

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES

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EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

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*Section 7*

*Michael S. Graese*

*Sarasota City Manager  
Candidate Report*

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*Cover Letter and Resume*

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## Section 7

6 February 2025

Dear Mayor Alpert, Vice Mayor Trice, Commissioners Ahearn-Koch, Battie, and Ohlrich,

I am applying for the opportunity to serve as Sarasota's next city manager.

The expected characteristics annotated in the city manager job description (leader, manager, record of achievement, consensus/team builder, facilitator, and motivator visible to the staff and in the community) align with my experience, skill sets, and natural inclinations; your desire for this type of leader motivated me to apply for the position.

Sarasota's stated vision, mission, and values further appealed to, and prompted, my application. The combination of the three paint a picture of a city and commission aiming to reach and sustain levels of excellence across all city disciplines while striving for attainable and critical values.

My thirteen years of city management experience in support of eighteen different and unique supervisors at one municipality and two separate Army installations makes me uniquely qualified to implement your legislation and policies, and "administer the day-to-day operation of the affairs of the city."

Some of my qualifications include my collaborative efforts with local officials, planning commissions, and chambers of commerce in Kentucky, Virginia and South Carolina. These efforts included focusing on positively influencing economic conditions in local communities and they provide me many experiences to draw upon in support of the citizens, businesses, and government of Sarasota. I am committed to excellence and intend to ensure all members of the team are committed to the same.

Additionally, my experience leading directors of public works, emergency services, utilities, community and economic development, engineering, assisted housing, human resources, public affairs, recreation & social services, strategic plans, and legal at three similar organizations is an advantage as Sarasota's organizational structure mirrors much of my experience.

I am a hard-working, intellectually curious professional ready to bring my skills to a community "known by many as "Paradise." I would appreciate an opportunity to interview to determine if I am the best candidate for Sarasota's city manager position.

Sincerely,



Michael (Mike) Graese  
ICMA-CM  
1920 Lexington Avenue, Ashland, KY 41101  
(540) 841-9128  
grayzee5@yahoo.com

**MICHAEL (Mike) GRAESE**

1920 Lexington Avenue, Ashland, Kentucky 41101  
540.841.9128 – grayzee5@yahoo.com  
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mike-graese>

**OBJECTIVE:** Serve as the City Manager of Sarasota, Florida.

**PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY:** A proven Chief Administrative Officer with over forty years in escalating leadership roles and thirteen years' experience at one municipality and two U.S. Army bases. Implemented, influenced, and administered corporate-level policies and directives impacting community services including emergency services, utilities, public works, operations, economic development, airfields, and recreational facilities.

**Core Competencies:** Executive Leadership, Utilities & Facilities Recovery/Management, Budget Development/Execution, Emergency Management, Program Management, Team Building (people), Strategic Planning, Performance Improvement, and Analysis/Problem Solving.

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**City Manager, Ashland, Kentucky (8/2017-12/2024):** Chief Administrative Officer who exercised executive powers and duties in accordance with Kentucky Revised Statute 83A.150, statutes and ordinances. Subject to the Board of Commissioner's approval, promulgated procedures ensuring the efficient and orderly administration of a 337 person staff with a \$123M budget in support of a 20,000+ person community with a day-time population of over 90,000.

- Led a crucial and timely transformation of city utilities from being under two separate Commonwealth agreed orders to earning Kentucky's 2024 Water Plant of the Year.
- Spearheaded a generational downtown revitalization including \$33 million in grants for walkability/streetscape and a regional conference center, which included briefing the Governor and Commonwealth Senate and House Appropriation & Revenue Chairs.

**Executive Officer/ Chief of Staff to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management (ACSIM), Pentagon, Washington, D.C. (6/2015 - 7/2017):** Principal multifunctional advisor to the Army's senior executive responsible for policy, programs, and resourcing; operations support; environmental and energy programs; military construction planning and programming; and social programs in support of all US Army installations worldwide. Tasked and synchronized the efforts of four senior executive-led directorates and 152 reporting units consisting of over 76,000 employees with an annual budget exceeding \$16 billion. Synchronized requirements with counterparts in Congress, Office of Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Senior Army Leaders.

- Spearheaded the transition between two senior executives with 72 years' combined experience and ensured installation policy and resourcing continued uninterrupted.

## Section 7

- Planned and implemented procedures resulting in the timely staffing of thousands of Congressional, OSD, and Army taskers supporting worldwide installation management.

**City Manager (Garrison Commander), Fort Jackson, South Carolina (6/2012 - 6/2015):** The Chief Administrative Officer of a 1,750 person workforce. Managed a \$119 million annual operating budget supporting the maintenance, security and emergency services, utilities, modernization, community recreation, social services, and operational life support to a community of more than 17,000. Implemented corporate-level city management guidance. Managed community relations with local government leadership that included political, law enforcement, military, civic groups and prominent community officials.

- Created a plan to place the most personnel in higher-quality workspace while simultaneously demolishing tens of thousands of square feet of unsatisfactory space.
- A constant focus on customer satisfaction resulted in over 13,000 comment cards with a 97% satisfaction rate in 2014.
- Implemented a Refuse Collection Savings Initiative to minimize tipping fees. The onetime cost of \$26,000 saved \$175,000 annually.

**City Manager (Garrison Commander), Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia (6/2006 - 6/2009):** Chief Administrative Officer of a 119 square mile US Army regional combined arms training center in support of over 80,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and interagency personnel annually. Managed a 300 person staff with a \$35 million dollar annual budget supporting public works, law enforcement, security, emergency services, utilities, modernization, community recreation and operational life support. Managed community relations with three counties and multiple cities' political, law enforcement, military, civic groups and other prominent community officials.

- Recognized as the Army's best-run garrison via the Community of Excellence program.
- Achieved \$1.4 million in Lean Six Sigma-generated efficiencies over a two-year period.

### **EDUCATION**

M.S. Strategic Studies, Marine Corps University

M.S. International Relations, Troy State University at Dothan

B.A. History, Eastern Kentucky University

United States Army Command and General Staff College

### **Recognition/Volunteerism**

ICMA (International City Management Association) Credentialed Manager

ICMA's 10 Years of Service recognition

Kentucky League of Cities (Board Member)

Kentucky City and County Management Association (Multiple Committees)

Pathways (Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic) Chairman of the Board

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*Candidate Introduction*

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**MICHAEL “MIKE” GRAESE**

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**EDUCATION**

Master of Science, Strategic Studies, Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia  
Master of Science, International Relations, Troy State University, Dothan, Alabama  
Bachelor of Arts, History, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky  
United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

**EXPERIENCE**

City Manager, Ashland, KY	2017 – 2024
Executive Officer/Chief of Staff, Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.	2015 – 2017
Garrison Commander (City Manager), Fort Jackson, SC	2012 – 2015
Air & Missile Defense (AMD) Integrator, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.	2011 – 2012
Chief of Staff, Force Strategic Engagement Cell, U.S. Forces-Iraq, Baghdad, Iraq	2010 – 2011
Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA	2009 – 2010
Garrison Commander (City Manager), Fort A.P. Hill, VA	2006 – 2009
Operations Center Officer in Charge & Theater AMD Branch Chief, U.S. Central Command, MacDill AFB, FL & Qatar	2004 – 2006
Air Defense Analyst, U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt AFB, NE	2001 – 2004
U.S. Army, Various Air Defense Artillery Assignments, Worldwide	1988 – 2001

**BACKGROUND**

Ashland, a city with a population of over 21,000, is located in eastern Kentucky on the southern bank of the Ohio River approximately 15 miles north of I-64; it is on the state border with Ohio and very near the border of West Virginia. Ashland is the most populous city in eastern Kentucky and serves as a crucial economic and medical center for northeastern Kentucky. For these reasons, the daytime population swells to over 90,000. Ashland is also included in the Huntington-Ashland Metropolitan Area, known locally as the "Tri-State Area," home to ~376,000 residents as of the 2020 census.

The city of Ashland was authorized a 337 person staff, a few of which are part-time employees. Additionally, Ashland employs dozens of seasonal workers which is financially practical and provides supervisors the opportunity to “scout” future employees.

Of the 337 person staff, I directly supervised 14 teammates. Nine of these were directors, three were special staff, and two were administrative/operational. Frankly, my span of direct control was numerically too large. Organizational models I’m familiar with recommend a range from



### MICHAEL “MIKE” GRAESE

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six to nine personnel to be most effective. I am encouraged by Sarasota’s organizational “Block and Line” diagram which reflects numerically realistic spans of control. I specifically value that a Deputy City Manager is in place and has clearly defined responsibilities.

Ashland’s FY2025 budget was \$123 million (M) consisting of 22 funds and it’s General Fund budget was \$32.6M. Funds of interest include Capital Investments & Projects, CDBG, ARPA, Section 8 Vouchers, Utilities, Bus System, and Conference Center.

The three most important issues facing Ashland are:

- 1) Lack of a defined Vision and Strategic Plan: Ashland’s residents, through their elected officials, must determine and define the desired future of the city. The city is broadly polarized into two camps. One camp can be described as “We’re fine and nothing needs to change; we’ll do things the way they’ve always been done.” The other is “Ashland has been dying for years; we have to adapt to become attractive to new residents, businesses, visitors, and retain our young people.” Unaddressed, this dynamic will continue to hamstring the city.
- 2) Aging Utilities: Ashland, like many municipalities, did not “keep up” in the utilities arena over decades. Seven years ago, the city was receiving near-quarterly “Notices of Violation” (NOVs) for both water and wastewater. The Water Treatment Plant and Wastewater Treatment plant were both on Agreed Orders (AOs) for consistently failing to meet state and federal standards. The city is under a Combined Sewer Overflow consent decree with the EPA and line replacement was underfunded by 1/3 of study recommendations. Dramatic progress was made during my tenure: both plants are off the AOs; no NOVs in 25+ quarters; earned the Commonwealth’s 2024 Water Treatment Plant of the Year; and \$1M a year was added for line replacement. If the city loses focus, the days of NOVs, etc. will return.
- 3) Cascading Effects of OPIOID Abuse: Homelessness, pan-handling, aggressive crime, a decline in the skilled workforce, myriad and complex family issues, and outside perceptions are among the challenges of high OPIOID (and other drug) usage. I recommended, and the Board of Commissioners (BoC) approved, a novel RFP process to analyze proposals & organization to get OPIOID settlement funds into the hands of the most capable organizations with the best chance to make the greatest impact on the crisis.

### GENERAL, MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE

I am extremely interested in servicing as Sarasota’s next city manager because I believe the characteristics and reasoning Sarasota describes for its “Ideal Candidate,” define, and resonate deeply with, me. I’ve honed and demonstrated in action these very characteristics and traits throughout my career and believe I could bring these skills to bear for the betterment of Sarasota. Career-wise, I am 59 years old and have so much diverse experience and energy to offer the community, elected leaders, and city staff. I want to be part of a true team that is constantly

### MICHAEL “MIKE” GRAESE

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focused on the best customer service, process improvement, and encourages all viewpoints.

My management style revolves around the Golden Rule: treat others the way you (I) want to be treated. Respect, trust, and integrity are paramount. Respecting the team’s (elected officials, staff, other stakeholders) knowledge, experience, and opinions enables a healthy, team environment. I’ve always had a strong desire and focus to accomplish the mission, while simultaneously “taking care of” my team. This is simply described as “Mission First: People Always!” The sweet spot is achieved when all team members understand the mission and work towards its accomplishment with sufficient latitude to employ their individual and organization’s skills, creativity, and knowledge.

The majority of people on my previous staffs will tell you that I am dedicated, loyal, and intellectually curious about them and the organization’s responsibilities and capabilities. I ask second and third level questions to learn and understand. As a result of a 360-degree evaluation after my first Garrison Command in 2009, I discovered that some staff misinterpreted my questions as micro-managing or a perceived lack of trust in them. Subsequently, during initial meetings and introductions to new staffs, I describe why I ask questions which largely allay concerns and mis-interpretations. Nearly all my staff knew that I cared deeply about not just accomplishing the mission, but for them and ensuring their success.

Elected officials I’ve served with over the past seven+ years will likely describe me as professional, personable, proactive, dedicated, passionate, candid, and focused.

My strengths are that I constantly strive to “do the right thing” for everyone: citizens, elected officials, staff, and my family. The core of this desire is grounded in striving to maintain unquestioned integrity and treating everyone the same, like gold. Regardless of a person’s socioeconomic status, everyone should be treated with dignity and respect, everyone.

My challenges as a leader include maintaining a healthy work-life balance. My wife is very concerned that if hired as Sarasota’s city manager, I will work extremely long, self-induced hours. I have wrestled with this for 20 years. Ironically, I am very cognizant when teammates work too much and risk losing their balance, and I have helped many regain their balance. I do not take this lightly; the negative effects of not maintaining a healthy balance are substantial.

Performance measures can be either organizational or individual. Organizationally, the city strategic plan should include broad “lines of effort,” with defined goals, specified objectives, and appropriate tasks. Executed properly, the strategic plan reflects citizen’s overall vision for Sarasota, defined and “defended” by the elected officials, and vigorously implemented by the city staff. These “lines of effort” must be candidly and responsibly reviewed and updated on a regular basis. At the individual level, I’ve used numerous formatted evaluations that grade characteristics, attributes, etc. and measure performance. Each of my direct reports was required to submit a list of prior year accomplishments and next FY goals and objectives. At least once a year, I personally met with the employee providing direct feedback on areas to sustain and areas

### MICHAEL “MIKE” GRAESE

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to improve. We always discussed, and annotated, their professional goals and potential. Of note, I crave thoughtful criticism to improve my performance and receive all feedback positively.

Defining one specific “biggest achievement (success)” is tough as so many accomplishments have great meaning to me and the communities I served. Spearheading the receipt of \$33 million for two generationally-transformative projects in Ashland, KY included persuading both a Democratic Governor and a Republican legislature of the value for a conference center; being the “glue” of a dynamic, high-stress staff in the Pentagon; leading an installation-level space management plan, talked about for years, to execution at Fort Jackson; facilitating reconciliation in a war zone; and winning the 2008 US Army Community of Excellence at Fort A.P. Hill are a few. But broadly, the greatest feeling of success is when teammates “buy into” accomplishing the mission to the best of their abilities, while treating all customers like family, and eagerly requesting (and implementing) constructive criticism for the good of customers and residents.

My biggest mistake was not ensuring two senior/key staff inculcated themselves as part of the team. They intentionally worked independently, and many times against me and the professional staff. They used their longevity to skip the chain of command, manipulate higher leaders’ thoughts and marginalized actual subject matter experts. This dynamic was toxic and cancerous to the entire staff, other leaders, and the organization. I learned this behavior should never be allowed, supported or enabled; I gained knowledge of the reality of the delicate balance between direct orders and political influence.

I’ve recommended employee terminations throughout my career. This responsibility comes to Army officers at an early age; my first was when I was 23 years old. I’ve never lost sleep on any dismissal because in every single case, the person being terminated was afforded the opportunity to correct their deficiencies, unless it was particularly egregious which necessitated immediate removal. I am always empathetic to the challenges a separated employee experiences, but if standards and values are not upheld, the impact to the rest of the team is typically destructive.

The challenges facing the incoming city manager as described in the job posting are varied: Ensuring effective interaction with elected officials, staff, and the public; infrastructure; balancing growth without losing a cherished small-town feel; dealing with the impact of natural disasters; affordable housing; embracing an existing and growing community diversity. The most important issues identified in the 14 February 2025 edition of the Sarasota News Leader Citizen Opinion survey were population growth; crime; quality of the waterway; and the economy/jobs and dropping real estate / home values. Sarasota’s next city manager must calmly and effectively lead both the definition and “triage” of the challenges, the development of a strategy to collaboratively and simultaneously make progress and regularly adjust as necessary to sustain success. I have had the privilege of demonstrating this type of leadership in my career.

In my first six months as Sarasota’s City Manager, I will ensure I get to know, and especially listen-to, elected officials, staff, and key stake holders. I will basically conduct a SWOT analysis to soon deal with the challenges described above. I’ll positively address “pop-up” issues as they

### MICHAEL “MIKE” GRAESE

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occur. I have ZERO desire to “make change for the sake of change.” I’ve witnessed this previously and it can have negative consequences. However, if I witness or become aware of illegal, immoral, or unsafe issues, they will be handled. If the staff doesn’t already have a near-maniacal focus on customer service, I will start emphasizing it.

My relationship with the media has always been exceptional. There is nothing I know of in my background that would cause embarrassment to myself or to the city of Sarasota.

Social media efforts without a strategic communications plan can be counterproductive. Understanding elected official’s perspectives and staff strategy, especially Ms. Thornburgh’s, is crucial. When I arrived in Ashland, the city did not have a PIO so I established a Facebook account to portray positive messaging to the community; it was well received. After the PIO was hired, my posting waned as I felt the gap was filled.

I can’t think of any “dirt” community activist groups in Ashland would assign to me. There is a FB group that is a typical “social media anarchist” site, but they basically criticize everything. There is an “Ashland For Change” group that advocates for equality. I attended some of their functions and believe I am viewed, at worst, as neutral to many of their causes. There is also a “Kentucky People’s Union” which is “a community organization building a people’s union for everyday people in Eastern Kentucky.” Their goal was for Ashland to adopt URLTA (Uniform Residential Landlord and Tenant Act), which the BoC decided against. I suspect they also perceived me as neutral as I was willing to listen to them.

In my free time I enjoy being with my family, working out (biking, jogging, hiking), and we started RVing locally two years ago.

### SIX ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE MYSELF

- Servant Leader (I love when people realize and strive to meet their potential)
- Integrity (non-negotiable)
- People First: Mission Always!
- Intellectually Curious
- Accountable (I am ultimately responsible for everything that does or doesn’t occur)
- Teamwork (A cliché to some, being a part of a “winning” team is thrilling)

### REASON FOR DEPARTING CURRENT POSITION

I concluded, after meeting with two of five incoming elected officials (three others chose not to meet with me), that the incoming BoC did not respect and value the city manager’s role. I learned they planned to repeal a largely symbolic city ordinance that specifically stated, “No individual elected official....shall give orders or directives to city employees... or otherwise

**MICHAEL “MIKE” GRAESE**

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interfere with the managerial function of the City Manager.” This ordinance was adopted to magnify Kentucky Revised Statute 83A.150. My conclusion was confirmed when the new BoC repealed the ordinance. The “so what” is some elected officials were in the regular habit of directing staff which caused stress to the staff, confusion of priorities to myself and staff, and caused the staff to “chase vapors” on a regular basis. The direct orders also took resources away from higher priorities, some which were directed by the whole BoC. I knew I could not effectively lead and manage the staff in this type of environment; the new BoC deserved a city manager that was comfortable with their desire to repeal the ordinance.

**MOST RECENT SALARY**

~ \$234,000 annually (Salary: ~\$170,498; Deferred compensation (457/IRA): \$37,168; Medical benefits: ~ \$25,000; Phone allowance: ~\$1,100; and a city-provide vehicle. The city also paid for my annual ICMA and KCCMA memberships and attendance at their annual conferences.

## **Section 7**

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*CB&A Background Checks*

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**Background Check Summary for  
MICHAEL "MIKE" SCOTT GRAESE**

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**Criminal Records Checks:**

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Boyd County, KY	No Records Found
District of Columbia	No Records Found
Richland County, SC	No Records Found
State	
Kentucky	No Records Found
District of Columbia	No Records Found
South Carolina	No Records Found

**Civil Records Checks:**

County	
Boyd County, KY	No Records Found
District of Columbia	No Records Found
Richland County, SC	No Records Found
Federal	
Kentucky	No Records Found
District of Columbia	No Records Found
South Carolina	No Records Found

**Motor Vehicle**

Kentucky	No Records Found
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**Credit**

Excellent

**Personal Bankruptcy**

No Records Found

**Sex Offender Registry**

Not Listed

**Education**

Confirmed

**Employment**

Confirmed

**Social Media**

Nothing of Concern Found



**Background Check Summary for  
MICHAEL "MIKE" SCOTT GRAESE**

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Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681Y, credit and bankruptcy information are very sensitive and should not be used in the consideration of hiring. The information is included for each candidate because we do not want you to be surprised if third parties raise what they consider to be a concern. Also, some states have limited the reporting to seven years, so any records older than that will not be available in those states. In addition, motor vehicle reports are limited to three to seven years, depending on the state.

**Background Check Summary for  
MICHAEL "MIKE" SCOTT GRAESE  
Personal Disclosure**

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**Personal Disclosure Questionnaire**

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Name of Applicant: Michael Scott Graese

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?  
Yes                       No
2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?  
Yes                       No
3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?  
Yes                       No
4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?  
Yes                       No
5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?  
Yes                       No
6. Have you ever been charged with driving while intoxicated, driving under the influence, operating a vehicle impaired, or a similar offense?  
Yes                       No
7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?  
Yes                       No
8. Please list all your social media accounts (Facebook / X (Twitter) / Instagram / LinkedIn, etc.) and your personal web page if you have one. Facebook: Deactivated 2024; X: @grayzee5; Instagram: mikegryz;  
LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/in/mike-graese](http://www.linkedin.com/in/mike-graese)
9. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?  
Yes                       No
10. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant. N/A

Attested to:   
Signature of Applicant

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*CB&A Reference Notes*

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Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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**Josh Blanton – Former Commissioner, City of Ashland, KY 606-547-1519**

Mr. Blanton met Mr. Graese when he was hired as the City Manager for Ashland in 2017. At the time, they were both volunteers for Build Ashland, a community clean up group. Mr. Blanton ran for office in 2020 and won. He served until January 1, 2025. Mr. Blanton's work experience is in manufacturing, and he holds a management position. Mr. Graese is one of the most detail-oriented and well-rounded managers that Mr. Blanton has worked with, both in public and in private service.

Ashland was very fortunate to have had Mr. Graese as their City Manager. Working with the Commission, he was able to make progress in the often-challenging atmosphere of a smaller community. He is extremely capable. He set long-term strategies and would be an excellent manager for a private or public organization of any size.

Mr. Graese was very good at establishing procedures. One example is when they were interviewing candidates for a key position, he created a committee that included an elected official, staff from the department where this individual would work, and himself. He used a comprehensive approach with input from everyone. He looked to create or follow procedures rather than making decisions on his own. He is a critical thinker who is very well organized and knows the facts. He allows data to drive decision making.

Considering that Ashland was Mr. Graese's first position outside of the military, he was very innovative. He had never worked on a strategic plan prior to his arrival, but he led a strategic planning process for Ashland because he saw that the community needed a vision. He was continually looking at what was happening in the state and where they could improve, though the Commission was not the best at supporting him in these innovations. He consistently shared best practices and information from the Kentucky League of Cities with the Commissioners.

Never wanting his picture taken, Mr. Graese was often the one taking the pictures. He picked up trash for Build Ashland. He served on the Board for Pathways, an organization focused on family services. He was always ready and willing to participate in any activity and was very much part of the fabric of the community. He was excellent with the public. He never over promised or tried to make a situation sound better than it was. He is very transparent, which the public appreciated. The Commissioners felt lucky that he was working for them, and not running against them, because he was so well-liked in the community that he would have won the election against any one of them.

An ice storm occurred in 2021. Before the storm arrived, Mr. Graese aligned with the County Emergency Management team on emergency services. He scheduled a regular press briefing to keep everyone updated. Emergencies require a high level of coordination, which he excels at.

A train derailment released chemicals into the river supplying water to Ashland. Communities were so concerned about water contamination that they turned the water off before any testing was done. Because these communities shut the water off prematurely, there were concerns about

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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the water running out. Mr. Graese provided great information on sampling, which allowed them to make the right decision. There were no detectable results of the chemical in the water 100 miles upriver. He coordinated extremely well with governmental agencies and those in the water industry. This example is a common thread of his management. He understands the importance of communicating with residents, but also making good, data driven decisions.

One of Mr. Graese's jobs during the budget session was to present the data to the elected body and review it with them. He ensured that anything they wanted was addressed before going into the meeting. He provided information on items of interest. He was transparent and provided information to the community so they could understand how the City operates. He provided the information necessary for the board to make good financial decisions.

Ashland was in a good position financially and they even had extra funding, which also meant they had more projects ongoing than ever before. While this is a great position to be in, Mr. Graese had to carry out the plans. Though he did not have as many resources as he needed, he was excellent at meeting timelines. He completed both long- and short-term tasks without any issues in terms of timeliness.

