Progress***

In August, the City Council approved Zoning Board of Appeals By-laws, and a City Council Orientation Guide and Training Strategy. These documents are a requirement of the Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program, which the City is actively pursuing. By showing progress towards finishing the remaining items necessary for the RRC Essentials Program, the City was able to apply for and receive a \$30,000 technical assistance grant for the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance updates.

### ***Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance Updates***

On July 11, 2023, the City released an RFP seeking assistance preparing an updated Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The City received four (4) proposals in response to this RFP from qualified contractors. After careful review, Council approved the selection of Abonmarche, due to their twelve (12) month timeline and public engagement strategy. Abonmarche's bid for this project was \$47,000. The total cost of this project for the City will be \$17,000 thanks to a \$30,000 technical assistance grant the City received from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation on October 24, 2023. Work on the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance updates started in October with the release of a community-wide survey.





## ***Employee Pension Plan***

Municipal Employee's Retirement System (MERS): In 2023, the City received its 2022 MERS pension plan valuation. The plans funding ratio went from 80% funded at the end of 2021 to 83% funded at the end of 2022. In the spring of 2024, the City will receive the 2023 valuation. The City has made progress in increasing the funding ratio by making voluntary contributions in years prior. In January of 2022 the City Council approved a voluntary contribution of \$50,000 to the MERS surplus fund. Below is a table from the 2022 valuation that shows the funding ratio percentage by year.

**Table 7: Actuarial Accrued Liabilities – Comparative Schedule**

Valuation Date December 31	Actuarial Accrued Liability	Valuation Assets	Percent Funded	Unfunded (Overfunded) Accrued Liabilities
2008	\$ 413,492	\$ 301,718	73%	\$ 111,774
2009	424,998	330,009	78%	94,989
2010	1,454,330	886,237	61%	568,093
2011	1,579,361	973,741	62%	605,620
2012	1,665,666	1,051,720	63%	613,946
2013	1,768,256	1,167,052	66%	601,204
2014	1,917,762	1,237,160	65%	680,602
2015	2,161,142	1,310,864	61%	850,278
2016	2,296,215	1,399,354	61%	896,861
2017	2,399,836	1,508,387	63%	891,449
2018	2,521,583	1,809,973	72%	711,610
2019	2,677,653	1,902,634	71%	775,019
2020	2,843,354	2,088,747	73%	754,607
2021	3,054,758	2,446,150	80%	608,608
2022	3,169,530	2,643,380	83%	526,150

Notes: Actuarial assumptions were revised for the 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2020, and 2021 actuarial valuations.

## ***Infrastructure (Water, Wastewater, Roads):***

***Road Maintenance/Improvements-*** In 2023, the City worked with the Branch County Road Commission to perform preventative maintenance on City streets and parking lots. City staff recommended the following roads and parking lots for improvements:

- City Hall Parking Lot (crack fill, paver patching, and fog seal)
- Cemetery Drives (crack fill and fog seal)
- Mowry, West Railroad, and Sherman Street (Chip & Seal and Paver Patching)
- Roosevelt (crack fill)
- South Walker (crack fill and chip seal)

The total cost for the work on the roads and parking lots came in at \$57,045.59, slightly more than the original estimate of \$54,915. The final cost is based on actual materials and labor used by the Road Commission.

## ***DPW Trailer Purchase***

In March, the City Council approved the purchase of a new PJ 20 FR landscaping trailer from D.R. Trailer Sales Inc. for the Department of Public Works. The trailer is twenty (20) feet in length and has a weight capacity of 14,000 lbs. The previous trailer did not have a braking system and was undersized for the department's needs. The cost of the trailer was \$6,933.00.

## ***Treatment Plant Equipment Purchases***

In October, the City Council approved the purchase of a new Hach DR 3900 laboratory VIS Spectrophotometer and a new DRB200 Digital Reactor (digestor) for the treatment plant. The equipment was recommended to the City by John Holland from Michigan Rural Water. The system tests samples in vials electronically and gives highly accurate results faster than previous methods. The equipment cost was \$8,322.00 without the annual contract for service. Additionally, the equipment requires the purchase of Hach's premixed testing vials, which cost \$500-\$700 per month. The purchase of this equipment will modernize the treatment plant's lab, while ensuring consistent testing results and reducing the amount of time spent on testing.