In challenging situations Mr. Graese's professionalism benefited the community. He was very open to talking about difficult topics. At times he took a few moments to think about a matter. He never lost his composure, either in public or in private. He was always professional.

The downtown project was very controversial. Mr. Graese approached the issue with data. He kept everyone updated on the project, the cost, and the timeline. Also, a situation with the police department led to a fatality. It became controversial, but Mr. Graese handled the situations by procedure, which helped them avoid a serious situation with the public. The outcome was the best it could have been considering the circumstances.

Mr. Graese has great experience. He is an individual you can hire with confidence, because nothing negative will pop up. He really aspired to bring the organization to a point where they were strategically driven. He accomplished so much. He left of his own accord, making a personal and professional decision to move on.

While some may have disagreed with Mr. Graese's vision for the community, they never questioned his integrity or his preparedness for the position. He handled so many difficult situations in a great way. He bought many pieces together during his tenure.

If Mr. Blanton started a company tomorrow and needed a CEO, he would actively pursue Mr. Graese for the role. He is the best manager in Kentucky and can stand his own against any manager in the country.

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Detail oriented,
- Prepared,
- Community focused,
- Very passionate,
- Very timely in completing work, and
- Dedicated.

**Strengths:** Detail oriented, very experienced, complete package, fantastic manager.

**Weaknesses:** Being very passionate is not a negative, though he did feel discouraged at times. He needed to be reminded at times that while he should care about everyone's opinions, he sometimes took things to heart that he should not.

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**Steve Cole - City Engineer, City of Ashland, KY 606-471-0818**

Mr. Cole worked with Mr. Graese for five years while he served as City Manager of Ashland, Kentucky. Mr. Cole worked as the City Engineer.

Mr. Graese demonstrates leadership that surpasses other managers, showing dedication, hard work, and a strong ability to resolve conflicts effectively. Mr. Graese leads by example, displaying integrity, honesty, and high character. He makes decisions that serve the public's best interest and maintains a strong work ethic. His verbal and written communication skills clearly convey messages to all stakeholders.

Mr. Graese makes sound hiring decisions and carefully considers input from all stakeholders before finalizing key choices. He maintains a high-performance organization while also driving necessary change. He engages all stakeholders in regular staff meetings, fostering open discussions and collaborative decision-making. His leadership rallies employees around the organization's vision rather than relying solely on process management.

Upon joining the City, Mr. Graese found the wastewater treatment plant non-compliant with state regulations, leading to an Agreed Order. He led a team of engineers and managers to resolve the issue, bringing the facility back into compliance.

Highly engaged in the community, Mr. Graese attends events, supports local organizations, and actively participates in city functions. His customer service orientation ensures fair and considerate treatment of every resident and business. He completes tasks efficiently, balancing urgency with thoroughness. He exercises patience when necessary but pushes for prompt resolutions when delays are unwarranted. He collaborates effectively with elected officials, adapting to different agendas while maintaining professional relationships.

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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No controversies or concerns exist regarding Mr. Graese's background or professional conduct. Mr. Cole holds him in high esteem and respects him greatly. Mr. Graese is a great manager, and Mr. Cole would hire him.

**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- High character,
- Integrity,
- Honest,
- Hard-working,
- Looks out for public interest, and
- Leader.

**Strengths:** Exemplary leadership, strong communication skills, commitment to public service, and ability to resolve complex issues.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Nate Pagan - City Manager, Owensboro, KY 270-889-1555**

Mr. Pagan has known Mr. Graese since 2019 when Mr. Graese served as City Manager of Ashland, Kentucky. Mr. Pagan works as a City Manager for Owensboro, Kentucky. They met in a professional capacity at various statewide events and conferences.

Mr. Graese is an excellent leader who demonstrates a strong moral compass and consistently stands up for what he believes is right. He makes thoughtful, ethical, and forward-thinking decisions. He collaborates effectively with others and maintains an open-minded approach to leadership. His outgoing and friendly demeanor makes him approachable, and he fosters both professional and personal connections with ease.

Mr. Graese consistently makes good hiring decisions and carefully evaluates candidates before making selections. His decision-making process is methodical and well-reasoned, ensuring the best outcomes for his organization. Mr. Graese balances innovation, change management, and maintaining an organization at a high-performance level. He effectively resolves long-term issues by implementing sustainable solutions. In Ashland, he successfully tackled complex projects, turning persistent challenges into long-term improvements.

Mr. Graese actively participates in the community, engaging with local organizations and attending community meetings regularly. His customer service-oriented approach ensures that he values input from residents and works to address their concerns effectively.

Highly efficient, Mr. Graese completes tasks promptly while maintaining quality and attention to detail. He exercises patience when necessary but also pushes for timely resolutions when delays

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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are avoidable. In Ashland, he successfully navigated a politically divided council and remained in his role longer than most City Managers in the area.

No controversies or concerns exist regarding Mr. Graese's background or professional conduct. Mr. Pagan strongly endorses Mr. Graese and would hire him without hesitation. Mr. Graese is a competent manager.

**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Conscientious,
- Thoughtful,
- Ethical,
- Collaborative,
- Forward-thinking, and
- Open-minded.

**Strengths:** Strong leadership, ethical decision-making, community involvement, and the ability to resolve long-term challenges effectively.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Amanda Clark – Former Commissioner, City of Ashland, KY 606-831-2963**

Ms. Clark has known Mr. Graese since 2017. He is a fantastic manager who really raised the standard in Ashland while also changing the culture of the employees. He did a great job.

Decisions made by Mr. Graese were good. He is a change agent as well as an innovator. He is not satisfied with the status quo and did a great job maintaining the structure of the organization. Ms. Clark worked with four city managers and Mr. Graese was the very best at keeping the elected body informed.

Mr. Graese was so visible in the public that it bothered one of the Commissioners. She felt that he spent too much time with the public. However, other Commissioners appreciated his visibility because it allowed them to stay better informed. He attended every meeting that involved a city project or one of his department heads. He commands authority and works very well with the public. They appreciate his professionalism.

Ashland has a downtown revitalization plan called Destination Ashland. Mr. Graese led a team of staff and community members for this plan. He also led the pay and classification plan to bring employees to fair and equitable pay, which was monumental.

Mr. Graese has good financial skills. He weighs out all the scenarios, and then plans for the worst, so they are prepared. He digs into the numbers so he knows what a project will cost. He



Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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had a stressful tenure with many changes and issues, and he handled them well. When he disagreed with staff, he stepped away for a minute to clear his head and then came back to the conversation. He did not just say whatever was on his mind, which was positive.

Ashland had a major streetscape project on a state-owned street. The project did not go as well as they had hoped, and it became controversial. Mr. Graese was doing the right thing, and he dealt with every issue that occurred. Another issue was the pay and classification plan. The consultant suggested that the manager should be the highest paid employee in the City. At that time, Mr. Graese had been working for the city for six years and was still making the same salary he was hired at. Most of the Commissioners agreed, but because of public input that was factually incorrect, it became controversial. He handled the situation with grace and professionalism. Nothing in his background or conduct would concern a reasonable person.

One Commissioner had an issue with every city manager Ashland had, including Mr. Graese. However, she did not really understand the concept of the City Manager form of government and felt that the elected body should be involved in day-to-day operations. This belief became a rub between this individual and all the city managers employed by Ashland.

Ms. Clark would hire Mr. Graese tomorrow and is sad that he is no longer working in Ashland. He would be a good hire for any community. He worked well with the elected officials and was respectful when he did not agree with them. He listened to their opinion, took the criticism, and used it to better himself. He is an all-around good person.

**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Commanding,
- Empathetic,
- Conscientious,
- Kind,
- Meticulous, and
- Excellent manager of people.

**Strengths:** Ultra organized, great team builder, detail oriented, good communicator.

**Weaknesses:** Being ultra organized and detail oriented. At times he was so focused on the detail, and in fully thinking the matter through, that it slowed the process down.

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**Bernice Henry - Former Interim City Commissioner, City of Ashland, KY 606-571-5646**

Ms. Henry has known Mr. Graese since about 2020 when she started as Interim City Commissioner for Ashland, Kentucky. Mr. Graese worked as the City Manager. He provided

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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guidance, ensuring she understood city operations and decision-making processes. They spent significant time together both professionally and socially.

Mr. Graese demonstrates strong leadership and an open-minded perspective that allows him to approach issues uniquely. He commits himself fully to every task, ensuring that responsibilities receive 100% of his effort. His leadership fosters an inclusive environment where employees feel informed and invested in city operations. He consistently makes sound hiring decisions, working with the available resources to select the best candidates. His military background reinforces his ability to maintain high performance, implement change when necessary, and drive innovation.

Mr. Graese prioritizes communication, ensuring all stakeholders remain well-informed. He regularly uses email, text, phone calls, and in-person meetings to share important updates and keep employees engaged in city operations.

Problem-solving defines his role as City Manager. Mr. Graese takes on challenges daily, ensuring that decisions align with the City's best interests. He also provided strong support to Ms. Henry, recognizing her position as the first African American commissioner and advocating for inclusivity in city leadership.

Highly involved in the community, Mr. Graese regularly attends public meetings and engages with residents. He maintains a customer service-oriented approach, treating each issue with importance and ensuring that residents feel heard and respected. Mr. Graese completes tasks efficiently, balancing urgency with thorough decision-making. He remains patient when necessary but pushes for timely resolutions when appropriate. During commission meetings, he maintained focus and helped elected officials work together effectively.

No controversies or concerns exist regarding Mr. Graese's background or professional conduct. Ms. Henry strongly endorses him, emphasizing that he would be an asset in any leadership position. Mr. Graese is a great manager.

**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Leader,
- Good listener,
- Compassionate,
- Contributor,
- Open-minded, and
- Joyful.

**Strengths:** Strong leadership, effective communication, inclusivity, and the ability to resolve complex challenges efficiently.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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**Kim Jenkins - Director of Museum and Chair of the Park Board, City of Ashland, KY  
606-922-7033**

Ms. Jenkins has known Mr. Graese since about 2020 through multiple city initiatives, including the annual flower basket program, the streetscape project, and park-related developments. She collaborated with him closely throughout his tenure as City Manager.

Mr. Graese demonstrates outstanding leadership and enthusiasm for city improvement. His attention to detail and vision set him apart as a leader who drives positive change. He remains open to new ideas and fosters a collaborative approach to city management. His ability to implement long-term plans and initiatives makes him highly effective. He hires capable personnel and ensures that they contribute meaningfully to city operations. The staff he selected performed exceptionally well, reinforcing his ability to assess talent accurately.

Mr. Graese balances innovation, change management, and high-performance maintenance. He led the City's acquisition of a performing arts center, revitalizing the facility and positioning it for long-term success. His leadership transformed struggling projects into assets for the community. Highly engaged in the community, he attends public meetings, interacts with residents, and plays an active role in city affairs. His customer service-oriented approach ensures that every interaction prioritizes fairness, responsiveness, and accessibility.

Mr. Graese completes tasks promptly and has a results-driven mindset. While he exercises patience, when necessary, he prefers to take action rather than allow unnecessary delays. He managed a politically diverse commission effectively, finding common ground and ensuring that city operations progressed efficiently.

No controversies or concerns exist regarding Mr. Graese's background or professional conduct. Ms. Jenkins strongly endorsed him, stating that he was the best manager Ashland has ever had. Ms. Jenkins would hire him without hesitation.

**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Detail-oriented,
- Visionary,
- Supportive,
- Enthusiastic,
- Caring, and
- Superb.

**Strengths:** Strategic leadership, visionary planning, staff development, and a strong commitment to community engagement.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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**Henry Culveyhouse - Reporter, The Daily Independent, KY 304-268-5004**

Mr. Culveyhouse has known Mr. Graese since 2020. Mr. Culveyhouse covered city affairs as a reporter for The Daily Independent while Mr. Graese served as City Manager. Their professional interactions provided extensive insight into Mr. Graese's leadership and management style.

Mr. Graese demonstrates exceptional competence as a manager. His ability to organize, communicate clearly, and maintain high ethical standards sets him apart. He takes pride in being truthful and honest, ensuring transparency in his leadership. He effectively balances maintaining the organization at a high-performance level while implementing necessary changes. His long tenure in Ashland, in contrast to prior high turnover, highlights his adaptability and leadership stability. He actively collaborates with community stakeholders and City Officials to enact improvements.

His decision-making process prioritizes the best interests of the City, even when those decisions carry personal or political costs. Mr. Graese remains willing to make difficult choices when necessary. He engages in direct communication, preferring phone calls and in-person discussions to keep stakeholders informed. He leads without micromanaging, working alongside department heads while allowing them autonomy to perform their roles effectively. His ability to collaborate ensures a productive and motivated workforce.

One of Mr. Graese's key accomplishments includes spearheading the revitalization of Ashland's downtown area. Recognizing the need for economic and aesthetic improvements, he worked with community leaders to develop an organization dedicated to improving walkability, attracting businesses, and revitalizing the city center.

Highly visible in the community, Mr. Graese regularly attends meetings, interacts with residents, and remains actively involved in city functions. His customer service-oriented mindset ensures fair and considerate engagement with all citizens. He efficiently completes tasks while maintaining patience in government processes. His ability to remain calm under pressure allows him to navigate complex political environments. He effectively worked with elected officials with diverse agendas, fostering collaboration and problem-solving.

Although some of Mr. Graese's decisions generated controversy, such as the implementation of roundabouts, he remained steadfast and handled criticism professionally. He approaches challenges with resilience and maintains a focus on long-term improvements.

No concerns exist regarding Mr. Graese's background or professional conduct. Mr. Culveyhouse respects Mr. Graese as a leader and affirms that any city would benefit from his expertise. Mr. Graese is a great manager.

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Honest,
- Compassionate,
- Intelligent,
- Hard-working,
- Straightforward, and
- Leader.

**Strengths:** Transparent leadership, strategic planning, community engagement, and the ability to implement long-term improvements.

**Weaknesses:** Adjusting to the political aspects of the job required adaptation, but did not impact performance.

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**Brandy Clark - Director of Tourism and Economic Development, City of Ashland, KY  
606-465-3295**

Ms. Clark has known Mr. Graese since 2020. Ms. Clark worked closely with Mr. Graese during his tenure as City Manager, particularly on the City's rebranding and revitalization efforts. Their collaboration focused on increasing tourism, community pride, and local business engagement.

Mr. Graese provides clear direction, follows established guidelines, and ensures transparency in decision-making. He leads with a structured, mission-oriented approach, keeping processes by the book while demonstrating passion and commitment to city improvements.

Mr. Graese's leadership fosters collaboration by considering all perspectives and valuing input from stakeholders. He listens attentively, seeks assistance when necessary, and encourages teamwork. His ability to rally individuals around a shared vision enabled Ashland to undergo a complete rebrand, transforming the downtown area into a thriving hub of activity. Under his leadership, the number of downtown events grew from almost none to over 1,200 annually, making Ashland a model for other cities.

Mr. Graese consistently makes sound hiring decisions and evaluates candidates thoroughly. His leadership is a balance of maintaining a high-performance organization while also driving necessary change. His ability to execute long-term plans ensures city projects remain sustainable and impactful. He keeps all stakeholders informed, ensuring open lines of communication. His departure from the City left a noticeable gap, as many officials and staff feel less informed in his absence.

Mr. Graese's ability to manage multiple personalities and agendas among City Officials contributed to the stability of Ashland's leadership. Throughout his tenure, he worked with the

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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same four council members and mayor, successfully fostering teamwork and cooperation among elected officials.

Highly engaged in the community, Mr. Graese actively attends events and volunteers his time to support local initiatives. His visible presence reinforces his commitment to civic engagement and public service. He completes tasks efficiently and remains patient when navigating government processes. His ability to maintain focus and composure under pressure allows him to guide teams effectively through challenges.

No controversies or concerns exist regarding Mr. Graese's background or professional conduct. Ms. Clark considers Mr. Graese's departure a significant loss for Ashland and highly recommends him for a managerial position.

**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Kind,
- Thoughtful,
- Intelligent,
- Strong,
- Mission-oriented, and
- Go-getter.

**Strengths:** Strategic leadership, structured decision-making, community engagement, and the ability to implement transformative projects.

**Weaknesses:** Tendency to hyperfocus on specific tasks, occasionally overlooking other responsibilities.

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**Jim Moore - Former City Attorney, City of Ashland, KY** PII City Attorney - F.S.

Mr. Moore worked with Mr. Graese from 2019 while he served as City Manager of Ashland. Their professional relationship developed into a strong partnership based on mutual respect and effective collaboration.

Mr. Graese stands out as one of the most dynamic and hardworking managers. He demonstrates unwavering dedication to doing what he believes is right and welcomes constructive criticism. His ability to balance strategic planning with adaptability ensures that decisions align with long-term objectives. He systematically approaches hiring decisions, using objective criteria to evaluate candidates. His structured hiring process resulted in strong personnel selections, with no questionable hires.

Rather than driving change for its own sake, Mr. Graese assesses what works and what needs improvement within the organization. His approach prioritizes efficiency, effectiveness, and

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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alignment with strategic goals. He keeps all stakeholders well-informed through email, phone calls, face-to-face discussions, and text messages. His preference for frequent meetings fosters open communication and collaboration. He rallies employees around the organization's vision and avoids micromanagement. He delegates effectively while maintaining accountability, ensuring that teams remain engaged and productive.

One of Mr. Graese's major accomplishments includes securing \$25 million in state funding for a new conference center. Through lobbying, political engagement, and strong interpersonal skills, he convinced the governor to allocate \$20 million and secured an additional \$5 million from the state legislature. His leadership and persistence drove the project forward, setting a precedent for securing large-scale funding.

Mr. Graese actively participates in the community, serving as Chairman of the Board for Pathways, the regional mental health provider, and holds positions on other community boards. His involvement in downtown events further demonstrates his commitment to public engagement.

Mr. Graese's emphasis on customer service led him to implement a citywide initiative requiring staff to read a book on customer service principles. He instills a results-driven culture and ensures that tasks are completed efficiently. He proactively sets deadlines and schedules, even for projects that do not require them, to maintain accountability.

Patience is not one of Mr. Graese's strongest virtues, as he prefers to push projects forward rather than wait for bureaucratic processes to unfold. While adjusting to the complexities of working with elected officials posed an initial challenge, he successfully adapted over time and improved his ability to navigate political environments.

No controversies or concerns exist regarding Mr. Graese's background or professional conduct. Mr. Moore considers Mr. Graese the best manager he has ever worked with. Mr. Moore would hire him without hesitation. Mr. Graese is an experienced manager.

**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Hard-working,
- Dynamic,
- Strong,
- Open-minded,
- Organized, and
- Strategic.

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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**Strengths:** Exceptional leadership, structured hiring processes, community engagement, and the ability to secure funding for major projects.

**Weaknesses:** Impatience with slow government processes, though this does not hinder performance.

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**Marty Gute - City Commissioner, City of Ashland, KY 606-923-9256**

Mr. Gute worked with Mr. Graese from 2017 to 2024. Mr. Gute played a key role in the hiring process and worked closely with Mr. Graese throughout his tenure.

Mr. Graese is meticulous, detail-oriented, and works tirelessly from sunup to sundown. He remains highly involved in the community, bringing people together and fostering collaboration. He sees the big picture, anticipates consequences, and makes informed decisions. He thoroughly researches personnel before making hiring decisions, prioritizing the best fit for the organization rather than solely focusing on credentials. His ability to read between the lines ensures well-rounded staffing choices. He successfully balances innovation, change management, and high-performance maintenance. He implements change when necessary while ensuring stability within the organization.

Mr. Graese maintains direct and frequent communication with stakeholders, providing updates through emails, texts, and in-person discussions. His leadership style blends hands-on involvement with strategic management, ensuring both fieldwork and office operations remain effective.

During an ice storm emergency, Mr. Graese mobilized resources to establish emergency water stations and safety points across the City. He coordinated with nonprofit organizations to provide relief, ensuring the City responded effectively to the crisis.

Mr. Graese remains highly engaged in the community, serving on various boards and regularly attending meetings. His customer service approach ensures residents and stakeholders receive attention and support. He completes tasks in a timely manner and approaches problem-solving with urgency while maintaining patience. He actively seeks solutions rather than waiting for bureaucratic processes to unfold. He works well with elected officials, recognizing their varying political perspectives while striving to unify them into a cohesive governing body. He remains project-focused rather than politically motivated, ensuring decisions are aligned with the City's best interests.

No controversies or concerns exist regarding Mr. Graese's background or professional conduct. Mr. Gute endorses him as an effective leader who prioritizes organizational success and collaborative governance. Mr. Graese is a great manager.



Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Persistent,
- Natural leader,
- Detail-oriented,
- Community-minded,
- Compassionate, and
- Loyal.

**Strengths:** Strategic leadership, attention to detail, emergency response management, and strong community engagement.

**Weaknesses:** Mr. Graese's military background instills a structured mindset that sometimes results in rigidity, particularly when projects do not go as planned. He holds high expectations and dislikes failure, making him highly driven but occasionally inflexible in unexpected situations.

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**Matthew Perkins - Former Mayor, City of Ashland, KY 606-939-4895**

Mr. Perkins worked with Mr. Graese from 2017 to 2024 while serving as Mayor of Ashland. Their professional relationship centered on city operations, strategic planning, and major infrastructure projects.

Mr. Graese demonstrates exceptional problem-solving skills and remains highly focused, professional, and ethical in all aspects of his work. He consistently works hard and approaches each challenge with determination and attention to detail. His ability to evaluate personnel ensures strong hiring decisions. The employees he selected proved to be reliable and highly competent. His hiring track record reflects a thoughtful and well-reasoned approach.

Mr. Graese balances innovation, change management, and high-performance maintenance. He effectively rallies employees around a common goal while also diving into project details and procedures. His hands-on leadership style ensures thorough execution of city initiatives.

Mr. Graese's ability to resolve infrastructure issues stands out. When faced with problems in the City's water system, he organized staff, identified the root causes, and executed a well-planned solution through proper budgeting and resource allocation. His leadership turned a failing water treatment center into an award-winning facility, recognized as the Water Treatment Plant of the Year by the state.

Mr. Graese remains actively engaged in the community, serving on local boards and participating in charitable organizations. His presence in public meetings and city events reinforces his commitment to civic involvement and transparent governance. He completes tasks efficiently and prioritizes problem-solving.

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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Mr. Graese collaborates well with elected officials, maintaining professionalism while managing diverse political perspectives. Under his leadership, Ashland earned recognition as City of the Year, secured a \$30 million state earmark for a conference center, and won the national conference for SOAR within the Appalachian Regional Division. His ability to lobby the state legislature directly contributed to these achievements.

No controversies or concerns exist regarding Mr. Graese's background or professional conduct. Mr. Perkins would hire Mr. Graese again without hesitation. Mr. Graese is a great manager.

**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Focused,
- Professional,
- Ethical,
- Hardworking,
- Caring, and
- Problem-solver.

**Strengths:** Problem-solving, strategic leadership, hiring expertise, and securing major funding for city projects.

**Weaknesses:** While he exhibits strong patience in managing long-term projects, his military background influences his preference for structured and timely execution. Adjusting to government processes, where decision-making often moves slowly, presented an initial challenge, but he adapted over time.

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**Andrew Wheeler - City Attorney, City of Ashland, KY**

PII City Attorney -  
F.S.

Mr. Wheeler worked with Mr. Graese from 2019 to 2024. Their professional collaboration focused on legal matters, city governance, and administrative decision-making.

Mr. Graese consistently performs well above average, demonstrating a strong work ethic and high energy. He takes a hands-on approach, remaining actively engaged in city operations and decision-making processes. His leadership style reflects reliability, trustworthiness, and the ability to foster collaboration. He ensures that city initiatives run efficiently and while maintaining open communication with key stakeholders. His ability to inspire confidence among colleagues and community members reinforces his effectiveness as a leader.

Mr. Graese provides valuable input on hiring decisions and evaluating candidates thoroughly. While he did not have final hiring authority, his recommendations contributed to selecting strong personnel who fit the City's needs. As a change agent, he prioritizes innovation and process improvements. He continuously seeks opportunities to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. He keeps stakeholders well-informed through direct communication, maintaining an open dialogue

Reference Notes  
Michael Graese

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via phone, email, and in-person discussions. His leadership style is to rally employees around a shared vision, aligning city operations with strategic goals set by the governing body.

When a politically sensitive issue arose involving a long-term city employee and involved external complaints, Mr. Graese assembled a small team to investigate and reach a fair resolution. His ability to navigate complex personnel matters while considering political implications demonstrated his problem-solving skills and leadership.

Highly visible in the community, Mr. Graese regularly attends meetings, engages with local groups, and participates in public events. His commitment to civic engagement strengthens relationships between city leadership and residents. He accomplishes tasks efficiently and remains patient despite the slow pace of government decision-making. His ability to adapt to political environments and work with elected officials of varying perspectives ensures smooth governance.

Mr. Graese's contract negotiations became a polarizing topic during an election year, though no controversy stemmed from his actions. The timing of discussions led to heightened scrutiny but did not reflect any wrongdoing on his part. No concerns exist regarding Mr. Graese's background or professional conduct. Mr. Wheeler strongly endorses Mr. Graese and would hire Mr. Graese without hesitation.

**Words or phrases used to describe Michael Graese:**

- Experienced leader,
- Well respected,
- High energy,
- Trustworthy,
- Not afraid to ask for advice, and
- Reliable.

**Strengths:** High energy leadership, strategic problem-solving, personnel evaluation, and strong community engagement.

**Weaknesses:** Struggles with work-life balance due to his dedication to the job.

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**Prepared by:** Hazel Jones  
Colin Baenziger & Associates

## **Section 7**

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*CB&A Internet Research*

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**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
February 14, 2025

**Downtown business files suit, claims streetscape project damaged property**

Author/Byline: Mary Jane Epling

A downtown business has filed a lawsuit against the City of Ashland, former engineer and contractors tasked with completing the Winchester Avenue Streetscape Project, claiming the city refused to rectify damages partly due to the store owner's opposition to the project. The owners of Lara's Bridals & Formals filed a complaint in Boyd County Circuit Court late last month against the city, former Director of Engineering Steve Cole, Allard Excavation, LLC, and Palmer Engineering Company, outlining negligence and tortious interference with business relations, negatively impacting business inventory and profits.

Per the plaintiffs, sidewalk removal adjacent to their property, located at the corner of Winchester Avenue and 15th Street, was done so without proper drainage or erosion controls, resulting in water infiltration to the business's basement each time it rained in the spring of 2024 — during the time frame the plaintiffs allege the streetscape project was "expedited." Per the suit, the shop owners had multiple conversations with city officials, including former City Manager **Mike Graese**, Cole and representatives with Allard Excavation and Palmer Engineering, but that no actions were taken that remedied the water infiltration.

The alleged inaction was a breach of the city and project overseer's "duty of reasonable care" to the business, including the installation of "defective or improper materials, such as brick pavers over sand which exacerbated water intrusion into the subject property." Specifically, plaintiffs allege the city (through their supervision of engineer Cole), ignored or inadequately responded to the repeated complaints, as Cole allegedly refused to follow recommendations of Allard and Palmer to identify the cause of pooling water, which seeped down the walls and collected in the basement of the dress shop after contractors unsealed a former coal chute that extended beneath the concrete sidewalks.

"Defendant City knew or should have known the defendants Allard and Palmer, in concert or coordination with Cole, had improperly planned, designed, supervised and implemented the streetscape project and negligently accelerated the completion of (the project) in December 2023, posing an unreasonable and foreseeable risk of damage to the plaintiffs and others similarly situated within the City of Ashland," the complaint reads. Furthermore, dress shop representatives claim after raising numerous concerns with the ongoing water infiltration, in April 2024, parties associated with each defendant, including Graese and Cole, "arrived at the subject property unannounced and questioned Plaintiff in an aggressive manner that suggested that she had in some way caused the water infiltration."

With the alleged problems still unresolved, the complaint alleges the city's current Economic Development Specialist, Eden McKenzie, "acknowledged that, as a result of the streetscape project, both the Putnam Building and Highlands Museum had nearly identical water infiltration

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**

**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**

*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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damage as that of the subject property," but that possible remedies weren't initiated, as the City of Ashland, "did not like the options to repair the damages." According to the dress shop owners, a forensic engineer with Allard's insurance provider recommended "restoring the sidewalk to its original condition," which the city allegedly would not approve, in addition to denying requests to excavate under the sidewalk to identify issues that "could be coming from aging clay pipes beneath Winchester Avenue." In addition to allegations of negligence in supervising the project, the shop owners are suing for overall nuisance claims, alleging the streetscape rehaul interfered with daily functionality of the shop, as the project "has caused unreasonable and substantial annoyance and interference with plaintiffs' ability to use and enjoy the property."

As for the claim of tortious interference with business relations, Lara's claims all defendants part of the suit "disrupt(ed) customer access to the subject property and refus(ed) to take reasonable corrective measures to mitigate the entrances to the business being inaccessible for extended periods of time." Issues accessing the business include pooling water in front of the store and water infiltration "created a hazardous environment for employees and patrons, all of which resulted from the streetscape project." Dress shop representatives claim their issues weren't just related to poor supervision and execution, but went unresolved seemingly out of spite, claiming "Defendant city ... was intentional, purposeful and upon information and belief, undertaken by defendant city to punish the plaintiff for her early opposition to the streetscape project." The plaintiffs added the defendants' "intentional and improper conduct was designed to advantage their own interests in completing the streetscape project."

In summary, the business owners claim the result has caused physical damage to the property, including mold formation, damages to interior walls and fixtures, standing water and structural and or foundations issues like sink holes. Those physical issues allegedly resulted in damage to business inventory, fixtures and personal property, a loss of business revenue and profits.

As of Monday, only Palmer Engineering's response to the complaint has been filed, in which they say excavation or demolition "was specified by the contract documents for the project and Palmer denies any allegations inconsistent with the contract documents for the project."

In other words, Palmer claims its actions were conducted as outlined in the contracted outline from the city.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
December 12, 2024

**Conference center construction gets green light**

Author/Byline: Mary Jane Epling

Ashland's self-proclaimed "commission of action" crossed off one final feat on Thursday by giving the unanimous green light for the construction of a multi-million dollar downtown conference center. The two-story, 20,000-square-foot event space is set to take shape in the 1300 block of Winchester Avenue, abutting the Paramount Arts Center, which was officially purchased by the city for \$3 million this week. City commissioners specifically OK'd the first reading of an ordinance permitting the city to execute a development agreement with AP3 LLC for the development, design and construction of the conference center, with a budget capped at a little more than \$34 million.

**Mike Graese**, who will finish his duration as city manager at the end of the year, provided a report to go along with the new business item, suggesting conversations of a downtown convention center have been kicked around by elected officials and funding sources for the past decade. **Graese** said with "historic" and "unprecedented" funds available on the state level for such development, that talk turned to serious action earlier this year when state legislatures earmarked \$25 million for the engineering, design and construction phases of the project.

After the city contracted with Conventions, Sports and Leisure to conduct a feasibility study for such a structure in 2022, the findings revealed a 20,000-square-foot event space would capture 84% of the conference center market, anticipating to bring in at least one national convention per year. The 2022 study found that the conference center could have an economic impact of \$12.9 million annually and would add 115 full- and part-time positions. In October 2023, current commissioners accepted the city's conference center committee's suggestion of AP3 LLC, prompting contract negotiations with the company in March 2024.

Two months ago, the city signed a preliminary design agreement for the center that will include a multipurpose hall, ballroom, meeting space and outdoor event space. As far as funding for such a project, **Graese** said the local tax base isn't expected to foot the bill, either. In addition to \$25 million from the state, the city also secured \$1 million from a federal AMLER grant, \$750,000 from the Woodlands Foundation Grant for vertical construction and a \$10 million bond which will be paid for through transient tax revenue. **Graese** gave Commissioner Amanda Clark credit for securing the AMLER funds, saying those funds have historically been extended for things already constructed. "This is the first time, as I understand, in their history that they have given any stipend to a organization to do planning and engineering," **Graese** said. **Graese** said the city managed to utilize \$3 million of the \$10 million bond for the purchase of the financially struggling Paramount Arts Center. "With the bond, we can get that paid back with the transient tax that was previously going to the Paramount construction project from 10-15 years ago," **Graese** said. That revenue stream became available to the city from Boyd County in October, per **Graese**. Other financial boosters will include paid parking similar to that found in other



**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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urban areas, such as Lexington, which is estimated to bring in more than \$500,000 annually, naming rights and sponsorships and revenue generated from meeting space fees and retailer tenants inside the conference center.

With preliminary designs indicating a connection point between the first floor of the conference center and the lobby of the existing Paramount, Sam Howard with Trace Creek Construction said the conference center will be constructed to complement the Paramount, not compete with it. "This is a community project. This is not seen as a for-profit project for someone to come in and operate," Howard said. "It's at the city's discretion on what happens. "The community doesn't have to worry that what is the Paramount today will not be what the Paramount is tomorrow," Howard said, referencing traditions and community organizations like Paramount Players and the Festival of Trees and Trains. "If you want it to continue to operate, the city has to be involved," Howard said. "What is to be added to the Paramount is not meant to compete, it's meant to contrast and bring out the visual and historic nature of the Paramount itself," he said.

**Graese** said an additional P3 study would provide updated findings from the previous feasibility studies with updated job count and economic impact. A secondary RFP is currently in the process for future operations and management of the Paramount and conference center, to be selected by the city. A formal groundbreaking event is scheduled at the site for Tuesday, Dec. 17, at 11 a.m. with Gov. Andy Beshear and Senior Adviser Rocky Adkins set to attend.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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The Daily Independent  
November 14, 2024

**Graese resigning as City Manager**

By Aaron Snyder

**Mike Graese** is resigning as Ashland’s city manager. **Graese** made the announcement following executive session of Thursday’s city commission meeting. “It’s time for me to step away as the city manager of Ashland, Kentucky,” **Graese** said. “To be honest, I’m just out of gas.” The 59-year-old retired Army colonel has led Ashland since August 2017. He will wrap up his time in the director’s chair on Dec. 31, 2024. “Today, the city manager has tendered a notice to terminate his contract, and the board has accepted the same,” said Mayor Matt Perkins during Thursday’s meeting. “After discussion, this board feels it’s appropriate for the city manager to continue in his capacity through the end of December 2024, and the interim city manager will be named to serve after that date.” **Graese** told The Daily Independent he’d been mulling over this decision for about six months. “Ecclesiastes 3 states there’s a point and time for everything, and there’s a time for every event under heaven,” **Graese** said during the public meeting. “After taking counsel and, most importantly, praying extensively, and long discussions with my wife, we believe now is the best time to terminate my contract with the city to allow the incoming board of commissioners to select a successor that will bring the full energy they deserve.” The incoming commission consists of incumbent Marty Gute and newcomers D.J. Rymer, Sonny Martin and Tim Renfro, along with Mayor Chuck Charles. Amanda Clark, Josh Blanton and Cheryl Spriggs join Gute and Perkins to comprise the current commission.

**Graese** told The Daily Independent the election results did not directly factor into his decision to resign. “During my interview in March of 2017 and after taking this position, I pledged to the elected officials, staff and to the citizens of our community that I’d work as hard as I could for as long as I could,” **Graese** said on Thursday in the commission chambers. “I’ve kept that promise. “... I’m grateful for the opportunity to serve the citizens of Ashland, the city staff, the elected officials and I’m profoundly appreciative to have been part of the historic progress Ashland has made in the last seven and a half years,” he said to conclude his public statement. The commission voted, 3-2, to give **Graese** a pay raise to \$163,000 last December. The total compensation was \$233,897.20 when factoring in 457/IRA contribution and benefits. That raise took effect on Jan. 31, 2024. **Graese** told The Daily Independent he and his wife, Francie, determined this move will be best for his physical, mental and emotional health. **Graese** had no experience working in city government prior to accepting Ashland’s top position. He did, however, serve as base commander and garrison commander in the Army. **Graese** said he will miss the city staff “tremendously.” “That’s the hardest part of today,” he told The Daily Independent. “... I’m sincerely going to miss serving the citizens of Ashland and working with this staff. The staff dedication is something I’m not sure most people in the community realize how hard they work and how dedicated they are trying to do the best job at the time. ... The most pleasant surprise seven and a half years ago was what a talented, professional staff it was.”

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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The Daily Independent, Ashland, Ky.  
October 1, 2024

**PAC properties purchase particulars provided**  
Matt Jones

The City of Ashland and the Paramount Arts Center have signed a purchase agreement for all real properties and the earnest money has been provided to the PAC. The agreement was signed by PAC Board President William Boykin on Thursday and Mayor Matt Perkins on Friday. “This was based on what was in the best economic and cultural interest for the region,” City Manager **Mike Graese** said. The purchase price was \$3 million for the real properties at 1300 Winchester Ave., 1316 Winchester Ave., 1322 Winchester Ave., 333 14th Street and 332 13th Street. The contract required the city to pay the PAC \$500,000 within seven days upon signing the agreement, stating “given the immediate financial need of the PAC, the parties agree these funds shall be made available to PAC in order for the PAC to continue operation and execute all currently scheduled programs.” The city delivered a check to the PAC for the \$500,000 on Monday, **Graese** said. The money came from the interest drawn on a grant the city received on the American Rescue Plan Act grant, **Graese** said. The city will lease the property back to the PAC for \$1 from the date of closing to June 30, 2025. During that time the PAC will manage and operate the PAC. Management of the PAC starting July 1, 2025, was not discussed in the agreement, only saying if the city wishes it can request proposals for management and the PAC can submit a proposal.

**Graese** said the PAC was encouraged to submit a plan to continue operation after that date, but the city will also be accepting plans from other companies as well. As of Tuesday, the city did not have the parameters set for what would be included in the proposals. **Graese** said it “was critical” that any proposal the city decided on would include the continuation of Paramount Players and other cultural opportunities. The city will place a lien on the buildings; the lien will have a rate of 6% interest if closing does not occur. The remaining \$2.5 million will be paid at a bond closing, expected to take between 60 and 90 days. The contract also states the closing will be no later than Dec. 31 without the written agreement of both parties. The PAC will be “responsible for costs associated with the occupation, management and operation of the theater and attached buildings, including but not limited to utilities, maintenance upkeep, operations and repairs” during the lease. The lease states the city will be responsible for maintenance and upkeep to the buildings in excess of \$25,000. The repairs are those required to keep the buildings up to code. Language clearly states that the amount must be associated with a singular issue or condition and not an accumulation of items. The city agreed for the PAC to have first refusal to repurchase the theater if the city were to sell at a future date. The PAC would have 15 days to respond to the city’s offer. Since the deal is for the properties, the city does not have access to financial information or operational cost. The city did not set aside time for public input regarding the purchase of the Paramount. “Speed was of the essence,” **Graese** said. “Getting them the help they needed so critically.”

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
August 23, 2024

**City gears up for new wastewater plant overhaul**

Author/Byline: Mary Jane Epling

After many trials and tribulations through the decades related to utility infrastructure, the City of Ashland is gearing up for a long-awaited, and costly, upgrade to the wastewater treatment plant. City officials and commissioners got an in-person look at the tucked-away facility on Thursday, where Wastewater Plant Superintendent Jeff McFarlin outlined the future of a totally rehailed system and plant that will expand its footprint toward the Ohio River. The proposed project includes a campus-like layout of new pumping stations, clarifiers, administration building and other structures vital in wastewater treatment and collection.

The city has currently allocated a whopping \$82.4 million to the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) project, comprised of a \$44 million loan secured with the help of FIVCO, a projected \$15 million revenue from combined sewer overflow surcharge, a \$4 million community project grant and a future local issued bond totaling \$19.4 million. Tasked with filtering millions of gallons of wastewater before being sent on to the water treatment plant, some equipment currently operating at WWTP are about 20 years passed their life expectancy, according to Utilities Director Mark Hall. Hall and McFarlin said the plants can handle its current capacity, but some equipment is so dated, utility guys frequently have to fabricate their own parts in the event something dated breaks, as spare parts are no longer sold on the market. McFarlin said the plant also runs into issues with heavy rain events, as the city's current combined sewage flow added with torrential rainfall can cause an overflow issue, but that's not a new problem.

Rewinding to 2007, the city entered into a consent decree agreement with the state Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet to outline steps to eliminate its combined sewer outflows. The environmental agency found issue with several cities, including Ashland, still using a combined system collecting sanitary sewage, industrial wastewater and stormwater, as heavy rain could lead to overflow and a discharge of waste containing bacteria and pathogens, posing a public health risk and wreaking havoc on ecosystems, according to the Kentucky Division of Water. At the time, the city's outlined plans to the state anticipated budgeting several million dollars toward its utilities infrastructure to take place over the next 20 years. However, months later, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ordered the city to complete the work in half the time or face thousands in federal fines.

Fast-forward to 2018, and with new, utility-focused City Manager **Mike Graese** in the equation, the city budgeted \$28 million for wastewater upgrades to modernize the existing infrastructure, including upgrades to pumping stations and drainage systems. By June 2018, the city had completed water collection projects that included pump station projects on Roberts Drive and 6th Street, 37th Street and a project on 29th Street that separated the combined sewer system into two separate lines, cutting 4 million gallons from passing through the single line. By 2022, the city had completely rehailed its water system and was up to compliance standards by tackling 30

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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infrastructure improvements to correct 27 violations previously found by the state between 2013 and 2018. With wastewater collection and water treatment on track, the city has shifted its focus to wastewater treatment.

Earlier this year, the City of Ashland approved a historical \$122.8 million budget which included a \$22.5 million earmark from the utility and combined sewer overflow fund for the WWTP project. The WWTP project is one of two \$59.2 million capital investment projects planned for the fiscal year ending in June 2025, in addition to a downtown conference center. On Thursday, commissioners were provided with a general arrangement outline that provided a bird's-eye image of the planned layout of construction and a rundown on how wastewater will be treated. "Really the driver behind this plant is not a capacity issue," Hall said. "It's a compliance issue for combined sewer overflows." Hall said, like most river cities, the collection of both sewage and rain water requires an overflow, "however, that is something we have been tasked by the EPA to get rid of." Hall said the construction of a "state-of-the-art facility" will bring the city into compliance and will ultimately replace a plant that's decades past its prime.

McFarlin said the plant has been functioning up to par as far as screening solids and removing organic material, but the outdated plant requires manual labor where modernized plant's have a push of a button. "There's a lot of maintenance issues with that older technology," McFarlin said. "We spend money to keep trying to replace as it breaks down or try to get it fixed." Even with the "ancient technology," **Graese** commended wastewater employers who contributed to a national water treatment award for having no violations, through "sheer manpower and professionalism." "This is something we have waited for for many, many years," **Graese** said.

Hall said the utility department has been conservative with its expenses, holding off on low-priority projects to conserve money for the anticipated construction. The project is planned to have a new building where wastewater first arrives, where McFarlin said he and his men have to climb in with a rake and manually remove large items from a grate before moving it along. The new system will have an automatic system that the department will maintain instead of physically operate. McFarlin said the proposed project also includes a new administration complex, moving a state-of-the-art lab, workshop and operations under one roof. The new system will also allow for extra volume with new clarifiers and treatment will be modernized. To resolve the federal compliance issue, **Graese said**, currently, any stormwater-caused overflow would simply flow out into the river. Hall said with the new plan, "When the flow reaches a certain level, it will divert." Considering the plant has to maintain operation during construction, McFarlin said the project would be completed in stages. "It requires a significant investment and its a mandate by the federal government," City Engineer Steve Cole said. "It is certainly the environmentally responsible thing to do for the city. "It's a necessary cost," Cole added. Commissioner Cheryl Spriggs, who has been an elected official for much of the city's water woes, put it simply: "It's been a long time coming." Mayor Matt Perkins said the city is currently not being fined by the state or federal environmental agencies and is in a state of grace for actively pursuing a revamped plant.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
July 26, 2024

**Walking the roundabouts: City officials get up close during construction update**

Author/Byline: Austin Johnson and Matt Jones

City officials trekked for a tour detailing progress about the construction project that brought roundabouts to downtown Ashland on Thursday afternoon. Standing on the freshly poured sidewalk in front of the Highland's Museum, City Manager **Mike Graese** said the project was set to begin paving August 19. "We are moving toward exciting times. We have faced significant challenges and we are overcoming those. This will be a final product the city will grow to love," Steve Cole, Ashland City engineer, said.

A couple blocks earlier, on the corner of 15th Street and Winchester Avenue, **Graese** highlighted the project has always been scheduled to pave in August. The paving should take about a week to complete, which will include striping lanes and parking spaces. "After the paving, you will see a huge improvement in the appearance of downtown," **Graese** said.

During the tour, the issue of handicap accessibility was raised. Stephen Sewell, with Palmer Engineering, stressed each block will have ADA compliant parking as well as van spaces and ramps. City Commissioner Amanda Clark brought up the concern about crossings, especially for those visually impaired. Sewell said the city could look at installing safe crossing options. Cole added the paving will all be done at once to ensure the best possible product, a sentiment echoed by Sewell. "When you (pave) all at once, you end up with a way better product," Sewell said.

On the North side of Winchester Avenue, between 15th and 16th streets, an issue with water standing on the sidewalk has been noticed. Sewell said he watched when it rained and while the water would drain, it might take a while to fully drain from the sidewalk. The solution to the issue is to add a drain to the sidewalk for the block, with each end tying into preexisting storm drains. The drains will require tearing up the middle section of the new sidewalks on the block to install the flush drains at the low spot between the storefronts and the edge of the curb. The drains are expected to be fixed next week and will be a three to four day project, Cole said.

The responsibility of the cost of the fix seemed to be a bone of contention during the tour. Cole said the contractor recommended things at "additional cost." Cole said a ruling by the state transportation department stated the city would not be responsible for the cost, but he was unable to get conformation as of Thursday. During the tour, Sewell said there would be no additional cost, but deferred to the city after Cole brought the issue up again. Cole said he expected an official answer about any additional cost next week.

**Graese** said the decision to not advance the project block by block was in hopes to minimize the effects on area businesses. Had the project proceeded block by block, each block, as well as the block on either side of an intersection, would have been affected while the roundabout was installed. However, by doing it in sections, the contractor was able to install multiple

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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roundabouts for each closure. While progress seems to have slowed, Sewell said the project was on track according to the original timeline. Paving was, and is, scheduled to happen in August. and the project is still on track to be finished on time, which the contract set to be completed in November.

**Graese** stressed the city understood the effects the project has had on downtown businesses and did not want to minimize citizen concerns. That is not to say there haven't been setback on the projects. Currently, the contractor is reordering metal grates that cover water runoff at several intersections after the original grates were stolen. The number of basements slowing progress was more than expected, **Graese** said. Just ensuring the basement was safe halted progress.

**Graese** said in the case of the Highland's Museum, the city was not fully aware of the dimensions of the basement until 2022. Crews worked extra this week to secure the basement and poured the sidewalk in front of the museum. But in the case of a basement on the corner of 15th Street and Winchester Avenue, the size of the basement was not known until the contractors began work. **Graese** said while the city knew the building had a basement, an extension of the basement that juts out under the sidewalk was not known about until crews found it. "It's lucky a car backing up to the building never went through," **Graese** added. That set back means that corner is the final section awaiting new sidewalks and curbing before paving begins. Once paving is complete, the project will require buttoning up of items in the business district, Sewell said. Streetscaping, which will go through 22nd Street, will also continue in September and October, **Graese** said.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
June 28, 2024

**Ashland makes a move towards allowing medicinal cannabis businesses**

Author/Byline: Mary Jane Epling

Ashland city commissioners voted to take initial steps to make space for medicinal cannabis businesses within city limits on Thursday. Katherine Utsinger, city planner, gave a brief presentation prior to the commissioners' vote, recapping Senate Bill 47, which legalized medicinal cannabis use in the state set to take effect Jan 1, 2025. Utsinger said medicinal use and businesses licensed to sell cannabis products are already heavily restricted on the state level. The state mandates a medical card given by licensed practitioners to patients meeting specific qualifications. Examples of people who may medically qualify for cannabis usage are those with chronic or severe pain, epilepsy, any type or forms of cancer, chronic nausea and post-traumatic stress disorder — again determined and diagnosed by a licensed physician. Utsinger said cities had the option to opt out of the state's legalization by putting resolutions in place before the effective date to prohibit medicinal cannabis businesses within the cities' zoning.

Ashland appears to be pursuing the possibility of redefining existing zoning ordinances to allow and regulate the time, place and manner of operations at cannabis-based businesses. In addition to state-level mandates on medicinal users, the state also heavily regulates any potential businesses dispersing cannabis products. Kentucky is only allotting 48 licenses state-wide. Additionally, the state will be divided into into regions with each only getting two licenses, Utsinger said. State law bans dispensaries within 1,000 feet of schools, daycares or where minors congregate as no person younger than 18 may purchase medicinal cannabis. Utsinger said although minors can be issued a medicinal use card by their doctor, a parent or guardian must maintain another specific card that would allow the purchase for the underaged user.