In November, the City Council approved the purchase of six (6) Water Solutions Unlimited scales for the wells and an Idexx Sealer Plus fecal coliform testing unit. Previously, City staff manually measured the height of the phosphate, fluoride, and chlorine drums at the wells to determine feeder rates. By adding scales, staff is able to make consistently accurate readings. The Idexx Sealer Plus testing unit replaces equipment that had been in use at the plant since 1987, so upgrading to a new “fool-proof” machine was overdue. The cost was \$2,940 for the Water Solutions Unlimited scales and \$8,556.15 for the Idexx Sealer Plus testing unit.

In December, the City Council approved the purchase of new stainless-steel rods from Sutton Machining for the City’s clarifier tanks at the wastewater treatment plant. The company that made our original equipment, Walker Process Equipment, quoted us a price of \$7,455.00. Sutton Machining provided an estimate of \$3,537.00 for regular steel and \$4,287.00 for stainless-steel. We believe that stainless steel rods will give us better value and a longer useful life as these components are constantly submerged in water.

### ***City Hall Generator***

In February, the City Council approved the purchase and installation of a Generac Guardian 24KW generator from Alliance Electrical. The Generac Guardian was recommended by Alliance Electrical, who felt it was a better solution for the City than smaller capacity units. The cost of the generator and installation was \$10,290 and included a three (3) year warranty on parts. The generator ensures that communication systems and administrative functions can continue at City Hall during power outages. This will help us maintain uninterrupted services to our residents.



### ***Tree Stump Removal***

In June, the City released an RFP seeking bids for the removal of twenty-two (22) tree stumps in the City. Bids were opened for this project on July 13<sup>th</sup>, with the City receiving twelve (12) responses. Affordable Outdoor was the low bidder at \$1,669.50 for the project work. Affordable Outdoor was able to successfully remove all twenty-two (22) tree stumps in the City in a single day.

## ***Police Department***

*Salvage Inspections-* In 2023, Officer Ferry was able to attend Salvage Inspection School to help alleviate some of the demand on Chief Johnson. Between the two of them, they were able to complete 102 salvage inspections during the calendar year. These inspections assist the department with equipment purchases without having to spend budgeted dollars. Salvage inspections helped the Bronson Police Department purchase new firearms in 2023 from CMP Distributors Inc. for a price of \$8,280.75.

*Disposition of 2016 Tahoe-* In September, the City finalized the sale of its surplus 2016 Chevrolet Tahoe Police SUV. The vehicle was sold on the GovDeals auction website for \$8,900. The vehicle was removed from service in May 2023 with approximately 94,000 miles on the odometer, and had its decals and emergency equipment removed prior to listing. The auction received 18 total bids and closed on September 8, 2023. The sale of surplus property valued at over \$5,000 requires approval from the City Council, which was given for this sale at their June 2023 Regular Meeting.



*Additional Full-Time Police Officer-* In October, the City Council approved the addition of a 5<sup>th</sup> full-time police officer contingent upon final approval from the Union. Over the last few years, the department has been hit hard by officers needing leave time resulting in additional overtime, part-time pay, and salaried employees working more shifts without being able to use all of their vacation. This position could cover those shifts, thereby reducing overtime and part-time pay. In the 2023-24 budget, the City budgeted \$75,000 for part-time wages and \$30,000 for overtime wages. A fifth full-time officer with benefits is budgeted at \$78,000. The City has negotiated with the Police Officers Association of Michigan and the Bronson Police Officer's Association to make this new position exempt from the "Layoff and Recall" section of the collective bargaining

agreement. With future funding for this position uncertain, this would prevent us from having to layoff all part-time and temporary employees prior to removing this position.