The state also places limits on the hours a dispensary may operate, restricting hours of operation to 8 a.m. to 8 p.m, but the hours may be shortened through city ordinances. Utsinger said if the city was interested in allowing medicinal cannabis in the city, she proposed revisiting existing zoning ordinances, defining medicinal cannabis businesses and outlining where medicinal cannabis-related business would be permitted. "Obviously we want to stay ahead of this to make sure we're doing what we need to be doing within the boundaries of the law," Mayor Matt Perkins said.

The state will be accepting license applications from July 1 until Aug. 31. A lottery-style selection will begin in October. "So right now is the time local municipalities need to act or not act," Commissioner Josh Blanton said. Commissioner Cheryl Spriggs said medical cards will include photo ID and would be administered through the state if qualifications are met for medicinal users. "When we first heard about this I thought I needed to educate myself on this so I started to look at some John Hopkins studies ... read some reports from our department heads, I talked to cancer physicians, other physicians for their opinion. I talked to my Sunday school class," Spriggs said. "Overwhelmingly people are for this," Spriggs said, adding after she lost her



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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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father to cancer at the age of 20, "If there had been anything — I would've gone to the ends of the earth for him to ease the nausea and the pain."

Commissioner Marty Gute said he was a bit apprehensive initially. "I thought it was, ya know, Cheech and Chong was gonna set up on the street corner somewhere," Gute said, but Utsinger's presentation swayed him to be in favor. Utsinger told the commission it needed to act if the city wanted dispensaries or medicinal cannabis-related businesses in Ashland. According to City Manager **Mike Graese**, interested cannabis investors have already reached out to the city regarding the city's status on permission. The first reading to alter the ordinance and define zoning for medicinal cannabis passed unanimously. Commissioner Amanda Clark was absent on Thursday.

Here are a few more highlights from this week's meeting:

Commissioners passed an ordinance to install a safe haven baby box at the Ashland Fire Department, providing a space for newborns to be safely surrendered — the first of its kind in Northeast Kentucky. The initial \$15,000 fee for the baby box was provided by an anonymous donor and Two Hearts Pregnancy Care Center. Construction supplies and installation will be donated by Trace Creek Construction, according to Graese. **Graese** said the annual \$500 fee would be paid by Two Hearts Pregnancy Care Center's donation and the city's general fund would contribute for delivery fees.

Commissioners passed the first reading and approval of an already existing ordinance regarding truck routes within city limits. According to City Attorney Jim Moore, the amended ordinance updated the cost of fines to discourage semi trucks using Winchester Avenue, also making it more feasible for the Ashland Police Department to reinforce.

Commissioners passed the first reading of an ordinance that establishes procedural regulations and prerequisite qualifications relating to the selection and recruitment of city police officers. The ordinance includes a one-year probationary period of service for each new employee, education and training requirements, performance evaluations and standards of discipline for city officers.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
June 13, 2024

**Growing frustration on Winchester Ave. progress**

Author/Byline: Mary Jane Epling

An Ashland city commissioner voiced displeasure in the speed of the Winchester Avenue streetscape project on Thursday, stating no portion of the downtown stretch had been entirely completed after months of construction. Commissioner Amanda Clark said although she still advocated for the project and called it "fantastic," she was growing frustrated at the timeline of the five-block revamp. "It makes it very difficult to keep paying them (contractors) knowing that there's not a single piece of it that is completely finished and I'm struggling with that," Clark said.

According to City Manager **Mike Graese**, the ongoing activities on Winchester Avenue include landscaping and paving. "Assuming you all adopt the ordinances that we have on for today for some change orders, it has to address some things that were unforeseen as part of the project," **Graese** reported.

The unforeseen happenings relate to the sidewalk near the Highlands Museum and Discovery Center, which required extra engineering, a persistent leak in a building on the corner of 15th Street and "a massive basement that was not known before the construction started at the old Second National Bank is going to be filled in." "It looks like paving will be mid-July at this point if everything goes well," **Graese** said, adding workers were also unable to get concrete as needed, leading to a delay. "I know everybody is anxious and we want to get that done as soon as possible. ... The contract can be complete with the entire project by November, if I remember correctly," **Graese** said.

Clark said while she appreciates the update and appreciates the project's completion being within the bounds of the contract, she prefaced, "I don't want to in any way make any comments seem as if I am not 100% for this project." "I think we all are a little frustrated with the fact that nothing seems to be finished and I would implore you and the rest of the city staff to pass that message to the contractors," Clark continued.

In reply to Clark and Commissioner Cheryl Spriggs — who said the street circles were too large — **Graese** said he agreed with the frustrations "wholeheartedly." "I don't think we'll ever do a project exactly like this again," **Graese** said. "Like everything else we do in the city, there's lessons to be learned." **Graese** said, like Spriggs, he was under the impression the project would be done one block at a time. "It has taught us some valuable lessons. ... We will continue to express that to them," **Graese** said.

Clark said she believes the project needed to happen, but "it's like remodeling your house. We're getting toward the end of it and we just want our kitchen sink back." City Commissioner Josh Blanton encouraged commissioners to remember the project was launched to improve

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**

*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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walkability along the downtown strip, which, according to him, had already taken effect despite the ongoing construction. "Obviously we want it to be finished and for it to look great. ... First Friday, I stood there, because that's what I do, and I watched people go back and forth across Winchester Avenue with no problem at all because it's one-third of the distance that it used to take," Blanton said. "You think about what that used to look like. It used to look like you'd have to plan if you were gonna get across the street or not," Blanton said. "We're already seeing that walkability benefit."

Later in the meeting, the aforementioned ordinances by **Graese**, which included a \$537,494 increase in the project's contract and another \$55,000 for professional engineering services, both passed unanimously. The revised contract amount now equals more than \$7.7 million, however the city is only contributing \$1.2 million with the remaining amount to be paid through state and federal grants and general obligation bonds.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
May 31, 2024

**Ashland approves \$122.8M budget**

Author/Byline: Aaron Snyder

The City of Ashland's budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, reflects a \$24.3 million increase from the prior year. It's the first time in the city's history the budget has exceeded \$100 million. The inevitable wastewater treatment project and state-supported conference center plans make up much of the difference, according to Ashland's finance department.

Tony Grubb, the city's longtime finance director, Michelle Veach, the assistant director, and Robin Rohauer, senior financial analyst, presented a 29-page proposal in the continuation of a recessed city commission meeting on Wednesday morning. The commission passed the budget unanimously and Mayor Matt Perkins — in his final budget-related meeting as mayor or commissioner — thanked the finance department for its tireless efforts all year long, but specifically "budget season." City Manager **Mike Graese** declared it a "good budget," which required about 75 minutes for the finance experts to present, all told.

Commissioners questioned little, but a pair of "red" numbers prompted a few inquiries and moments of out-loud thinking. The Ashland Cemetery, founded in 1870, is costing the city nearly four times more than what it brings in. Projected revenue for FY25 is \$121,950 whereas envisioned expenses total \$427,975. The bulk of that — \$331,703 — is salary and benefits for workers who handle upkeep. Operating expenses for the cemetery are \$96,272. Commissioner Josh Blanton broached the topic following the conclusion of the proposal reading. "I jotted it down as a takeaway when I saw the number," **Graese** said. He said he hopes to implement an analysis regarding the cemetery that he can get to the commissioners at some point in the near future.

The parking garage Community Trust Bank donated to the city in 2022 is projected to produce a \$175,502 deficit in the upcoming fiscal year. The garage is at the corner of 17th Street and Carter Avenue. Despite some resistance in 2022, the city took it on to create more parking for downtown visitors. Commissioner Cheryl Spriggs, who was the lone wolf in firm opposition to the city accepting responsibility for the garage two years ago, posed the question: "How much money have we lost on the garage since we got it?" Veach said in Fiscal Year 23, the deficit was about \$148,109, and that "this year will probably be about the same." "Comes out of the general fund, doesn't it?" Spriggs asked, to which Veach answered yes. They turned the page — literally to Page 27 — from there. Salaries and benefits for upkeep and maintenance of the garage are budgeted at \$130,272. Operating expenses are expected to be \$69,905.

The annual Tax Increment Finance (TIF) cumulative shortfall is \$1.3 million. That pertains to accounts for redevelopment and improvement projects in the downtown TIF business district. With a 4.6% employee cost of living allowance, that has increased city-wide personnel costs by \$1.2 million, bringing FY25 personnel costs (salary and benefits) to \$36.6 million (30.4% of the

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
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total budget). The city will add three firefighters, with salaries/benefits totaling \$377,517. Federal and state grant funding accounts for 14% (\$18.3 million) of the budget. That number includes a \$4 million grant for the wastewater treatment plant. Capital investment and projects comprise 49.1% (\$59.2 million) of the FY25 budget. Both the wastewater treatment plant project (\$22.5M; utility fund combined sewer overflow fund) and conference center grant funds (\$12.5M) fall under that category.

Perkins closed out the budget portion of Wednesday's meetings with complimentary remarks toward the finance department. "I value your professional relationship and your friendship, and it's going to be tough not seeing you all at this time next year, although I'm sure, for your all, budget time's not the most fun time to be with us, but it's important to our citizens and our city that we get this done, and I know that we will continue to be in good hands with you all leading the way in the finance department, so thank you from me personally," Perkins said.

**Graese** added more for the commission to consider prior to voting to approve the budget — all pertaining to salary adjustments for employees (five per the employees' request and one at his recommendation).

Other highlights from Wednesday's meeting:

The commission voted to keep the regulatory license fee at 4% of the gross receipts from the sale of alcoholic beverages within the city during the fiscal year July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025. Blanton requested information from gross receipts from this past year, which **Graese** said he would retrieve.

The commission paved the way for the Ashland Police Department to increase its school resource officer number to nine in the city. According to **Graese**, the commission also made a decision that will allow an officer to step into a supervisory role regarding SROs. Commissioner Amanda Clark requested clarification that this would not reduce the police force. **Graese** said, "in reality, no." "Good; I wasn't going to say yes to that," Clark said.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
May 8, 2024

**Ashland's water plant earns top state honor**

Author/Byline: LEE WARD

Ashland's Water Treatment Plant swept away a top state honor this week. The plant was awarded the title of Kentucky's Water Plant of the Year by the Kentucky Water and Wastewater Operators Association at an event in Owensboro.

Bill Stambaugh, water superintendent for the City of Ashland, said they knew the plant was in the running because KWWOA representatives inspected the plant recently; the top four plants are inspected before the winner is decided. Stambaugh said the plant was nominated anonymously and several points were considered in naming a winner. "Water quality is a huge one, and they also look for making sure we don't have violations for previous 12 months," Stambaugh said. "They want to see how you're utilizing your facility to the best of your ability with treatment and staff." Mark Hall, Director of Utilities for the City of Ashland, said the organization also looks for any innovative measures in plant operation.

One of those points: The Ashland plant signed onto the Area Wide Optimization Program (AWOP), which means the plant is committed to meeting standards that are well above regular operational guidelines. That means AWOP plants are much more strict. Another advancement: total organic carbon, which watertechnologies.com calls "an important water quality parameter for drinking water plants due to its link to disinfection byproducts (DBPs)." "It fine-tunes the water even more, which most plants aren't doing," Stambaugh said.

For the good of the industry, as well as Ashland's water supply, the plant participates in an internship program, working with Kentucky Community and Technical College System, Marshall University and Ohio University to offer students some insight into water treatment and giving them a leg up on getting a job. "We just hired our third intern from KCTCS," Hall said, giving students a chance to get an inside look might open career doors for them, plus the program is unusual and likely had an influence on Ashland's plant winning the award.

City officials say they're proud of the achievement. "I'm immensely proud," City Manager **Mike Graese** said. Ashland City Commissioner Josh Blanton congratulated the plant and those associated with it for winning the award. "Six years ago, our citizens had become accustomed to seeing notices of water violations. Very proud to say that this team decided that was unacceptable and went from violations and fines to being named the best water plant in state of Kentucky," Blanton said. Hall said the city deserves credit, too. "Elected officials and the city manager and those who prepare the budget have given us the funds to see that this happened," he said.

Last year, Ashland won second place and first for the eastern region. This is the first time Stambaugh is aware that an eastern Kentucky plant has won, he said. "We're extremely excited

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**

**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**

*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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that eastern Kentucky finally was overall winner and, obviously, we're excited, too," Stambaugh said. "It's not just a big deal for us, but more on a regional basis. Our region goes from the Tennessee border, so there's a lot of counties in it and it's a tremendous honor to represent them." He also praised others who work at the plant. "We want people to have confidence in their water," he said. "They take pride in their jobs and it's usually not recognized. ... It takes everybody working together that's shown in these awards and I'm really proud of them."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
April 28, 2024

**SOAR names Ashland City of Year**

Author/Byline: Staff report

Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) named Ashland its 2024 City of the Year at the annual gala in Prestonsburg. Mayor Matt Perkins, the four city commissioners and Visit AKY Director Brandy Clark accepted the award on Saturday at the Mountain Arts Center.

"So proud of all the hard work and teamwork that makes recognition like this a possibility!" City Manager **Mike Graese** posted on Facebook.

"This recognition embodies not only the tremendous hard work and dedication shown by our city staff and elected officials, but the support of our community as well," the City of Ashland Kentucky Government wrote on its Facebook page. "Thank you, SOAR, for this prestigious award. Our future in Ashland is bright, and we are excited to continue building on this momentum."

During the ceremony, SOAR indicated Ashland leadership has focused on public safety and making investments into the city. "When you work together, you can get some things done," Perkins said during the event. "Our region has been hit hard, but I'm so proud of this commission, the tourism office, our city staff and our citizens for coming together like we know we should."

SOAR is a non-profit organization that serves 54 Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) counties of eastern Kentucky. Ashland was the host city for the annual ARC conference in 2023. The city hosted the Mini SOAR Summit in 2022.



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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
April 25, 2024

**Ashland audit clean; minor repeat findings**

Author/Byline: Mary Jane Epling

The city of Ashland received an overall clean audit for the 2023 fiscal year, but minor findings suggest recurring issues affecting the wait list for public housing. During Thursday's city commission meeting, auditor Anthony Workman gave commissioners the rundown on the city's financial audit, which concluded with no major findings. While the audit didn't uncover any major issues with financial statements or issues with internal control, the report does note four instances of "noncompliance" with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's voucher program. Of the four findings, three were also noted in 2022's audit.

After reviewing Ashland applicants for acceptance into the federal housing program, the audit states "several" applicants received preference codes (or priority numbers of sorts) that did not match their original application. Preferences, according to HUD occupancy handbook, help the federal program prioritize its applicant waiting list so those "most in need" are housed first. Examples include prioritizing applicants who are displaced due to disaster or government action and ranking based on income.

Per the audit presented by Workman, missing documents or incorrect filings could result in applicants moving to the top of the wait list over other qualified individuals erroneously, a carryover issue from 2022. "During our testing of compliance with Section 8 requirements, we noted several errors while reviewing 40 tenant files," which include three instances in which income documents didn't match. In another example, one tenant was accepted into the program due to "homeless status," but documents to prove such were missing from the file.

The remaining issue also found in 2022 suggests noncompliance with the program's administrative plan which requires a 30-day notice of a rent increase. "We noted one instance after year-end in which a tenant was only given a four-day notice before the effective date of the rent increase," the finding states.

The final issue noted was unique to 2023 but also found instances of noncompliance with HUD's requirements relating to "up-to-date utility schedule," which the city failed to update after a rate change, per the audit.

Within the audit, City Manager **Mike Graese** included a "corrective action plan," as required by the federal government. The planned fixes include policy and procedure review with staff, implementing a "scanning system" for instant document sorting and ensuring staff is aware that a rent increase must include a 30-day notice before it takes effect. All four findings fall under the responsibility of Chris Pullem, Director of the city's Community and Economic Development. According to news reports from 2022 with the same issues, Pullem noted a "complete turnover" in the Section 8 program which resulted in errors as new employees were trained. According to

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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the corrective action plan for 2023, all issues are expected to be resolved by June 30 and five of eight findings from 2022 have since been corrected.

In other audit news, the city raised its total revenue \$1.5 million from 2022 but spent \$2.9 million more in total government expenses.

The audit also lists major construction projects from June 2022 to June 2023 that still has the city on the hook for \$3.7 million in contract payments at the time of the report.

As far as debt, the audit reports about \$16.8 million in governmental activities which include older bonds and leases. However, the debt amount for 2023 was down roughly \$3 million from 2022.

Listed under "other potentially significant matters," the audit notes the city's substantial increase in payments to the state's retirement system which nearly doubled from 2021 to 2023 for both hazardous and non-hazardous employees.

The audit states the nearly \$7 million contribution to the retirement system "has significantly impacted the city's operating budget."

As far as 2024's budget, the audit offers a summary of expected funds which include a \$1 million grant for the city's downtown conference center.

Economic factors noted include "several significant budget items" accounting for the replacement of "aging water lines," engineering for a new sewer treatment plant and the Winchester Avenue improvement project's paving, sidewalk replacement and downtown "streetscape."

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
January 26, 2024

**City manager provides year in review**

Author/Byline: AARON SNYDER

The bulk of City Manager **Mike Graese's** comments during Thursday's Ashland city commission meeting consisted of an overall glowing review of 2023. **Graese** pointed out a plethora of positive items from a 46-page report.

Among the city staff's accomplishments:

- The solid waste department collected 9,200 tons of municipal solid waste on six routes.
- Workers completed 1,901 repair orders in the Central Garage.
- Animal Control fielded 859 service calls
- Employees collected 860 dumpster loads of recyclables.
- ELDT (entry-level driver training) trainers Frank Jones and Scott Dalton trained 28 employees, all of whom acquired their CDLs — saving the city about \$78,000 in 2023.
- Street workers patched 2,966 potholes — using 290 tons of asphalt. They also installed 1,500 feet of conduit and wire for the parking garage camera system and converted all lighting to LED in the garage.
- The fire department responded to 2,066 calls (an increase of 37 calls from the year prior) — 195 of them were fire-related; and 540 were of the EMS variety. Firefighters logged 13,702.5 hours of training — an average of 268.6 hours per person. AFD conducted 657 fire inspections and flushed/tested 1,033 hydrants. It received five grants amounting \$156,400 and received \$11,250 worth of donations.
- Ashland Police responded to 23,191 calls for service — an average of 63 a call. APD made 1,345 total arrests in 2023. It worked 858 vehicle crashes (up 6% from 2022).
- APD hired seven new police officers and employed six school resource officers last year.
- **Graese** noted the addition of a digital forensic lab, which is valuable to other law enforcement agencies, too.
- Regarding utilities, city employees repaired 213 water main leaks and breaks. They committed no violations in water production while producing more than 3.3 billion gallons of high-quality water, according to Graese. As previously reported, the water treatment plant earned a certificate of excellence in water quality by the state's Area Wide Optimization Program.
- Wastewater workers treated 1.1 billion gallons of wastewater. By remaining in compliance, 2023 marked the fourth year of the last six that Ashland qualifies for the operational excellence award from the Kentucky/Tennessee Water Environment Federation.
- Engineering-wise, Phase 3 of the Dixon Street project is complete. Projects in progress or under construction are U.S. 23 road waterline replacement, water pump station emergency generators, wastewater treatment plant upgrade, Winchester Avenue streetscape and the conference center that will be at 1401 Winchester Ave.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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- About 17.3 miles (12% of streets included in the Administered Annual Resurfacing Program) were resurfaced. Workers installed 11,000 linear feet of sidewalks at various locations.
- The finance department received the CAFR (Comprehensive Annual Financial Report) Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 16th year in a row.
- In Parks and Recreation, employees installed bench swings at Riverfront and Central Parks, put in a playground at Wendell Banks Southside Park, constructed a playground at Oliverio Park and erected a new fence at the riverfront.
- The Ashland Assisted Housing Authority went from "standard performers" to "high performers," and it issued vouchers to 319 low-income families.
- Economic Development employees created a comprehensive "how to start a business" packet, "providing valuable resources for aspiring small business owners," the report states.
- **Graese** said the legal department played a pivotal role in Ashland's ability to get national opioid litigation funds. "Legal" drafted and prepared 173 ordinances, 34 resolutions and 27 municipal orders in 2023.
- **Graese** extended gratitude to Erika Bonner, the city's public information officer, and others who played instrumental roles in drawing the Appalachian Regional Commission Conference to the city in September.
- Also under the public-information umbrella, a city logo was trademarked and used regularly, and social media accounts saw significant growth.

"This doesn't even scratch the surface," **Graese** said. "I strongly encourage you to get that 46-page document, and there's a lot of other things in there that'll make you go 'wow.'"

The full report is accessible at [ashlandky.gov](http://ashlandky.gov). Click on "document center" and then scroll down to "accomplishments," and click on it to access the report.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
January 17, 2024

**Ashland Water Plant recognized for quality**

Author/Byline: Austin Johnson

The City of Ashland water treatment plant was listed this week in the top 1% for best water quality in the state in 2023. The plant was awarded a certificate of excellence in water quality for 2023 by the State Area Wide Optimization Program, known as AWOP. After previous years in the past involving numerous violations, **Mike Graese**, Ashland's city manager, said it's an example of the continued progress the city is making in an effort to ensure that Ashland has the best utilities the city can provide.

"I am tremendously proud of the progress that has been made," **Graese** said. "Five to six years ago, we were pretty regularly getting notices of violation. We have not had one of those in about 25 quarters. That, to me, is not just about the recognition, it's the recognition of excellence. "We are not chasing awards and recognition just for that. We are pursuing that because it reflects what the team is doing and that is trying to produce the best utilities possible."

He mentioned a 2022 award when the city captured the title for the best water treatment plant in eastern Kentucky. "The water quality recognition is just another one of those tangible examples of progress that we are making," **Graese** said. "It reflects very well of the mayor and commissioners' commitment to improve our utilities regardless of if it's water or waste water."

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
November 16, 2023

**City manager raise granted despite divided board**

Author/Byline: Mary Jane Epling

Despite a holdout and contentious exchange, Ashland's City Commission voted 3-2 in favor of extending a contract and more than a \$30,000 pay bump to current city manager **Mike Graese** on Thursday. The initial talks of a pay raise and continued contract with **Graese** came up earlier this month, but with Commissioner Cheryl Spriggs absent from the Nov. 3 meeting, the topic was tabled to Thursday. **Graese's** contract currently includes a \$130,000 salary, but the new ordinance granted an additional \$33,000 — bringing **Graese** toward the top end of state averages of chief administrative officers. In comparison to state averages of city management positions, out of 13 reported cities with population sizes of 20,000-99,000 (Ashland's being approximately 21,500) the listed maximum salary is a tad more than \$180,000 per year.

With the first reading gaining approval from commissioners Josh Blanton and Amanda Clark and Mayor Matt Perkins, **Graese's** possible \$163,000 ranks a little over the 75th percentile. While majority overruled commissioners Spriggs and Marty Gute, a clear division severed the commissioners' bench. In January 2021, the commission voted 4-1 in favor of three additional years under **Graese's** guidance. Spriggs was the lone opposed vote. Spriggs continued the pattern, stating the commission had yet to give **Graese** an updated evaluation and made a motion to table the discussion again. "We are putting the cart before the horse here — doing an evaluation after this meeting while we're voting on a raise," Spriggs said after her motion to continue was overruled by Blanton, Clark and Perkins.

Gute backed up Spriggs, implying he was blindsided by the proposed raise. "I never got any memo or communication whatsoever and now I see the request for the \$33,000 and I'm just puzzled," Gute said. "How am I supposed to fill out a favorable performance evaluation and he (**Graese**) just ghosts me?" Gute said **Graese** also sent an article from The State Journal (Frankfort) about the implementation of a deputy city manager, which Gute said was "telling," considering the Frankfort article added the city of Frankfort capped its city manager's salary at \$137,000. "Are you saying that if we give you the \$163,000 you can't do the job, so you need a helper?" Gute asked. "I can't vote for this," Gute said, feeling as if he was given an ultimatum.

Spriggs said **Graese** pitched to her he deserved the raise because he "needed to be the highest-paid employee in the city of Ashland," later adding she had never received a \$30,000 raise in her life. Spriggs mentioned a budget that, in her opinion, wouldn't sustain that yearly increase. While Spriggs and Gute were the outliers on the commission, they weren't alone in their belief that the pay raise was incompatible.

During public comment, Ashland residents Dave Williams and Kathy Meade voiced opposition to the pay raise as well. Meade said she found the proposed salary increase "insulting" and offered solutions to the commission, stating either to review and negotiate the increase, open the

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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position to a new candidate or simply **Graese** could extend his contract at his current pay. Meade added she started a petition 48 hours before the meeting, which, according to her, had already garnered 100 signatures. Meade said in conversations with the petitioners, the consensus was that the median household income in Ashland was \$40,000 and "60-some percent," lived below the poverty line. Williams said while he deemed **Graese** a "nice guy," he was apprehensive about the precedent being set at the expense of taxpayers. "Eight times more than the lowest-paid income seems excessive for our town," Williams said.

Blanton was the first commissioner to voice opposition to Spriggs and Gute, saying the new salary base would put **Graese** in the "roughly 75th percentile" in city administrators. "Now if you know **Mike Graese**, you know he's a 75th-percentile city manager, at least," Blanton said. Blanton cited improvements to the city's water system and **Graese's** overall project management as deserving of a competitive wage, as Blanton said **Graese** hadn't received a raise since 2017.

Perkins said he had felt with **Graese's** leadership, the city had ample forward momentum, extending gratitude to city department heads present at Thursday's meeting. "Most people would expect the CEO of a company to make the most of anybody else in a company," Perkins said. "We have given raises to every employee consistently to try to be competitive. ... I support this contract." Perkins then sent the contract and proposed raise to vote, which prompted a "hold on" from Spriggs. "Is this the whole contract?" Spriggs asked. "It's the employment agreement, yes," Perkins said, causing Spriggs to lift her hands and lean back in her chair. "So he'll get an automatic raise when — all that other stuff that's in there we haven't even negotiated," Spriggs retorted before she and Gute casted their "no" vote. Blanton, Clark and Perkins in-favor votes outnumbered the two "no" votes.

During public comment, Mike Wurts, a longtime attendee and Pledge leader at commission meetings, took the mic after the previous two speakers opposed the increase. Wurts said based on his attendance and to his witness, **Graese** "deserves it."

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
November 16, 2023

**Commission passes controversial ordinance, 3-2**

Author/Byline: Aaron Snyder

Ashland's city commission narrowly passed a controversial ordinance Thursday that, if not implemented, City Manager **Mike Graese** said would result in his resignation. The ordinance further defines the line of authority and responsibility between elected officials, the city manager and all city employees. Thursday's meeting marked the first reading. The ordinance was one of three stipulations that needed met in order for **Graese** to enter good faith negotiations for another contract, according to an Oct. 13 letter he penned to the mayor and commissioners.

**Graese** first shared the following issues in late August, five months prior to the end of his current contract – Jan. 31, 2024: 1) Finalize an ordinance that specifically defines the parameters of the board of commissioners' relationship and interactions with Graese and city staff; 2) Commitment to consider the hiring of a deputy city manager within 12 months; and 3) complete two overdue evaluations on the city manager's performance. Commissioners Cheryl Spriggs and Marty Gute interpreted it as a resignation letter because Graese punctuated it with this statement: "I conclude there are no alternatives but for me to provide the BoC this letter as formal notification that I can no longer continue good faith negotiations on a future contract and, if it still be your desire, I will diligently serve out the terms of my contract until (Jan. 31, 2024)." **Graese** interjected and went on the record that it was not a letter of resignation.

City Attorney Jim Moore agreed with **Graese**. "Well, what is it?" Spriggs asked. "By contract, he is required to notify the other if they intend to not continue in good faith negotiations at that time," Moore said. "That's what that letter did." "So, if we're not negotiating, what's that mean?" Spriggs said. "You don't know what negotiate means?" Moore asked, which prompting a vocal reaction from the crowd. Gute seemed at a loss for words, saying "uh ... uh," into the microphone. "It's OK, he's insulted us before so here we go," Spriggs said. "... What does it mean if he's not negotiating? If we're not negotiating, what's that mean?" "It means at that time, he indicated an intention not to negotiate on a contract," Moore said. Moore later said it'll be up to the city manager whether he accepts the contract that is ultimately approved by the mayor and commissioners.

In the letter, **Graese** said he had not received one written evaluation in six and a half years as Ashland's top governing official. In a city manager form of governor, the CM is the chief administrative officer. Spriggs contended that they did conduct an evaluation in 2021.

The ordinance, which was tabled on Nov. 2 due to a death in Spriggs's family, consists of five sections. In summary, all elected officers of the city – including the mayor and commissioners – shall communicate and deal with all city officers and employees only through the city manager, "except for purposes of inquiry and information concerning city business." Under the ordinance, individual elected officials are forbidden to give orders or directives to city employees or officers



**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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unless acting through formally adopted ordinances, municipal orders or resolutions of the commission. Essentially, they can't interfere with the managerial function of the city manager. Section 2 specifically states nothing in the ordinance shall be interpreted to prohibit conversations of a personal or social nature between the mayor and city commissioners and city workers. Under the ordinance, any elected official who violates any of the provisions in Section 1 shall be "subject to public censure upon a majority vote of commission members present and voting finding a violation of Section 1 upon a complaint brought by the mayor or any commission member." Sitting to the right of **Graese** along the bench, both Spriggs and Marty Gute voted against the ordinance. Sitting to the city manager's left, commissioners Josh Blanton and Amanda Clark voted in favor. Mayor Matt Perkins broke the tie by siding with Blanton and Clark. Spriggs had made a motion to move items involving the ordinance and **Graese's** contract to the mid-December meeting. Gute seconded, but Blanton, Clark and Perkins overruled it.

Gute read a prepared statement regarding both items, referring to the pair of them as an "ultimatum that was given to us." In the statement, he said he viewed the ordinance as limiting direct commission access to city employees, to which Clark said, "That's not what it is." Gute continued, "There is nothing that I found in KRS 83.A.150 that prohibits an elected official from direct contact with a staff member or city employee. In my capacity as an elected official, it's critical that I can contact city employees. I do every day. "... I want to ask the crowd here, do you think state legislators would limit their right to discuss state issues with state agencies or state employees?" Gute said. There were a few "no" murmurs from the audience. "Neither does this ordinance, by the way," Blanton said. "There's absolutely no language in this ordinance that says that."

Unfazed by Blanton's remark, Gute continued reading. "... The city manager works for us, not the reverse," Gute said. He eventually directed his attention to Graese and said the following: "If this ordinance was defeated, would that be a dealbreaker? Would you still stay?" "You've said a lot of things, Commissioner, that have been misrepresented 180 degrees out," Graese said. "I came to you in August and I specifically did not say it was an ultimatum. I told you I was physically, mentally and emotionally worn out from doing additional work from elected officials giving directives to staff, directives to staff ..." "I have never given a directive to staff," Gute said. "I vehemently disagree with you," **Graese** responded. "Never, in 15 years, have I given a directive to staff," Gute said. "I vehemently disagree with you, Commissioner," **Graese** repeated.

"... Because of the day-to-day interaction that some commissioners have with city staff," **Graese** continued, "it's problematic for me to have command and control in the correct functionality of this staff. It is toxic. and you may not understand that. It is toxic. "So, to directly answer your question," the city manager said, "yes, if this or some version of this doesn't get passed – and it may not be in Kentucky, Commissioner; it is in many other states, and the other states I communicate with are shocked that it's not in here ... I'll also tell you that my peers in KCCMA fully support this and they're looking to try to add it to the KRS because they're facing similar problems, especially in communities that have not been able to retain city managers. There's cause and effect here. There's a reason that we turned over so many city managers in this city – so yeah, if some version of this doesn't get approved, you'll receive my resignation."

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Spriggs requested an example from **Graese**. "We have inquiries going on that are supposed to be confidential," **Graese** said. "I received word from multiple elected officials, 'Hey, you need to get on top of this' because it's problematic with an employee. Why would an elected official know about that unless it was a direct conversation about the inquiry? I've had elected officials tell employees they're shoo-ins for certain jobs, when that's not true. I've had elected officials say, hey, don't worry, I'll have the parks department look at that. That is direct interference in day-to-day operations." Gute once again denied those actions. **Graese** responded, "I didn't say a name." Said Spriggs: "Whichever commissioners did that, raise your hand." "Commissioner ..." Perkins said. "No, I'm going to the mat on this," Spriggs said.

Spriggs said her no votes on both items were "not personal" against **Graese**, but she didn't like the precedent it would set. "What happens when we get a city commissioner who doesn't like another city commissioner and they're constantly being drug up here to be publicly censured?" Spriggs said. "... You know what? We can do that anyway because there's a thing called freedom of speech."

Blanton said with a city manager form of government, he trusts **Graese's** stipulations in order to put forth his best job performance. He said the communication that has led to this ordinance probably didn't include malicious intentions, but "it still can present a problem and absolutely has presented a problem." "This would not be an issue if it hadn't been something that's important to the city manager," Blanton said. "It's our job to understand why that is."

Said Clark: "(This ordinance) codifies in the city state law that says that we cannot direct employees. We're not allowed to do that anyway." Clark said it was a watered-down version of what **Graese** had initially put forth. "No offense, but I don't understand why you're still OK with it," she said to the city manager. "I want Mr. **Graese** to stay our city manager," Clark said. "I want him to be here. He's good for the city. He's good for the city. We're doing good things. It seems ridiculous to me that we are so divided on this issue when it really only outlines what our responsibilities are anyway."

Spriggs agreed regarding the "ridiculous that we are divided" remark for different reasons. "I think it's unnecessary," she said. "All these years Ashland has operated without this and it's been fine."

Perkins said he had concerns at first, but upon the clarity of permitted communication, he's comfortable with the ordinance "because, to all of your all's points, we don't direct staff, and we're not going to direct staff, and it's going to be business as usual per this ordinance."

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
October 3, 2023

**Local News in Brief: City manager elected to KLC Board**

Author/Byline: Staff Writer |

The Kentucky League of Cities membership elected Ashland City Manager **Mike Graese** to the KLC Board of Directors, according to a news release. **Graese** has been Ashland's city manager since 2017 following a 33-year career in the Army.

The KLC Board of Directors consists of dozens of city officials and representatives of city-related organizations, according to the release.

The board sets the league's legislative agenda each year. It provides legislative strategy and reviews policy issues to create a better quality of life and expand economic opportunities for cities across the state, stated the release.

This will be **Graese's** first term on the board. "I am sure Ashland will bring great insights and ideas to the board as it discusses issues and proposed legislation," said KLC Executive Director/CEO James D. Chaney. "The collaboration of all communities makes KLC a stronger organization that can best serve all our members."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
September 14, 2023

**Commission tackles agenda following ARC**

Author/Byline: Mary Jane Epling

Commissioners and community partners expressed gratitude and pride at Ashland's City Commission meeting on Thursday following the conclusion of the Appalachian Regional Commission Conference. There was plenty of ground to cover Monday and Tuesday as ARC descended upon downtown Ashland, allowing the city to network, explore economic development and gain insight on bettering the quality of life of its citizens from other small towns nestled in Appalachia. Mayor Matt Perkins kicked off the meeting, thanking city partners and workers who made the conference a possibility. "It says a lot about our community. We've had a lot of hits — not usually in the good way — and to see this come about and we get selected and then pull this off in a way that was successful ... it really fills with me pride as Mayor," Perkins said.

The Paramount Arts Center, Visit AKY, Delta Hotel, Highlands and other community partners were thanked for their partnership in hosting visitors and happenings. "I'm also very, very proud of everybody in this city: staff, even our citizens, of how we handled the ARC commission this past week," Commissioner Amanda Clark said. "... Everyone that I talked to commented over and over again of how welcomed they felt." The praises continued across the panel from Commissioners Josh Blanton, Cheryl Spriggs and Marty Gute — who appeared to be in rare form.

Dressed in a branded T-shirt and jeans as opposed to the typical dress code, Clark said Kentucky Power was hosting a food drive, justifying her casual clothing. Gute didn't miss a beat during his address, chuckling, "I thought Commissioner Clark thought she was at a fiscal court meeting." On what began as a serious note, Gute spoke highly of the events scheduled earlier in the week, including the fireworks reception that closed out the conference. "We just scared the devil out of a couple dogs around the neighborhood," Gute said, drawing more laughter.

**Mike Graese**, the city manager, said, "I do think one of the areas we'll look for improvement next time, is that I wished we would've pushed harder to include more of the community."

**Graese** added in the future the city would be more proactive in alerting citizens about fireworks and the risks associated with it. "I dropped the ball on that. We won't make that mistake again," **Graese** said.

During the community comment section of the meeting, commissioners heard from Kim Jenkins, Holly Canfield and Scott Martin — each representing an organization or facility that had a pivotal role in the ARC conference's success. Canfield, Director of Paramount Arts Center — which hosted opening speeches and live entertainment throughout the conference — took the opportunity to discuss the Paramount's presence and role in the community. Canfield highlighted the recent growth of the Paramount, announcing the arts center was still recovering from record

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**

*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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income loss during the pandemic. Canfield said in the last fiscal year, Paramount Arts Center hosted 110 events, garnering 250,000 patrons from all 50 states and four countries including Spain, Germany, Canada and Mexico. The Paramount is a major piece of economic revenue for Ashland, Canfield said, adding \$12.5 million in regional economic impact. Canfield said while the profit numbers were high, the Paramount costs about \$60,000 in operational costs and mostly rely on ticket sales and donations. Canfield said expenses haven't accounted for any preservation or renovations to the nearly century-old venue and hoped to continue its economic momentum to afford desperately needed updates, including plumbing and electrical work.

Kim Jenkins, Director of the Highlands Museum and Discovery Center — which also hosted ARC breakout sessions earlier this week — said the museum, too, is experiencing growth. Jenkins said the museum's new addition — the Clark Family Discovery Center, a multi-million dollar project — is projected to open on Dec. 16.

Even after the exhaustion that must've come from ensuring quality transportation to keeping the streets clean for regional big-shots earlier this week, the trains keep rolling in the city and the commission shifted their focus to the meeting's agenda.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
June 8, 2023

**Ashland city commission passes budget**

Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

Following a riveting performance by the Eastern Kentucky Harmonics Order, the Ashland City Commission passed its budget for fiscal year 2024. This year's budget, set to take effect July 1, was unchanged from the \$98.42 million proposed at a late May budget session. That's up 8% from the previous fiscal year.

Commissioner Amanda Clark thanked the commission and the city staff for getting the budget ready so early. Normally, June is a mad dash for local governments to get the budget ironed out, requiring multiple meetings. "It's June 8 and we're passing a budget," she said. "I really appreciate all the hard work we did ahead of time to get this done so early."

Mayor Matt Perkins noted about \$17.5 million in grants are a part of that budget. "We're looking for all the opportunities we can find for resources from our federal and state partners," he said.

Alongside the budget, the commission also fixed the tax levy for 2023 and the alcohol licensing fees.

Here are some other highlights from Thursday's city commission meeting:

Mayor Matt Perkins named the Eastern Kentucky Harmonic Order "Citizen Ambassadors" for the city, following its performance of "Fly with Me," a Beach Boys medley and "My Old Kentucky Home." The latter performance brought all assembled in the meeting to their feet. Perkins also reported he was made an honorary member of the South Hills Garden Club Thursday morning. The club even presented him an apron.

Commissioner Marty Gute said he bragged about Ashland at the Ironton Rotary Club this week. "I didn't Auger Inn and I didn't stagger out," Gute quipped.

City Manager **Mike Graese** said the city was designated a "Certified Age Friendly Employer" for folks age 50-plus.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
May 1, 2023

**Ashland City Manager gets credential**

Author/Byline: Staff Report

The Ashland city manager became one of more than 1,300 local government management professionals to become credentialed through the International City/County Management Association. In a press release sent Monday, the ICMA said **Mike Graese** completed the Voluntary Credentialing Program. Those holding the credentials represent 10% of the ICMA's 13,000 members in 27 countries.

**Graese** has served in his role for six years in Ashland. Prior to that, he was the United States Army Garrison Commander at Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia and at Fort Jackson in South Carolina. He also served as the Executive Officer to the Department of Army's Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management, who is responsible for 150-plus Army garrisons worldwide.

**Graese** has been a member of the Kentucky City/County Management Association since 2017 and serves as the Chairman of the Board for Pathways.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
March 17, 2023

**Ashland water plant named best in eastern Ky.**

Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

The Ashland Water Treatment Plant was named the best in eastern Kentucky this week. According to an announcement posted to the city's Facebook page, the water plant beat out 34 counties in the region in the Kentucky Water and Wastewater Operator's Association. Ashland will now go on to compete against three other water plants from different parts of the state — one from northern Kentucky, one from central Kentucky and one from western Kentucky. Last year, that award went to Madisonville.

Mayor Matt Perkins said the award is reflective of the city's commitment to update the water system. "We've gone from being on agreed orders with the state to excellent standards," he said. "When I came into office as a commissioner, we were not in a good spot with water infrastructure. I think this is a real shot in the arm for the city."

Back in 2017, a report on the city's water treatment and distribution showed the city's aging infrastructure was causing large amounts of water loss and too much disinfectant by-product in the lines. It was that disinfectant by-product that the city had to enter into an agreed order with the state, according to Utilities Director Mark Hall.

As of Friday, Hall said the water plant has gone 23 quarters without any violations. "That was one of the main subjects of that order, so it's good to see we're focused on that," he said. "We have been performing this quality of work quite a while, but it's nice to be professionally recognized and it's good for our customers to see that, too."

City Manager **Mike Graese**, whose first months as city manager included a crisis at the water plant wherein one of the main filters had broken, praised the improvements at the plant. "I am exceedingly proud of the hard work, dedication and focus of our water treatment plant personnel and the support of the entire city staff to get our plant to this level," **Graese** said. "Thanks also to our elected officials for focusing on improving all of our utilities."



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The Daily Independent  
March 8, 2023

**City of Ashland releases statement after Wilkerson death**

The City of Ashland released a statement following the death of Clarence Wilkerson, a 34-year-old man who died while in custody of the Ashland Police Department on Saturday.

The city release the following statement:

"City of Ashland officials met today with representatives of the Boyd-Greenup County Branch of the NAACP regarding the impact on the community of the recent death of Clarence Wilkerson.

The meeting, requested by Reverend Stanley McDonald (New Hope Baptist Church), included McDonald, Reverend JD Crockrel (Christ Temple Church), Marshall Tyson (United Way of Northeast Kentucky), City Manager **Michael Graese**, Chief of Police Todd Kelley, and City Attorney Jim Moore.

All attending recognized the grief experienced by the friends, family, and community for Mr. Wilkerson's passing. One of the primary goals of the meeting was to facilitate open communications between the city and the community and to ensure those communications remain open. The group also recognized that the need for community unity, especially during this very trying time, is crucial to the life, health, and safety of our entire city and region.

To ensure a complete and thorough independent investigation of the circumstances surrounding Mr. Wilkerson's death, the city immediately requested that the Kentucky State Police (KSP) conduct the investigation and has cooperated fully with the process. Therefore, the city cannot make any comments on the details or status of the case until the investigation is complete. As soon as the investigation is complete, it will be released to the public."

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**The Investigation report:**

<https://www.kentucky.com/news/local/crime/article276964823.html>  
July 11, 2023

**Grand jury won't file charges after Kentucky man dies in police custody**  
By Taylor Six and Christopher Leach

A Boyd County grand jury decided not to file criminal charges after a man died in police custody, Kentucky State Police announced Friday. Clarence Wilkerson, 34, died in March while in custody of the Ashland Police Department. The Kentucky State Medical Examiner's Office ruled that Wilkerson's death was accidental — the official cause being acute methamphetamine intoxication, KSP said in a news release.

The case was presented to the Boyd County grand jury last week after an investigation was completed, according to KSP. "A report was issued by the grand jury that no criminal charges

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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were to be filed,” KSP said in a news release. Bystander video — which sparked criticism of how police handled the incident — showed Wilkerson suffering from health issues while being put into the back of a patrol car. The video has since been removed online. Det. David Boarman with KSP interviewed the bystander two days after the incident, according to investigative documents obtained by the Herald-Leader through the Kentucky Open Records Act. The bystander told Boarman that Wilkerson had been at her residence that morning and maintained he was not intoxicated. Wilkerson encountered officer Jon McCormick shortly after leaving the bystander’s residence, according to investigative documents. The bystander told Boarman she believed McCormick had a bias against Wilkerson but did not have any definitive evidence of that claim. A brief pursuit happened after Wilkerson encountered McCormick, according to investigative documents. After Wilkerson was placed under arrest, he could barely walk and was “white as a ghost,” the bystander told Boarman. The bystander estimated five minutes elapsed from when Wilkerson fled to when he was brought back to a police cruiser, according to investigative documents. Wilkerson was subsequently transported to King’s Daughters Medical Center, where he died. Boarman also spoke to another witness who said the arresting officers were trying working with Wilkerson in a kind manner, according to investigative documents.

Wilkerson had methamphetamine, amphetamines and THC in his blood, KSP said previously. He also had a prior heart condition which “included congestive heart failure, hyperlipidemia, and diabetes,” the police press release said. Wilkerson’s family also confirmed his heart condition to Boarman and said he had a history of drug use, according to investigative documents. No signs of trauma were found on Wilkerson’s body by Boarman and Deputy Coroner Harold Holly, according to investigative documents. Law enforcement previously said Wilkerson was being pursued and detained on outstanding 2017 misdemeanor charges. Wilkerson was in possession of a crystal like substance suspected to be methamphetamine along with other items when he was arrested, according to investigation documents. Dispatchers were told Wilkerson might have swallowed drugs during the pursuit to destroy evidence of a crime, investigative documents said.

The Ashland police officers who were on the scene of Wilkerson’s arrest were McCormick, Chris Brislin and Tony Floyd, KSP said. None of the officers involved in the incident had body-worn cameras. However, there was a camera in McCormick’s cruiser that captured Wilkerson in the backseat of the cruiser. Ashland Police Chief Todd Kelley confirmed to the Daily Independent in Ashland that all officers involved in the incident were placed on administrative leave, per department procedure.

Kelley also confirmed to the Daily Independent an internal investigation was being conducted. “We conducted a thorough investigation and all evidence we collected lead to the grand jury deciding not to press charges,” state trooper Shane Goodall told the Herald-Leader Monday. Civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who has represented the families of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others who died in incidents with police, previously said he had been retained by Wilkerson’s family. Crump was not immediately available for comment Monday morning.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
January 29, 2022

**City of Ashland boasts clean audit**

Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

The City of Ashland posted up a clean audit, an accountant told the City Commission on Thursday. Anthony Workman, with the accounting firm Kelley Galloway Smith and Goolsby, reported the city's financial statements were given correctly and in-line with generally accepted accounting practices and standards. "This is a clean audit, no need for modification," Workman said. Mayor Matt Perkins said the audit is "one our best since I've been on the board," crediting the city manager, the finance department and the staff with remedying findings in last year's audit and continuing to improve inventory standards and systems. City Manager **Mike Graese** said the accounting team headed up by Workman "takes a deep dive into it" and gives the city a "good hard look at ourselves and our finances." "No one likes to have a material weakness, but we need to know the areas where we need to improve," **Graese** said.

In this year's audit, there was only a couple findings made by the firm — both of which involved the Community Development Block Grant and were carryovers from the previous year, most notably the Dixon Street fiasco, which has since been rectified by the city. Over all, the big takeaway from the report, according to Workman, is the city's revenue projections for fiscal year 2021 (which ended on June 30, 2021) were much lower than what the city took in — by almost \$17 million.

Essentially, the city's finances are in decent shape, even with the economy how it is. A huge portion of that was due to the \$9 million bond passed at the end of the fiscal year for capital projects — including the tear down of the Ashland Oil Building. About another \$2.5 million was from property tax collection — the city took in two years' worth of property taxes in one year because of a deferment on the taxes due to the governor's emergency orders in 2020 — and a \$1.3 million increase in occupational tax collection. According to the report, King's Daughters Medical Center went on a hiring spree following the closure of Our Lady of Bellefonte, which accounted for the increase in occupational tax. That occupational tax revenue increase was \$3 million over what the fiance department budgeted — at the meeting Finance Director Tony Grubb said his department made conservative calculations due to the uncertainty in the economy.

**Graese** said the relatively good financial standing of the city is a result of "hard decisions we made at the beginning of the pandemic." "We collectively made the decision to freeze hiring on certain positions and let other people go," he said. "All those people we let go we have either rehired or gave them the option to come back, but it was tough at the time. I think the finances we see now is a reflection of that strategy and we're in a decent position today."

Perkins credited the city's finance department with keeping the city in solid financial shape. "Our finance department errs on the side of caution," Perkins said. "They are not pie in the sky, they are keeping a level head and making sure we are within our means." Perkins also thanked the

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**

*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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state and federal governments for assisting local governments through the pandemic, with financial help such as CARES and AARPA. "We would've been in a bad place if it hadn't been for the state and federal government stepping up to help our local governments," he said. "I think by putting those funds into infrastructure, we are doing the responsible thing for our citizens and those governments."

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
January 13, 2022

**Price hike for plant: Engineering indicates new sewage treatment facility to cost \$59M**  
Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

The preliminary engineering on Ashland's new sewage treatment plant shows the a \$22 million in costs, up to \$59 million. The city, under an agreed order with the feds, has until the end of 2025 to complete the project. The city commission learned about the cost hike at Thursday's commission meeting from Mark Sneve, an engineering consultant with Strand, the firm that undertook the study. Ashland Mayor Matt Perkins vowed to keep the costs down on the taxpayer, stating the commission has a "fiduciary responsibility to ensure we leave no stone unturned looking for funding." That funding is what City Manager **Mike Graese** affectionately calls OPM — "Other People's Money." In this case, Perkins and the commissioners have said they are going to pursue different infrastructure dollars from the state and federal governments to help pay for the project.

During the meeting, Commissioner Amanda Clark said the two state budgets proposed in Frankfort would call for either \$250 million or \$500 million for local water and sewer projects — with all aspects of the project already lined out, Clark said she thinks the city has a good shot at securing a slice of the pie. Right now, the city has special surcharge on sewage bills to go toward new plant construction — as of Thursday, that fund has accumulated more than \$15 million. Other options for funding include a 20-year revolving loan with a 1.25% interest rate from the Kentucky Infrastructure Authority, according to Sneve. If accepted for the loan, there would be a \$1 million forgiveness on the principal built into it, he added. The main drivers of the cost of the new plant is the relocation of three new settling tanks from the east side of the existing plant — which is a former landfill from AK Steel — to the north side facing the river, Sneve said.

According to City Engineer Steve Cole, the site had to be relocated because the building cost would be much higher — technically, the AK landfill has an active permit and that would take a couple years to close out. Shortening the construction timeline to two years would increase the construction cost, and certain environmental factors would need to be monitored as well, Cole said. Switching that site to the riverbank comes at a \$6 million price tag, according to Sneve. That's because a special foundation needs to be laid to support the structure on sitting on top of it.

Inflation is another driver of the project cost — this year, construction costs are expected to raise by 25%. Sneve said the estimate takes that inflation into account, but when the project goes out to bid the market will be different — whether that means higher or lower costs remains to be seen, he said. The dewatering plant — where sludge is wrung of any remaining moisture to be shipped off to landfill in little cakes — is not salvageable, according to the engineer. He said the current building is 60 years old and is under its third use — a new dewatering facility would

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need to be built, he said. The landfill is another source of the cost increase — Sneve said the landfill has asked the sewer plant if it could process 30% more leachate, the liquid run-off from the landfill. While in terms of flow it would be a drop in the bucket — 90,000 to 120,000 gallons per day — Sneve said the pollutants contained in leachate account for 50% of what the plant has to treat. Taking that added load would mean more cost, he said.

Other factors for the increase include building a new facility to consolidate the plant's lab, administrative offices and maintenance and adding treatments at the plant for phosphorus and nitrogen, which are not currently under regulation but are expected to be in the future. However, Sneve was quick to point out where a penny could be pinched, stressing the engineers looked for areas where existing equipment could be reused. One area is in the current settling tanks, which would be converted to overflow.

Right now, as **Graese** has pointed out, when there's overflow due to rainwater at the plant, raw sewage is released straight into the river. Sneve estimated that happens roughly 50 times a year — according to Sneve, three of the existing four settling tanks could be used for overflow, with the fourth spared to hold sludge. Efforts to separate rain and sewer lines in high population portions of the city has allowed for rainwater to completely bypass the plant, **Graese** pointed out during the meeting, thus reducing overflow in the first place. Sneve said those efforts in sewer line replacement and improvement have led to a downsizing of capacity.

After the meeting, Commissioner Cheryl Spriggs said seeing the city get closer to a new plant is a good thing, because it's been a longstanding issue. When Spriggs was on the commission in 2010, she said that's when she first learned about CSOs (Combined Sewer Outputs) and the city was first placed under a judgement to build a new plant. "Now we're looking at a new plant," she said. "I'm so proud of how far we've come. When we put that surcharge on there, people weren't too happy about it and I can understand that. But our commissions have had the foresight and the discipline to get us to this day."

Freshman Commissioner Josh Blanton said when looking at the city of Ashland's sewer system, it's important to realize it's not just a system, but a regional one. "We have a much bigger service area than the city limits," he said. "We'll have to do what we have to do, but I think there's a lot of dollars out there that can help."

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
September 11, 2021

**Remembering 9/11: 20 years later — From Cold War to Hot War: How 9/11 shaped Ashland city manager's military career**

Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

Even if you didn't already know it, spend a little more than five minutes with **Mike Graese** and it quickly becomes evident he's a military man. The Ashland City Manager and retired U.S. Army Colonel shows it in little ways — his perfect posture when seated, his love of acronyms and the jargon he peppers in everyday conversation, such as calling his coffee-drinking schedule a "battle rhythm."

Like all Americans, 9/11 was a watershed moment in American history for **Graese**. When he reported to work that morning at Offutt Air Force Base, **Graese** was already 17 years in his service in the military. Up until that point, **Graese** had served in a peace time army — after that, it would be a war that would encompass every member of the service, he remembers. "I joined back in 1984 after growing up with a father who was a career soldier," **Graese** said. "We moved around to military bases and at the time, I wanted something different. I literally saw a commercial and thought, why not try it?" "That was Reagan's first term — after the 1970s, with everything that happened in the Iran hostage crisis, post-Vietnam, there was a re-energizing of patriotism. In my mind's eye, that's how I remember it. I felt a desire to serve. So that's when I enlisted," he added. "I didn't realize how the time I spent with my dad had become a part of my DNA."

Taking to the service like a "a duck to water," **Graese** quickly found his niche in air defense artillery, which meant he found himself stationed in West Germany in the late 1980s and early 1990s, seeing the fall of the Berlin Wall first hand. For those too young to remember — or even be alive — the United States and the Soviet Union had been in a Mexican Standoff with nuclear weapons for about 45 years at that point. Stationing in Germany was a first-line defense in case the Soviets tried to invade Western Europe. "That's what we were trained for, a linear war with a show of force. It was called the Air/Land battle doctrine, and was designed for the steppes of Eastern Europe but could find application in the desert as well," he said. That's what Americans saw in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, **Graese** said — overwhelming firepower, reliance on massive air support, shock and awe, so to speak. It worked great for "force-on-force" confrontations, but **Graese** said that line of thinking had to change on that day in 20 years ago in September.

By the time **Graese** found himself walking into Offutt Air Force Base, he'd served in Germany and in Saudi Arabia. Now he was at STRATCOM — the coordination center for the nation's nuclear arsenal. In fact, **Graese** was so early in his tour at STRATCOM, he was still awaiting his security clearance for the top-secret facility and needed an escort whenever on base. "A cohort of mine greeted me at the door and said, 'The towers have just been hit by an airplane.' I just remember thinking, 'what does that mean?' The only thing I could think was some guy in a small Cessna or something had gone into one of the towers. We quickly determined after the second

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aircraft hit the Twin Towers that this was an attack," **Graese** said. Being the nerve center of America's nuclear payload, the building was evacuated — President George W. Bush was shuttled to the base later in the day for protection. A couple days later, **Graese** said he was speaking with a good friend, who is a major general now, about the impending war. This fellow had gone to the Advance Military Studies school, what **Graese** described as "the Jedi Knights of the Army." These are the top level strategists for war. "He said, 'Mike, this is a generational. This is a generational war,'" **Graese** said. Up until that point in **Graese's** military career, all America's military forays were short, quick and decisive. Panama, Iraq, peace-keeping missions in the Balklands and Africa were short, to the point and didn't involve the nation's entire military might. This was different, **Graese** said. "That's when the reality set in and we realized, this is going to be a long war. And still, it changed the relationship — this isn't just an active-duty war. This is Congress declaring war and bringing in the National Guard and the reserves," **Graese** said. After wrapping up his STRATCOM duty in 2004, **Graese** found himself posted to Central Command — the war room for active operations. The then Lieutenant Colonel was "double-hatted" as a coordinator for missile defense systems and chief of operations at the center.

The command center was essentially a large theater-style room with representatives from the Army, the Marines, the Navy, the Air Force, various U.S. intelligence agencies and American allies. Along with three other officers, **Graese's** job was to prepare presentations and keep things organized for the generals. What it gave the Lieutenant Colonel was a bird's-eye view of the war effort — he was able to see what was happening in both Iraq and Afghanistan through footage from both manned and unmanned aircraft, open news sources and other sensitive information. One incident that stuck out **Graese** was when Pakistan experienced a major earthquake in 2005. "We were deployed to Qatar with 48 hours notice to set up a central command because Gen. Abizaid realized the strategic impact of providing support to the Pakistani people. He thought that was of huge strategic significance," **Graese** said. "General Abizaid was brilliant — he took in all this information and synthesized it to get the big picture. He was rarely in headquarters and constantly in the field in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. When you heard him speak, you knew he was brilliant. His thinking was the people of Pakistan would see us as being able to help them, rather than killing and destroying," **Graese** added.

The invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) led to a rethinking on how the United States waged war, **Graese** said. The large-scale battles land battles and nuclear attacks planned for in anticipation of a Soviet action were out the window. Soldiers were having to deal with irregular militias, taking pot-shots at them with small arms and improvised explosive devices. "I am proud of how the military was able to adapt to that style of warfare," **Graese** said. "Not only in terms of training, but in designing and implementing equipment in the field. It was a massive effort undertaken by the military, our military industrial complex and our civilian work force."

In 2006, **Graese** was posted as a garrison commander — essentially, a city manager — to Fort AP Hill. While stateside again, the wars still followed **Graese**. Under his watch, he had to work with various commanders to implement training to give soldiers the tools to fight insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq. "We had to adapt our training to the reality on the ground," **Graese** said. "We built villages, we had an airfield they could do seizures on. Some of those tasks were from



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linear war, some from non-linear war." Whenever a unit was deployed on the ground, **Graese** said his staff would ask for as much feedback as possible, so the training could match what soldiers were finding in combat. With an enemy that was always evolving, **Graese** said it was important to get them as prepared as possible for threats on the field. "If you look at installation management, people might say that's not important to the war effort," **Graese** said. "Well, the military doesn't allow fat and fluff to move forward in its operations. It's important. If the installation is not preparing and providing services to ensure soldiers can survive in combat, then that organization is failing."

In 2010, **Graese** found himself in the Middle East once again — this time as a negotiator. The year prior, U.S. forces were winding down, turning over most security duties to the Iraqi army. In order to help with that transition, then Gen. Peatrus set up a special unit to do "reconciliation with insurgents and extremists." The idea was basically to get militia groups to lay down their arms and integrate into the burgeoning democracy in Iraq.

In 2011, **Graese** helped wind that operation down and turn it over to the U.S. State Department. Following that was another stint as a garrison commander at Fort Jackson, before winding down his career at the Pentagon, working underneath a three-star general in installation management. **Graese** said he frequently uses 9/11 as a point of reference in the military and considers those who joined up following the attack "one of the greatest generations." "This is not meant to diminish anyone who served at any point in our history. I find it encouraging that people are now recognizing the service of our Vietnam veterans. After Vietnam, one could've served an entire career without a hot combat situation, but we need to remember our presence in Germany was critical to history," **Graese** said. **Graese** continued, "Joining that army and joining the Army in a hot war, that's another great generation. The Greatest Generation, those WWII vets, they deserve that title and own it. But the people who signed up after 9/11, they knew what they were getting into. I've had nephews that have served. I've had very blunt conversations with them — listen, you're not going to be hanging out at Fort Lewis, Washington, you're going to serve in combat. I've had that conversation with my own son. It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when." **Graese** said for those who chose to serve following 2001, he's "always blown away" by their service, patriotism and bravery. "We never implemented the draft, we never brought it back. Sometimes there were challenges in getting the recruiting numbers at certain points in the war, but people continued to serve their country," he said. "Our nation chose to invest in its military and its service men and women."

For generations to come — those who don't remember or weren't even born — **Graese** said the lesson he learned from 9/11 and the ensuing 20 years of war that followed it is "you got to be prepared." "People want to do us harm — there are nations out there who don't like democracy, who don't like individual freedom. That's what our country is based on," **Graese** said. "We really coalesced as a country after 9/11, in a way I have never seen in my lifetime. In some ways, that remains and in other ways we're more divided than we ever were before. We all need to protect the Constitution of the United States. That's the oath I swore for years."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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WSAZ  
August 19, 2021

**Good Samaritan alerts drivers to sink hole**  
**Sinkhole shuts down road in Ashland, Ky.**  
By WSAZ News Staff

A sinkhole was reported Thursday afternoon in downtown Ashland. City officials are asking drivers to avoid the intersection of Greenup Avenue and 17th Street. Both northbound lanes and one southbound lane of Greenup Avenue are closed at 17th Street. Traffic is being detoured using Winchester Avenue (US23X) through downtown Ashland via 18th and 16th streets.

“This was a very firsthand account. Obviously, it’s right outside of the city building and the APD so it was quickly noticed. Fortunately, there was no one injured or any accident that took place along with it,” City of Ashland Public Information Officer, Michelle Grubb, said. “When you look down inside, you can see that it’s been washing away for quite some time, so it was something silent underneath. That’s why it’s so important that our crews get out and they’re inspecting and checking these on a regular basis and keeping track of things.”

WSAZ spoke with Ben Collier, who spotted the sinkhole Thursday afternoon.

“[I was] just driving along and then looked over and [saw] this hole right in time and I swerved and missed it,” Collier said. “As I was looking in my rearview mirror, I was worried about the other people behind me. I [did] an immediate U-turn and swerved across in front of the hole and blocked the traffic.” Collier directed traffic until police and firefighters arrived on scene. “Doing the right thing is never wrong,” Collier told WSAZ.

“You don’t like for things like this to happen, but it really inspires confidence when you see how competent people are when they react,” Ashland City Manager **Michael Graese** said.

City crews still have some exploratory digging to discover where water was going when they saw a break on a 24-inch combined sewer overflow line inside the sink hole. “Kudos to the workers out there getting on it that fast and making sure our streets are safe,” Collier said.

**Graese** says the city can’t patch the road to allow access to traffic yet. In the meantime, drivers should use Winchester Avenue and Carter Avenue as an alternative to Greenup Avenue.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
July 8, 2021

**City approves firefighter union contract**

Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

The Ashland City Commission unanimously approved first reading of a contract with the city's firefighter's union at a quick special session Thursday morning. The four-year contract is one of the longest in recent memory, according to Ashland City Firefighter's Local 706 President Richard Carr. Over the last 10 years, Carr said the union has entered into two-year contracts with the city — before then, single-year contracts weren't unheard of. The length of the contract was a result of the strength of language in it, as well as the good will between the city and the union, Carr said. "Being able to sit down and bring up our issues is one of the strengths of a union, and that happens in negotiations," Carr said. "Having a long contract doesn't enable us to do, so there was definitely a lot of discussion in the membership on that. We acknowledge we have a good contract with the city and there is language in the contract that protects our interests."

City Manager **Mike Graese** described the negotiations as "very in-depth and healthy." Two key points in the contract are the cost-of-living adjustment — which was extended to non-union city employees earlier this year — and an increase in sick pay buybacks. Both Carr and **Graese** touted the increase in the buybacks will reduce overtime in the ranks.

Under the current contract, if a firefighter banks more than 120 days of sick pay, the excess days are paid out to them at a rate of 50% their pay, according to both management and the union. For instance, let's say a firefighter banks 125 sick days. Since it's a use-it-or-lose-it scenario, the city will buy back the excess five days at a rate of 50% per day. In that case, if a firefighter made \$1,000 for those five days, the result would be \$500 for the buyback. Under the approved contract, that buyback percentage would jump to 75%. Using that example, that would mean the firefighter would be getting \$750 for the excess sick days. Since the fire department needs staffing, if a firefighter takes a sick day, that means someone gets called out, **Graese** said. A call-out results in overtime — the reduction in overtime would be about \$739 per shift, according to a fiscal note. Both Carr and **Graese** characterized the increase in the sick pay buy-out as a win-win for both sides. "These firefighters have earned their sick pay, so I think it's fair that they be compensated for it in this way," **Graese** said. "This will keep more folks at work and benefits the city by saving money." Added Carr: "When we won the 50% part on the contract years ago, that reduced overtime. I think with this increase, we'll see a further reduction."

According to the recently passed city budget, the lowest paid firefighter has a baseline salary of \$37,978 a year, with \$25,464 budgeted for overtime and \$51,090 in benefits. The highest paid engineer makes \$41,602 in straight time, \$27,639 in OT and \$53,745 in benefits. Fire engineers make roughly \$10,000 split between the salary and benefits. The city first recognized the fire union in 1973.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
April 28, 2021

**Clean audit for City of Ashland**

Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

The Ashland City Commission received a clean audit last week, showing only one finding in the fiscal year 2020. The audit is an annual review of the previous fiscal year — this year's audit looked at the financial year that began July 1, 2019, and ended June 30, 2020. All in all, the auditors reported no material weaknesses in the city's reporting of its finances, nor did they find any major cause for concern.

Ashland Mayor Matthew B. Perkins said the city is "fortunate our finances have improved." "There were only a couple findings and we were really pleased that the city manager already implanted corrective actions to address those issues," Perkins said. City manager **Mike Graese** said the staff "is always looking forward to the yearly look at the city's finances." "We always appreciate the effort of Kelley, Galloway, Smith and Goolsby (the accounting firm) and the hard work of the city's finance department to make that possible," **Graese** said.

Commissioner Josh Blanton said while this is his first rodeo in city government, he's studied audits in the past and saw no substantial changes. "I think this is an excellent tool for transparency and it shows we're doing pretty well," Blanton said. "I think overall, our financial health is relatively good. I compare it my role in manufacturing and industry and I can say, they did an excellent job and provided us with a comprehensive and thorough look at our position."

According to the audit, the city's net position — how cash and assets the city had to show for itself after subtracting its liabilities — came in at \$46 million, just \$2 million less than the 2019 fiscal year. When looking at the city's finances, the revenues are divided into two types — governmental activities (collecting taxes and fees) and business activities (collecting water and sewer bills). Looking at governmental activities, the city had a net position of \$10.2 million at the close of the year, down \$6 million from the prior year. Business activities saw a slight bump in FY 2020, rising nearly \$4 million to \$32.8 million. The auditors stated the decrease in overall net position was as a result of a budget adjustment due to COVID-19 and the postponement of PVA tax valuations ordered by the governor's office. At last week's city commission meeting, Blanton asked if the shortfall in government revenue was due to a postponement of collecting taxes. The auditor said there wasn't a postponement per se, but it's believed the money will be recouped in the following year.

In terms of liabilities, the pension fund is still an albatross hanging on the city's neck. The total liabilities facing the city amount to \$68.3 million, \$42 million of which consists of the pension liability and \$10.2 million consists of retirement benefits besides the pension. According to Perkins, the city has been dealing with the pension ever since the state reformulated the match between government employees and local governments to increase funding for the pensions. "The formulas in place wasn't adequate enough for local governments, we weren't paying

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches****Michael (Mike) Scott Graese***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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enough," he said. "It continues to be a challenge, but we're trying to play catch-up. It's our goal to ensure that the pension our city employees were promised is there for when they retire." While the pension was a huge topic about three years ago, Blanton said the latest audit showed the city has been able to "adapt to meet the obligation." "It is still a big consideration for the city, so the audit is really a reassurance that the staff has the pension in the forefront our their minds," Blanton said. "For me, I believe you manage the processes and not the people. What this shows to me is no matter who is in what position — because that will change over time — we have the processes in place to make sure we meet that obligation."

Perkins said while COVID monies were specifically earmarked to not be used for the retirement system, the money has allowed the city to fully fund other services while meeting their pension obligations. Essentially, the federal and state dollars being used to keep people employed, so the city can shift the local dollars into the pension fund, Perkins said.

The auditors identified only one finding in the fiscal year, in which a contract for the Pollard Mills streetscape project was awarded prior to the disbursement of funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant Program. According to the audit, the funds were disbursed on Jan. 31, 2020, while the contract was awarded on Dec. 13, 2019. The report states the city did not have procedures in place to ensure the project complied with HUD's environmental standards. Essentially, the city put the cart before the horse. In a response in the report, the city stated the bid for the job included language for the city to cancel or suspend the project without compensation to the contractor. However, in order to remedy it any future situations, new procedures and additional training on HUD's environmental standards. The total amount in question amounted to \$128,647.

The only other issues were not deemed findings, but areas for improvement — one was for the minority owned business loans administrated through CDBG funds and the other was inventory processes at the city garage.

The auditors recommended to bolstering the documentation in the business program — the city will be asking for end of the year payroll logs to verify the businesses in the program are meeting their employment requirements. The issue at the garage is there are work orders left unfilled, leading the city to have to reconcile the inventory at the end of the year. To correct the issue, better software and a spot check inventory has been developed to address the issue throughout the year, per the report.

"All the issues brought up were clerical issues," Perkins said. "You look at the federal programs we receive funds through, there's a lot of paper work in them and you have to dot every 'I' and cross every 'T.' As a business owner, I understand that inventory is always a concern, so I think the spot-check inventory is something that was needed. "I'm pretty happy with how it turned out and I hope we can do even better next year," Perkins said.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Michael [Mike] Graese** is listed below.]

Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
February 4, 2021

**COVID still among city officials' priorities**

Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

Looking back on 2020, one word seemed to dominate Ashland city officials' minds: COVID-19. As City Engineer Steve Cole put it, the real challenge to 2020 was "figuring out how to work with COVID-19 under these conditions." Facing staff reductions, potential budget shortfalls and the ever-present concern of a mass outbreak, workers across all functions of city government rose to the occasion, according to City Manager **Mike Graese**.

In order for a city to run, people still have to show up to work. A technician at the water plant can't treat the water from the comfort of his or her living room. A police officer can't enforce the law in a bathrobe and bunny slippers. And, as **Graese** pointed out, finance can't take valuable data and information home due to security risks. "There's a lot of city employees who can't work from home, so this has been the city's No. 1 challenge," **Graese** said. "Working from home has its difficulties too, but there's many jobs where you can't do it."

Working with ever-changing CDC guidelines, **Graese** said social distancing, testing and PPE have been key to keep the city employee infection rate to about 10% — the same as the state and county average. Currently, those who have been exposed but are asymptomatic are still allowed to report for work. If they wish to get tested, they may — if they present symptoms, they must be tested. Positives are required to quarantine.

Early on in the pandemic, the city had to cope with personal protective equipment shortages. Michelle Veach, of the finance department, was instrumental in sourcing the gloves, masks and sanitizer necessary to keep Ashland city workers safe as they continued about keeping needed city services running, according to various department heads. "Michelle was very aggressive in getting this equipment sourced," **Graese** said. "She was able to organize it to get it more manageable."

The city instituted a color-coded system based on the supply — according to **Graese**, the city has been in the "green" since summer. Veach said the sourcing of PPE was a result of teamwork between the departments and local businesses. "I'd get calls at 10 p.m. at night saying, 'we're getting a shipment in tomorrow,'" Veach said. "We were getting donations coming in and keeping up with reputable suppliers. Eventually, we were able to get it smoothed out to keep the supply coming in."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
January 28, 2021

**City manager contract set for renewal: Commission's second reading scheduled for Friday**  
Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

Following a 4-1 vote Thursday afternoon, the Ashland City Commission voted to renew city manager **Mike Graese's** contract for the next three years. **Graese**, who oversees the day-to-day operations of the city, said he was "excited the board has confidence in my performance." "I look forward to continuing to serve this city and to improve its quality of life," **Graese** said. **Graese** will see no pay increase — he's currently pegged at \$130,000 year. In a departure from typical practice, the fiscal note attached to the agenda delved into granular details such as pay to Social Security and Medicare benefits, pension benefits and phone allowance.

Typically, whenever a fiscal note reflects a new hire or a promotion to a position, it just lists the salary, the benefits paid by the city and the total combined. For instance, on this week's consent agenda, a hire for a pump station tech in the Department of Utilities listed a \$39,539 salary, \$32,188 in benefits and a total of \$71,727. Prior to the vote, Commissioner Cheryl Spriggs made a motion to table the contract renewal for further discussion. With no one seconding the motion, City Attorney Jim Moore declared it failed — Mayor Matthew B. Perkins then called the vote. Commissioners Marty Gute, Amanda Clark, Josh Blanton and Mayor Perkins voted in favor of first reading of **Graese's** contract. Spriggs voted against it.

Last year, the commission voted to extend **Graese's** contract by six months, in order for the new commission to decide. The city commission will vote Friday on the second-reading of the contract renewal — marking the first time in nearly 15 years the city has seen stability in the position. Prior to 2006, Bill Fisher spent 21 years as the city manager. When he retired, the city hired Randy Robertson, a 51-year-old Army veteran, who promptly resigned eight months later. That's when public services director Steve Corbitt stepped in — he held the post until 2013, when he was replaced with Ben Bitter. Bitter got tossed by the commission in 2016, which led to former City Attorney Richard "Sonny" Martin stepping in. Martin had the role for nine months, at which point Corbitt was tagged back into the ring. Following a five-month search, which included last-minute cold feet from the city's No. 1 choice, **Graese** came to town in 2017.

The city commission meeting also saw the following action:

- Perkins and **Graese** expressed hope that the public will be allowed to attend commission meetings in the near future, if the COVID-19 numbers continue to lower.
- **Graese** announced the 2022 budget was already under way.
- The commission voted unanimously to approve a \$7,258 decrease in the Simpson Road project.
- Perkins proclaimed Feb. 1-5 National School Counseling Week in Ashland.
- The city accepted a safety award.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
December 10, 2020

**Mayor nears finish line**

Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

Though the business was fairly mundane, emotions were raw at Thursday's Ashland City Commission meeting as Mayor Steve Gilmore danced his swan song as the city's top executive. Gilmore kept his cool throughout the meeting until Mayor-elect Matt Perkins announced that next year, he will ask the commission to name the area of 15th Street between Greenup Avenue and Front Street "Steve Gilmore Way."

Holding up the sign to the camera at the Zoom meeting, the next mayor said Gilmore taught him everything he ever knew about public service. The current mayor — with 20 years combined experience in the Ashland City Government — had to dry his eyes with a bandana. Gilmore, prone to reminiscing and reflecting during the mayor and commission comments portions of the meeting, gushed with platitudes and gratitude at the top of Thursday's virtual meeting, thanking each of the commissioners for their service on the board. "All of you exemplify a great love for this city," Gilmore said. "I know I am leaving this office with this city in great hands. I want you all to be successful and I know full well each of you have great commitment to this city." Gilmore also thanked city manager **Mike Graese** — whom he called one of the best hires the city made under his tenure — as well as city attorney Jim Moore, police chief Todd Kelley and the various departments of the city.

After the meeting, **Graese** said he "is going to miss (Gilmore's) experience, leadership and energy." Commissioner Marty Gute, who has served quite a few years with Gilmore, said the out-going mayor "has his fingerprints all over this city." "Look at the riverfront, Broadway Square, the bridges," Gute said. "Mayor Gilmore has seen through every project here that has come to fruition. He loves Ashland like I love Ashland."

Always one for sharing his wisdom, Gilmore called "public service the greatest work you will ever have." Of course, the meeting isn't the last Gilmore will helm. On Friday, the commission will have a short meeting to finalize a few items and close the book on the year's business, which most notably includes authorizing the Kentucky Bond Development Corporation to issue bonds for a \$40 million waste treatment facility.

Perkins said he hopes Gilmore will enjoy a retirement from public life full of "fun and family." However, with so many years in community leadership, Perkins said he would need Gilmore "now more than ever" to consult as he fills some big shoes in the city.



**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
October 11, 2020

**Build Ashland cleans up riverfront**

Author/Byline: Will Blackburn

Volunteers gathered at the Ashland Riverfront Saturday morning for the yearly Build Ashland Community clean-up project. Though they were delayed slightly by the morning rain, more than 10 volunteers — all men and women from Ashland — got together with work gloves, weed eaters, chainsaws and trimmers to perform some much-needed maintenance around the statues and walking trails of the Riverfront.

Build Ashland is a volunteer organization started in 2013 and dedicated to encouraging the citizens of Ashland to organize, clean and improve the community through different projects. Steve Cole, a part-time volunteer with Build Ashland and the city engineer, said, "I think they're a wonderful organization. The diversity of the people is tremendous. Everyone is working cooperatively to help make Ashland a better place to live, and I think they've been successful in helping establish a great foundation for Ashland to continue to build on."

As the rain subsided, volunteers quickly got to work pulling up weeds around the statues, cutting tall grass and briars along the walking trails and trimming the trees to make the Riverfront Park a safe place for recreation. **Mike Graese**, Ashland's City Manager, was among the volunteers and talked about how Build Ashland has helped the city. "It's just a really big volunteer organization that looks for opportunities in the city that other private or public organizations can't tackle. If you go down to the end of Riverfront Park, a couple years ago it was nothing but weeds and a field," **Graese** said. "They had a vision to make a walking path down there so for the first couple volunteer events that came up they did some weed whacking and limbed up the bushes so people would feel safe when walking. The commission then committed a couple thousand dollars to put asphalt in. What you see out there now is the vision of Build Ashland. It's been really nice."

**Graese** also talked about how important the work Build Ashland is doing during the coronavirus pandemic. "With COVID going on we've had a lot of personnel reductions, we're workers down in the Parks Department and three workers down in our City Streets Department so this has had a big impact on us," **Graese** said. "Groups like Build Ashland that can come out and volunteer to lend a helping hand is super helpful for us and greatly appreciated by the city and our citizens. This park has become so much more popular since COVID started, people come down here at lunch and any time on the weekends, and it's just filled with people who appreciate this."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
May 7, 2020

**City announces layoffs; benefit changes tabled**

Author/Byline: Temecka Evans

The City of Ashland is looking at 15 staff layoffs because of the financial impact of COVID-19, as announced at Thursday's Board of City Commissioners meeting. However, a few may return to work when the city building reopens.

The other positions are the following:

- Administrative assistant in the city manager's office
- Receptionist in the community and economic development department
- Payroll specialist II in finance
- Three customer service representatives in finance (these employees will return to work when the city building reopens)
- Occupational/net profit tax clerk
- Two maintenance workers in parks and recreation (and one that will not be refilled)
- Two maintenance workers (streets)
- Mechanic in public service (Central Garage)
- Operator III in wastewater collection
- Operator in sewer plant

"We're all tore up about this," City Manager **Mike Graese** said. "It hurts me personally that people think this is just a butcher knife going out. These are people's lives. We know that." Benefit and staff adjustments were tabled until the next regularly scheduled meeting (next Thursday).

Consent Agenda item No. 3, which detailed a recommendation to make adjustments to the city health plan, was tabled after commissioner Amanda Clark spoke up, saying she didn't feel comfortable voting on the item. The adjustments would increase the cost and reduce the benefits of city employees except for the union employees of the Ashland Fire Department. The item stated the changes were reviewed and recommended by the Insurance Committee for the commission and could save the city approximately \$712,526.88. Mayor Steve Gilmore asked to pull the item from the consent agenda until the next meeting. The item included the following changes:

- For those on an employee-only plan, the health only would increase \$10 (from \$25 to \$35) per paycheck. For health and dental, it would increase \$13.78 from \$27 to \$40.78 per check.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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- For those on an employee-plus-one plan, the health only would increase \$15 from \$50 to \$65. The health and dental plan would jump from \$54 to \$75.54.
- For those on a family health plan, the health only would go from %70 to \$90. Health and dental would be \$103.72 instead of \$75.

As noted by Clark, insurance plan changes have been under consideration long before the coronavirus-related budget crisis. The item noted this would include any current employee who was hired prior to March 1, 2018, who has a spouse that waives their employer's plan and onto the city plan. This will increase from \$27 per paycheck to \$35.

The item also contained a medical deductible and out-of-pocket increase. Those are as follows:

- The medical deductible would increase from \$1,000 to \$1,500 for an individual.
- The medical deductible will increase from \$2,000 to \$3,000 for a family.
- The maximum out-of-pocket cost would change from \$3,000 to \$3,500 for an individual.
- The maximum out-of-pocket cost would change from \$6,000 to \$7,000 for a family.

The change in benefits would also include the cut of the health reimbursement the city provided the workers. This would cease for the calendar year 2021, but all balances would remain available for city employees until they have been used. "We do have insurance consultants coming in to work with our finance department to review the hard work they have put in to look at any avenue to save money for the total operation of the city and our employees," said Gilmore.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
August 27, 2020

**Graese: Water plant crews fix setback**

Author/Byline: Henry Culvyhouse

Ashland's city manager reported a setback at the water treatment plant has been resolved at Thursday's city commission meeting. **Mike Graese** said crews at the water plant discovered a build-up in caustic — a chemical used to treat the water — in the lines leading into Filters 1-4. While the build is perfectly safe for potable water, **Graese** said it reduced capacity tremendously for the filters. The build-up cut the capacity of a 30-inch main line in half, the city manager noted.

**Graese** said the build-up was discovered when crews were testing new water under drains at the plant. The under drains are what catch the media — a mix of sand and anthracite the water is filtered through — before going into the rest of the treatment system. After a series of issues with the under drains, the city began installing a new system this year.

When the number of gallons didn't add up, they had to go to the drawing board — that's when they troubleshot the issue, the manager said. Working around the clock, employees with in water treatment and distribution cut open the pipe and chiseled out the build-up, **Graese** said. "Time was of the essence," **Graese** said. "Filters 5 and 6 are on a different line, so they weren't affected. But we had to take down Filters 1 through 4 to do this repair."

Present at the meeting were employees in both departments who were instrumental in rectifying the issue. The mayor and commission recognized them for their hard, back-breaking work of climbing inside the pipes busting the deposits off with small jackhammers. "This was 75 years worth of build-up that is the result of the necessary evil of treating water with chemicals," Mayor Steve Gilmore said. "I tell the police department and the fire department they provide the most important service in the city. And that is true. But every day, our citizens need clean, safe water to shower, drink and do their laundry. This is unhesitatingly one of the most important services that can be done."

By cleaning out the lines, **Graese** said one filter will be able to produce 5 million gallons of water a day. Commissioners Marty Gute, Amanda Clark and Matt Perkins also extended their thanks to the workers for getting the lines cleared. The renovations at the plant have been extended a little longer than initially thought — originally, the plan was to take two filters down at a time to install the under drains. Now, crews are taking one filter out of service at a time so as not to disrupt production, according to **Graese**. That's raised the contract by \$102,860, to a grand total of \$674,697, per the item voted on in the consent agenda. The city now owes \$405,006 on the project.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
November 25, 2019

**Graese says Destination: Ashland team a priority**

Author/Byline: Aaron Snyder

City Manager **Mike Graese** is ready for downtown Ashland to flourish, and he's not about to be a hindrance. "At the end of the day, it's about getting this Destination: Ashland team together, and the city's gotta get out of the way," **Graese** said in the The Daily Independent's conference room a couple hours prior to presenting his thoughts at the Ashland Rotary Club weekly meeting on Monday.

The focus of **Graese's** speech was Roger Brooks's "Shift Happens" presentation from earlier this month at The Delta Hotel by Marriott. Brooks captured the city manager's attention during his weeklong stay in the city. The downtown revitalization expert highlighted a bevy of key ingredients a city must possess in order to properly revive.

**Graese** agreed with the bulk of Brooks's assessments and ideas. "It wasn't just charisma, it was common-sense stuff," **Graese** said of Brooks's thought offerings. **Graese** said the city will soon assemble a Destination: Ashland team, which will feature millennials as Brooks suggested. **Graese** said the city hopes this group will have its first meeting in December.

**Graese**, the city manager since May 2017, said Brooks pointed to four establishments within what should be the city's concentration area — 13th to 18th Streets — that any city of this size would want: The Delta Hotel, Paramount Arts Center, the Highlands Museum and the G.C. Murphy building restoration conducted by Dr. E.B. Gevedon.

"What are we trying to become?" is the question, **Graese** said, the people of Ashland must ask themselves.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
August 24, 2019

**City prepares for water fine payment**

Author/Byline: Temecka Evans

The city of Ashland is looking at paying \$22,500 in fines for a series of violations given by the state to Ashland's Water Works system. They received 33 violations from May 2015 to March 2018. The Ashland Board of Commissioners held a first reading of an ordinance that stated the city would pay \$22,500 to the Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet. The city will enter into an agreed order with the state. This agreed order would cover any violations that occurred five years prior the day it is signed. The agreed order outlines the violations and how to correct the violations given to Ashland Water Works.

"They (the state) are working with us, so we can produce the best water possible," said City Manager **Mike Graese**. "We also agreed we will give a written response that will address all the issues that were identified. "We've come to the understanding there are areas we need to improve," said **Graese**.

**The following are the violations taken from public record:**

— The public water system failed to submit an Operational Evaluation report for compliance period January to March 2015.

— The public water system failed to submit operational evaluation Levels (OEL's) report for compliance period January to March.

— The public water system submitted fewer than 90% of the required number of analytical results for turbidity or failed to submit results by the 10th of the following month for the compliance period April 1 to April 30. After individual filter effluent turbidimeter failure, system failed to collect grab samples every four hours of operation during the April 2015 monitoring period and turbidimeter was not fixed within five days.

— Public water system failed to perform public notification in accordance with 401 KAR 8:070. The public notification must not contain language that contradicts or detracts from the standard mandatory language or the purpose of the notice. "Public notice performed for violation 2015-9951230 TTHM 4th OTR 2014 was distributed later than 30 days after receiving the NOV."

— The public water system exceeded the MCL for locational running annual average (LRAA) of samples for the specific contaminant in compliance period April 1 to June 30. The reported result of .106 mg/l exceeded the MCL of 0.080 mg/l.

— Failure to properly operate and maintain the drinking water system. There has been a major line leak ongoing since April 23, 2015 that has been entering the Catlettsburg sewer system and affecting a pump station with excessive flow.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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- TTHM The public water system exceeded the MCL for locational running average (LRAA) of samples for the specific contaminant in compliance period July 1 to Sept 30. The reported result of .081 mg/l exceeded the mcl of 0.080 mg/l.
- Public water systems failed to perform public notification in accordance with 401 KAR 8:070.
- Public water system failed to perform public notification in accordance with 401 KAR 8:070.
- TTHM The public water system exceeded the maximum contaminant level for locational running annual average (LRAA) of samples for the specific contaminant Oct. 1 to December 2015.
- A public or semipublic water system shall be subject to the requirements of 401 KAR chapter 8, except those exempt in 40 CFR 141.3, effective July 1, 2017[401 KAR 8:020 section 1]. Failure to provide a minimum 30 psi at all customer meters. A low pressure area exists at Old Summit Road. Pressure outside faucet for two customers residence at same approximate elevation as the customer meters tested from 18.70 to 21.00 psi during the site visit . Systems must be designed, operated and maintained in order to provide 30 psi at customer meters during time of peak demand.
- The public water system failed to submit the monthly operating report for the compliance period. Water system failed to submit MOR for January 2016 within 10 days after the end of the compliance period.
- The agreed order for case DOW-150132 filed 12/29/15 section H states "Ashland shall maintain a free chlorine residual of 0.20 ppm or greater in all areas of the distribution system as all times." The free chlorine reading taken at the bacT station at CINTAS showed a free chlorine residual of 0.00 ppm.
- The public water system failed to submit an adequate number of DBP samples.
- TTHM The public water system exceeded the MCL for locational running annual average (LRAA) of samples for the specific contaminant in compliance period 04/01/2016 - 06/30/2016. The reported result of .081 mg/l exceeded the MCL of .080 mg/l.
- CTs have not been calculated for several months. They must be updated daily. The turbidimeter for filter 1B was not working and hasn't worked since at least September 2016. Additionally, although the other turbidimeters could be read at the units themselves in the pipe gallery, 3B, 5B, and 6B were not recording on the computer much of the time making it impossible to adequately review past turbidity data.

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— TTHM The public water system exceeded for MCL for locational running annual average (LRAA ) of samples for the specific contaminant in compliance period 07/01/2016 - 09/30/2016. The reported result of .098 mg/l exceeded the MCL of .080 mg/l.

— Total Haloacetic acids. The public water system exceeded the MCL for locational running annual average (LRAA) of samples for the specific contaminant in compliance period 07/01/2016-09/30/2016. The reported result of .068 mg/l exceeded the MCL of mg/l.

— Total Haloacetic acids. The public water system exceeded the MCL for locational running annual average (LRAA) of samples for the specific contaminant in compliance period 10/01/2016 0 12/31/2016. The reported result of .061 mg/l exceeded the MCL of .060 mg/l.

— TTHM The public water system exceeded the MCL for locational running annual average of samples for the specific contaminant in compliance period 10/01/2016 - 12/31/2016. The reported resulted of .091 mg/l exceeded the MCL of .080 mg/l.

— TTHM The public water system exceeded the MCL for locational running annual average (LRAA) of samples for the specific contaminant in compliance period 01/01/2017 - 03/31/2017. The reported result of .091 mg/l exceeded the MCL of .080 mg/l.

— Failure to maintain adequate chlorine residual in the distribution system. At the CINTAS bacT station at Failure to maintain adequate chlorine residual in the distribution system. At the CINTAS bacT station at Eastpark free chlorine residual tested .00 ppm and at the bacT station coming from the Rt 5/503 booster station free chlorine tested 0.13 ppm. As a result public health for Eastpark area was endangered.

— A public or semipublic water system shall be subject to the requirements of 401 KAR chapter 8, except those exempted in 40 CFR 141.3, effective July 1, 2007. Extensive loss of filter media indicates a failure to maintain the system to comply with 401 KAR Chapter 8. A catastrophe failure by turbidity breakthrough at the filters is possible.

— TTHM The public water system exceeded the MCL for locational running annual average (LRAA) of samples for the specific contaminant in compliance period 04/01/2017 - 06/30/2017. The reported result of .093 mg/l exceeded the MCL of .080 mg/l.

— TTHM The public water system failed to submit operational evaluation levels report for compliance period 04/01/2017 - 06/30/2017

— A public or semipublic water system shall be subject to the requirements of 401 KAR Chapter 8 except those exempted in 40 CFR 141.3 effective July 1, 2007. There was a failure of continuous monitoring of turbidity at the plant. Individual filter effluent turbidimeter 2A did not record from 9/42/17 at 16:00 until 10/16/17 at 09:22. The turbidimeter was not repaired within the required five day period required, samples were not taken every four hours nor was the non-compliance reported to the Morehead Regional Office.



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— Revised Total Coliform Rule. The public water system failed to submit routine bacteriological sampling results for the compliance period 09/01/2017 - 09/30/2017.

—The public water system submitted fewer than 90% of the required number of analytical results for turbidity or failed to submit results by the 10th of the following month for the compliance period 04/01/2018 - 04/30/2018

—The public water system submitted fewer than 90% of the required number of analytical results for turbidity or failed to submit results by the 10th of the following month for the compliance period 05/01/2018 - 05/31/2018.

— Total Coliform Rule. The public water system failed to submit an adequate number of routine bacteriological sampling results for the compliance period 08/01/2018 - 08/31/2018. Comments said 39 of 40 required samples were received.

— TTHM THAA The public water system failed to submit an adequate number of DBP samples for the compliance period 10/01/2018 - 12/31/2018. Your system is required to collect four routine samples per quarter. No samples were received.

— Extensive loss of filter media indicates a failure to maintain the system to comply with 401 KAR Chapter 8. A catastrophic failure by turbidity breakthrough at the filters is possible.

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
May 19, 2019

**Ashland water line breaks persist; surcharge for fixes now unlikely**

Author/Byline: Glenn Puit

A flow of water seeps into Mike McKnight's backyard on Valley Street every single day. The sun comes up and the water is creeping through his yard. Dusk arrives and the water is still meandering its way into tall fescue. McKnight estimates hundreds of gallons of water every 24 hours seeps down a hill and through his yard in Catlettsburg, making for a marsh-like, swampy area. "It was about a year and a half ago it started," McKnight said. "I've got to put my boots on to walk across it the mud is so thick." He first contacted the Army Corps of Engineers, then the city of Catlettsburg, before tests showed fluoride in the water. This demonstrated the water is coming from a ruptured city of Ashland water line. "It's (Ashland) drinking water," McKnight said. "It's coming from the city of Ashland."

Ashland city officials said this week they are sympathetic to McKnight's plight and a permanent fix to McKnight's problem will take place this summer through replacement of a broken line on nearby Race Street. The swampy yard, meanwhile, serves as a small example of a much larger dilemma the city faces: repairing its aged water infrastructure. City leaders said fixing the water lines will take many years to address and, in interviews this week, they also confirmed that — so far at least — there are no immediate plans to impose a previously recommended volumetric surcharge on users that would have raised water rates significantly.

"It doesn't look like the volumetric surcharge is going to be implemented but more money is going into this than in the past," City Manager **Michael Graese** said. Instead of the volumetric surcharge, the city is going to allocate money every year to fix the most high priority lines with the money currently available to the city. The problem, caused by decades of neglect, will not be fixed overnight, but **Graese** and city engineer Ryan Eastwood said customers will see improvement over time. Part of the challenge in the past has been a lack of accurate information in city files about older water lines. The city is now approaching 10 years of gathering new, high tech data on its existing water lines that **Graese** said helps significantly in making fixes. Eastwood said the city is not looking to replace every single line in the city because that is not a plausible approach.

"You have to determine how much replacement you need in order to renew the system, and it is ongoing," Eastwood said. "If you were to determine every line in the city has a 100-year life expectancy you need to be at 1 percent replacement every year...it is ongoing, just like paving of roads. A programmatic approach to keep your infrastructure close to its useful life."

The city has created a list of the lines that are most important to repair. A top priority is a service line repair/upgrade on Highway 23. This repair is imminent. A contract has been awarded and a pre-construction meeting is unfolding next week. In the last two summers there have been major water outages impacting thousands of customers in Ashland. These outages were attributed to

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failure of another old line in front of the Ashland water plant under U.S. 23. "Probably the highest priority line is the water line in front of the water plant on 23," Eastwood said. "It runs from 39th street to 43rd street...it has broken multiple times in the past. It is a very similar to like a break on an aorta. It is such a key transmission line that when it goes out there are thousands of customers out of water."

Engineering contracting is underway to ready this replacement. **Graese** said the Ashland Board of Commissioners is preparing to allocate a set amount of money, approaching \$1 million, for this upcoming fiscal year's line replacements. The city is aggressively pursuing fixing the problem with the money available and without dramatically raising water rates. The recommendation is that a city like Ashland face 14 or fewer water line breaks a year. The city of Ashland approaches 80.

A consultant's report, called the BlueWater report, found that Ashland has not properly invested in aging water infrastructure and a dedicated 20-year program will be required to address the water infrastructure deficiencies. Prior to 2017 Ashland did not budget annually for water main replacement. A recommended volumetric surcharge was proposed as a way to pay for the fixes. This recommendation was proposed to be \$1.20 per 1000 gallons to generate 1.6 million dollars in year one to replace three miles. The surcharge would be \$1.80 per 1000 gallons to generate 2.4 million dollars in year two to replace 4.5 miles. The surcharge would then move to \$2.40 per 1000 gallons to generate 3.2 million dollars annually to replace 6 miles per year, for the remaining 18 years of a 20-year project.

It appears, however, there is little appetite for dramatically increasing water rates in the city for the fixes. "I had very significant concerns about what the impact would be not only to our residents financially but also to both our small and large businesses," Commissioner Matt Perkins said. "It would be economic suicide for our city. You were looking at a 40 percent rate increase for our largest employers, a 30 percent rate increase for our restaurants." In McKnight's case he said he's thankful for the city's willingness to fix the problem. "The grass is so tall and it is so wet I can't get at it with my mower," McKnight said.

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
May 2, 2019

**City Commissioners approve finances, policies**

Author/Byline: Carly Carver

The Ashland Board of City Commissioners approved necessary finances for paving, multiple expenditures for water tanks, the hiring of new counsel, a new smoking policy for city employees and improvements to the riverfront boat ramp during its most recent meeting. The board conducted a first reading and approval of an agreement between the city and Mountain Enterprises in the amount of \$865,375 for placement and replacement of asphalt for the 2019 Street Paving Program.

The fiscal note said that the bid has increased 17.4% from last year and the current budget is \$1,199,120. The fiscal note said the amount remaining is \$852,950, however City Manager **Michael Graese** said that there are incoming invoices. "We've got pending pay requests coming in for over \$700,000," **Graese** said. "We still have 29th Street and 15th Street, and I believe that's it. We've got a couple other small projects."

The board approved a change order increasing the contract between the city and Dixon Engineering Inc. in the amount of \$15,717.98 for their contract for engineering and inspection services for coating, painting, and repairing the million-gallon Catlettsburg water tank. The fiscal note on the agenda noted the project amount is already exceeded with pending invoice payments. An additional budget adjustment will be required.

The board conducted a first reading and approval of an ordinance executing an agreement between the city and Dixon for \$67,522.65 to go toward the Summit water storage tank. The board approved a \$215,800 contract between the city and Horizon Brothers Painting Corporation for the repair and painting of the Summit tank. This project is included in the fiscal year 2018–19 budget for a total cost of \$300,000, which includes the \$4,500 to Dixon Engineering for the design and specifications. The fiscal note said the project has \$220,300 spent out of the \$300,000 budgeted.

**Graese** said due to recent complaints about the boat ramp at the Ashland riverfront, there will be improvements made to correct the issues. Parks and Recreation Director Sean Murray said the current boat ramp can accumulate significant amounts of silt and debris when there are rises in river levels, which prevents boaters from launching. "The city rents equipment, typically in the spring and fall, that allows us to remove the debris and allow access for boat launches, etc.," Murray said. "In many cases, the silt that is removed is repurposed to other projects the city is working on."

**Graese** said the work is tentatively scheduled for next week. The board approved a first reading or an ordinance to include a smoking and tobacco use policy. "Essentially we're not allowing any use of tobacco products in (city) vehicles or in facilities, or within 15 feet of entrances to

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buildings," **Graese** said. The board approved the City Manager's Consent Agenda (commissioner Matt Perkins recused himself) which included the appointment of a part-time corporation counsel. The salary for this part-time position will be \$45,000 with no benefits.

Commissioner Amanda Clark said city improvements, stemming from board and city staff decision, have made a significant impact on young lives. "This past week I did some mock interviews at Blazer (High School)," Clark said. "This year I did about 15 and this year there was a different feel to those. Fourteen out of the 15 kids I had interviewed said to me that I'm going to go someplace and get whatever training and I want to come back." Clark said that she was thrilled to hear that the young students wanted to come back to their city after receiving higher education.

Commissioner Marty Gute took a moment of prayer for the Ashland students on a School Safety Patrol trip to Washington. Gute said a National Day of Prayer was held on the fourth floor of the Highlands Museum and Discovery Center on Thursday. Commissioner Matt Perkins took a moment to express appreciation for the Ashland Police Department and the recent drug bust that totaled 2.68 pounds of crystal methamphetamine with a street value of \$243,000 and \$4,300 in cash on Gallaher Drive last week. "I just want to commend our police department for the great work they are doing fighting drug problems," Perkins said.

"All those who were on the scene, all of them, are the ones who made it happen," Police Chief Todd Kelley said. Mayor Steve Gilmore said he hopes to recognize the officers involved on this case at a meeting this month. Gilmore also recognized May 5-11 as the National Travel and Tourism week in Ashland. Gilmore additionally recognized Jason Smith, an employee of the city's engineering department, and his service for the city over the last seven years charting and mapping city and sewer lines.

A resolution was made to change the city's Board of Commissioners meeting time from May through September to the second and fourth Thursdays at noon. **Graese** said that the city's surplus sale will be coming up and to watch the city's website for news on the date. There were no citizens at this Thursday's public participation.

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
April 11, 2019

**Ashland faces more water filter fixes**

Author/Byline: Carly Carver and Glenn Puit

The City of Ashland will consider spending \$131,517 at its Board of Commissioners meeting today to repair persistent problems with one of the city's water filters. The proposed expenditures are being considered as part of emergency readings aimed at expediting the repairs to the filter if approved.

Problems with the filter at the treatment plant have been ongoing since 2015 and represent a continued dilemma for the municipality. The City of Ashland first began this filter rehab project in 2015, installing six new filters. After installation, all six filters exhibited signs of malfunctioning. To address the issue, City management traveled to Pittsburgh to negotiate with the manufacturer Leopold, a Xylem Brand, an engineering firm and an installer and worked out a deal that addressed the problem and cost the city \$113,000 to replace the six filters.

"We avoided litigation, we saved \$325,000 on an already reduced price," City Manager **Michael Graese** said. Since then, a portion of the filter infrastructure known as an under-drain has buckled and malfunctioned, hampering the city's produced volume of water. City leaders emphasized that the issue does not impact water quality in any way. "This isn't a quality issue, it's a volume issue, and we are on it," said Mayor Stephen Gilmore. "The quality of the water is not in jeopardy at all," **Graese** said.

The City of Ashland will meet today for the regularly scheduled Board of Commissioners meeting adding three emergency items to the agenda to address the malfunction to cover parts, labor, and to retain an engineering company to do a forensics analysis to establish why the failure of the under-drain occurred.

The first agenda item will cover the cost of labor through Building Crafts Inc. at a cost of \$75,728.74 to remove and replace the under-drain for the filter. The second agenda item will cover the cost of parts through Xylem Water Solutions USA Inc. in the amount of \$25,789. The final reading will cover the cost of a forensics engineering company to investigate the Water Treatment Plant's filter failure and under-drain failure, in the amount of \$30,000. The city declared an emergency to exist to allow the first and second reading to exist in the same day, to quickly approve the \$131,517.74 in costs to get the under-drain and water filters running before summer production increases. The city will have to do a budget adjustment to pay out \$131,517 out of the city's utility fund to cover the cost of parts, labor, and the forensic engineering company. The Kentucky Division of Water assisted the City of Ashland in finding the resources for a forensics analysis.

The City of Ashland is currently producing the volume of water necessary to sustain the city's consumers, however with the increase in consumption over the summer, city management said it

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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was imperative to take fast action. "As the mayor and commissioners constantly remind us, we're under the auspices of making sure that we do this at the best cost," **Graese** said. "This is taxpayer money." Though the quality of water is not in jeopardy and maintains its standard, if another filter or under-drain fails the city will face a challenge in producing the volume of water necessary to meet consumers demand. "The good news is we are meeting the requirements to the capacity that we need right now," **Graese** said. "If something happens where one of the other ones go down, it's going to be a struggle."

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
February 2, 2019

**City releases 2018 audit findings**

Author/Byline: Carly Carver

An independent auditor has completed the city of Ashland's 2018 Audit and presented his findings at the Ashland Board of City Commissioners meeting earlier last month. Phil Layne, of Kelley Galloway Smith Goolsby, PSC, discussed a portion of the city's annual audit, with a focus on the city's pension obligations. "A total of \$68 million, that is the combined, underfunded pension liability and retirement insurance liabilities that is assigned to the city of Ashland," Layne said. "So we all know what's happening down at the legislature as we speak, but when I look at that I think you couldn't tax everybody in the city of Ashland and come up with \$68 million." Layne stated that the city of Ashland's Audit included an additional 15 pages of information in regards to the city's pension account.

Tony Grubb, the city's finance department director, said the city of Ashland currently has a Police Pension Fund and Firefighters Pension Fund, as well as Utility Pension Fund with no active members but 38 retirees total on both the fund plans. "For current employees, we pay into the Kentucky Retirement Systems with the exception of the City Manager, which we pay into the ICMA (International City County Management Association) 457 Plan," Grubb said.

Layne also discussed the city of Ashland's balance sheet of governmental funds briefly, with categories for flood wall operating, tax increment financing and housing assistance. This portion of the audit did not include the pension obligations. "This page does not include the pension liabilities because it's not budgeted," Layne said. "The only budget as far as pension is what you have to pay in each year." The city paid \$1,010,604 into the Police Pension Fund and Firefighters Pension Fund in 2018 according to the city's finance department. "This contribution exceeded the actuarial required contribution and paid down some of our unfunded liability," Grubb said. The city paid \$949,776 into the Utility Pension Fund in 2018, \$6,968,000 into the Kentucky Retirement Systems and \$24,335 into the ICMA in 2018, according to the city's finance department.

For 2019, the city will pay \$521,302 into the Police Pension Fund and Firefighter Pension Fund, \$845,798 into the Utility Pension Fund, \$7,655,255 into the Kentucky Retirement Systems and \$24,335 into the ICMA, according to the city's finance department. There is no anticipated increase in the obligations owed to the Utility Pension Fund or the Police and Firefighters Pension Fund, according to the city's finance department, however the Kentucky Retirement System has a set cap on a 12-percent increase for the next 10 years. The anticipated increase city-wide would be approximately \$400,000. "The financial health of the city remains stable," Grubb said. "We have planned and will continue to plan for these increased expenses."

Layne stated that a new component in the city's annual audit is the TIF project. "Which is the Ashland Plaza hotel project," Layne said. "It's in a separate fund because of its unusual



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characteristics and the way the tax revenue has to be accounted for there." Layne stated the city had not gained additional debts in the last fiscal year with the exception of the TIF project's bonds. "Other than the bonds issued for the Ashland Plaza this year, there was no additional debt," Layne said. "As that project progresses, there will be disclosures required."

The city's audit report stated that the city issued \$4.49 million in general obligation bonds with an average rate of 3.0 percent to fund the Ashland Plaza Redevelopment Project, a TIF project. The taxes levied on all taxable property within the TIF district on the increase in assessed value of the taxable property is allocated to pay for the cost of improvements in the district, including reimbursing the city's initial investment. Approximately 3.3 million was paid to the developer as part of the city's initial investment.

The city's audit listed a schedule of findings and questioned costs, stating that the city did have "noncompliance material to the financial statements" that was noted by the auditor. This was because of two purchases, one for \$52,025 and one for \$59,248 in street-scape projects that were not procured through competitive bidding as KRS 424.260 requires, as well as city policy.

City Manager **Michael Graese** responded to this in a planned corrective action to the city's departments, with finance and legal continuing to aid with oversight in bidding procurement regulations.

The city's audits may be viewed on the city's website, as well as requested in person at the city building through the Finance Department or by calling (606) 327-2009. The 2018 city audit will be uploaded early next week to the website, according to the city's finance department.

"We also have a condensed financial report conveniently located in the lobby of the city building that citizens may pick up," Grubb said. "It's called a PAFR — Popular Annual Finance Report. "The Department of Finance has created this report to increase the government's transparency to our citizens by creating a condensed financial report that is easily understood by our citizens and other interested parties who don't have a background in public finance," Grubb said.

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
August 7, 2018

**APD receives four-year accreditation**

Author/Byline: Emily Porter

Ashland Police Department received its third, four-year accreditation from the Kentucky Association of Chiefs of Police recently. APD Chief Todd Kelley attended the 46th annual training conference in Hebron and was joined by Maj. Scott Sexton and City Manager **Michael Graese** to accept the award. Kelley said attempting the accreditation is voluntary, but as long as he is chief the APD will pursue the honor. "Accreditation is a progressive and time-proven way of helping institutions evaluate and improve their overall performance," the Kentucky Association of Chiefs of Police website said. Kelley said the department is always doing performance reviews and evaluations, but additional reviews and visits from the association are added during the year leading up to accreditation. Officers are interviewed about policies and given scenarios of possible situations where they must explain the correct way to react given the policies put in place, Kelley explained.

Kelley credited Sexton with working diligently as the department's accreditation manager. "Participating administrators then conduct a thorough analysis to determine how existing operations can be adapted to meet these objectives," the association said. "When the procedures are in place, a team of independent professionals is assigned to verify that all applicable standards have been successfully implemented. The process culminates with a decision by an authoritative body that the institution is worthy of accreditation," Kelley said achieving the accreditation can be a tedious process, but something the department wants to do. Kelley said it is important to the department and the individual officers because they understand that they work in an environment that has high professional standards.

The chief emphasized that APD wants to be at the forefront of professionalism in the region, state and even nation. APD has 168 standards in 78 policies to which it adheres. Kelley said they are using the best information out there to keep up-to-date and display professionalism in their policing. The association says accreditation provides a means of independent evaluation of agency operations, a basis to correct deficiencies in the agency's operations before they become public problems and a norm for an agency to judge its performance. Accreditation minimizes an agency's exposure to liability, reducing vicarious liability suits, builds a stronger defense against lawsuits and citizen complaints and has the potential to reduce liability insurance costs. Accreditation requires that agencies commit policies and procedures to writing, promotes accountability among agency personnel and the evenhanded application of policies. It enhances the reputation of the agency, thereby helping to attract the most qualified candidates for employment and increases the community's confidence in its police department. Kelley said receiving the accreditation is a good, strong and prestigious honor for not only the department, but the city. He added that it is important for citizens to have a forward, up-to-date agency.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**

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While at the conference, Kelley joined other police chiefs from across the state to learn legal updates and observe equipment testing. Kelley said one popular exhibit was a vest shoot. There department leaders from the smallest, two-man departments to the large cities and state police agencies gathered to watch a company put it's vest to the test. The chiefs watched as 40, 50, 60 bullets were shot into the vest. Kelley said seeing all the chiefs so interested in the quality is another example of leadership in Kentucky police departments.

Kelley said no matter the size of the department, chiefs want to be purchasing quality equipment that will protect their officers. The vest was his primary example. As chief, Kelley wants "to ensure the vest I'm putting on my officers in is doing what it's suppose to." He saw that same desire from other Kentucky law enforcement leaders over the week. "It's solid leadership...saying 'I want to make sure my cops go home at the end of the night.'" Kelly said.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
June 27, 2018

**"Take our town back" — East Ashland, police partner on crime prevention**

Author/Byline: Glenn Puit

East Ashland resident Mollie Hood was taking her trash out one recent morning when she came face to face with a man high on drugs. He'd set up a tent in the garage of an abandoned home near her residence. When she confronted him, he ran off. "He came out and I said, 'What the (heck) are you doing?'" Hood recounted. "He said 'Oh ma'm I'm sick,' and I said, 'Should I call an ambulance?' And he took off running." Hood was one of approximately 50 people who joined together with Ashland police and city of Ashland leaders at Central Baptist Church on 29th Street Monday night to explore new ways to combat crime and blight in east Ashland. Hood wasn't alone in her account of troubled times on the streets of the neighborhoods. One woman said she observed people openly shooting up drugs in a park. Yet another recounted a house fire at an abandoned residence that threatened her home. There was frustration, anger and fear in their voices as they told the accounts. But after the meeting with Ashland police and city leaders — which established the infrastructure for a new Neighborhood Watch in east Ashland — there was also feelings of hope and optimism. "We want to work together in a partnership," said Ashland Chief of Police Todd Kelley. "If we can get everyone communicating we can work together...we can take our town back. But we can't do it alone. We can't do it by ourselves. It takes everyone in this room." Kelley and City Manager **Michael Graese** said the city is committed to aggressive policing combined with communication and partnerships with residents. "Keep calling in," **Graese** said, adding the city has dramatically improved its mechanisms for taking questions and complaints from area residents in the interest of serving the public. "You are all scouts for the police department," **Graese** said.

Sylvia McClelland-Morrison said she was encouraged by Monday night's meeting. She said roughly 15 years ago there was an organized Neighborhood Watch in the community. Some involved moved. Some involved passed away. But others eventually became frustrated with the police at the time because they were told "if the police didn't see it, didn't matter and that's why everybody gave up." Some in attendance encouraged the city to go after property owners who rent their homes to druggies. Others want to see more blighted properties cleaned up. Still others said a big problem are transients coming into town from out of state combined with a lot of homeless people in the neighborhood. Kelley and city leaders said they are committed to helping residents. Kelley encouraged residents to move forward with a Neighborhood Watch program and that the police will be there with them, side by side. He said Silent Witness number is 606-329-1771. Residents can also email the police at [silentwitness@ashlandkypd.com](mailto:silentwitness@ashlandkypd.com) or report crimes and even download photos using the city police mobile app. Ashland City Commissioner Marty Gute said he was very encouraged by Monday night's meeting. "I think it is a great start to start back up the Neighborhood Watch," Gute said. "I think people are excited to take back their community and its really good news."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
June 21, 2018

**City of Ashland violates open meetings rule**

Author/Byline: Glenn Puit

The city of Ashland approved a \$50 million municipal budget Wednesday during a special meeting, but the meeting was later invalidated due to inadequate public notice. The Daily Independent notified the city of an apparent open meetings violation after the meeting was held.

City Attorney Richard "Sonny" Martin subsequently told the newspaper it was correct -- the special meeting was not held in compliance with the state open meeting law, which require 24 hour notice to the public. As a result the meeting is now being rescheduled. "You are correct the notice failed to comply," Martin said, adding he was responsible for the error.

Governments in Kentucky are required to give 24 hour public notice of special meetings. The meeting Wednesday was a special meeting but not deemed an emergency. The Daily independent did not receive notice of the meeting until 5:10 p.m. Tuesday night, which is less than 24 hours as required by the Open Meetings rules. It also appears details of the meeting were not posted on the city's website until after the fact.

The meeting was also not live-streamed as is usually the practice by the city. The city posted an item on social media a few hours before the meeting started, announcing it, saying it was having a special meeting, but it does not appear an agenda of the meeting was attached to the Facebook post.

"The Board of Commissioners have called a special meeting today, Wed. June 20th, 2018 to complete budget discussion for the FY19 Budget. As with all Commission meeting, this meeting is open to the public. This special meeting will take place in the Commission Chambers, City Building 3rd floor, 1700 Greenup Ave Ashland KY 41101 at 2:00 pm."

When a social media poster asked if the meeting was being live-streamed the city responded saying "We are recording the meeting now and will post the video. MyTownTVHD was not available to stream live today. Thanks for asking!"

Board of Commissioners council member Matt Perkins was out sick and was not in attendance. Council member Amanda Clark was out of town but participated by teleconference.

The city approved the following items under old business during the now nullified meeting:

— The tax levy for the year 2018. City Manager **Mike Graese** said the levy has not changed from the year prior. "Basically the revenue stayed the same and the overall ad valorem dropped just slightly based on the PVA assessments," **Graese** said.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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- An ordinance requiring all food service workers within the city to receive Hepatitis A inoculations.
- Adopted a revised job description for corporate counsel as a full-time position. The city's assistant counsel will now be part-time.
- Accepted a proposal by Howerton Engineering & Surveying for professional engineering and drafting services for a sewer lining project.
- Authorized a contract between the city and Great Southern Recreation for installation of new playground equipment at Central Park for \$27,231.
- Authorized a contract between the city and Shield Roofing for the removal and replacement of the roof of the city of Ashland Central Garage Buildings in the amount of \$43,608.84.
- Authorized an agreement for a school resource officer between the city and Ashland Independent School District.
- Approved the 2018-2019 budget.

The city approved the following new business under a first reading:

- The ad valorem tax levy for 2018.
- An ordinance approving renewal with Medical Benefits Administrators for administrative fees to administer the city's health insurance coverage.
- An ordinance amendment to the city's budget ordinance.

According to the Kentucky Attorney General's Office, KRS 61.800 establishes the right of access to public meetings. A special meeting may be called but the agency must give written notice consisting of the date, time, and place of the meeting and the agenda. Written notice must be delivered to members of the agency and every media organization at least 24 hours before the meeting. Notice must also be posted in a conspicuous place in the building where the meeting will take place.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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WSAZ3  
March 26, 2018

**City leaders say Ky. pension reform could have impacts on services**  
By Chad Hedrick

As the battle over Senate Bill 1, known as the pension reform bill, continues in Frankfort, city governments all across Kentucky say they are keeping a close eye on the bill's developments and what it could mean to their budgets if it passes. "This is a major impact for us," said Ashland City Manager **Michael Graese**. **Graese** says with the bill written as it is, the city is looking at having to cover a \$1.7 million bill to pay for retirement funds for city employees. He says that means the city is looking at possibly making adjustments to other department budgets to cover that cost.

Just recently the City Commission voted to make changes to their insurance premium plans. Employees are now looking at having to pay an extra \$5-\$15 out of their paychecks to cover the changes. The added fees would generate around an extra \$93,000 a year for the city which would go toward funding for retirement plans. "It's difficult anytime to ask people to pay more," **Graese** said. "But it does show that the city workers are also contributing to try to get out of this problem."

Commissioners are set to begin laying out their next budget soon. With the possibility of the bill going through, departments and services citizens have could see shifts to make up the remaining debts the reform bill would bring. "Again there's been no decisions made, no recommendations made, but if for example water services were to get cut, it would be a longer response time during breaks. Especially like when we have a crisis like in January when we had zero and subzero temperatures and 40 breaks within two weeks."

For the most part, **Graese** says the city is in a good position financially, especially compared to smaller cities with lower budgets that could see even harsher impacts on their budgets if SB1 goes through. "I can't imagine for some cities with smaller budgets than us," he said. "Anecdotally I've heard people not being able to provide police and fire. I don't know how a community would deal with that." **Graese** says the cities of Kentucky are being represented by the Kentucky League of Cities in Frankfort who are keeping an eye on what's being done with the bill, much like how the Kentucky Education Association has sent representatives to rally at the Capitol and keep updated.

The city says they have also spoken with local and state leaders to express to them concerns and talk about what the bill would do to the city. **Graese** says their cautiously optimistic about a positive outcome for public employees. "I think everybody understands the need to address this and not kick the can down the road, but it's just how it's done I think is a crucial part, so it doesn't break the backs of local governments."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
March 25, 2018

**Ashland commission raises employee insurance premium cost**

Author/Byline: Andrew Adkins

Health care premium costs are rising for all Ashland city workers except union fire department employees. The Ashland commission on Thursday unanimously approved City Manager **Michael Graese's** request to raise employee health care contributions. The increased insurance costs for employees will range from \$5 to \$15 per every two-week pay period depending on the health care plan. City employees currently contribute \$22 per paycheck for single plans, \$44 for couples or employees with one child and \$60 per paycheck for family plans.

**Graese** said the city, which is self-insured, had not increased its premium for several years. But the city is looking to tighten its budget in many areas, including health care, as an anticipated increase in contributions to the severely-underfunded state retirement systems of nearly \$2 million per year still looms, said **Graese**. Commissioner Matt Perkins said Friday increasing the premiums for employees is "a hard thing to do," but is the right move given concern over increased pension obligations.

The city spent \$6.5 million on health insurance last fiscal year – an increase of \$369,000 from fiscal year 2015-2016. The city insures an estimated 900 people, including more than 300 city employees and their family members. The recommendation to increase employee contributions also came from the city's insurance committee. **Graese** said the union fire department workers, who are under contract with the city, were exempted from the premium increase after they voted against it.

The increase in premium cost is part of a larger plan to re-examine the city's health care, **Graese** said. Another element of the city's "health insurance benefits cost reduction efforts," as listed in the city's meeting agenda, was approved Thursday. It requires all spouses of new employees who already have health care through another employer to continue to use that health care for primary coverage, **Graese** said. The spouse can still be added to the city's health care but only for secondary insurance. The move will save the city an estimated \$97,000, **Graese** said. The city currently charges employees a \$20 penalty if they have a spouse whose employment offers health care. Overall, the city projects it will save an estimated \$189,170 through the insurance plan changes.



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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
January 1, 2018

**Ashland city manager looks ahead to challenging new year**

Author/Byline: Andrew Adkins

City Manager **Michael Graese** said 2018 is going to be a "tough year" as massive pension obligations appear to be looming and the city looks to improve its struggling water system - but he's optimistic. The city will be on the hook for a \$1.9 million payment increase to the County Employees Retirement System next fiscal year – beginning July 1 – based on the most recent estimates provided by the state. Kentucky is staring down what officials call a public pension crisis based on unfunded liabilities.

The city made combined payments of \$3.3 million last fiscal year for hazardous and non-hazardous employees in CERS. "The \$1.9 million is still an estimate, but we're moving forward with the idea that we've got this bill to pay," **Graese** told The Daily Independent in a recent interview at his office. **Graese**, who took the helm in August, said the city must find a way to meet its obligation to the state through two avenues. "It's either going to be through revenue generation or budget reductions," he said. "Whatever we do, it has to be sustainable, because we know this is not going to be a one-time bill."

*New Revenue Streams?*

**Graese** said the city's obvious goal is to increase revenue to avoid reducing the budget. New revenue streams could flow from new businesses locating in the city. A new, four-star Marriott Delta set to replace the Ashland Plaza Hotel could open by mid-to-late 2018, and would give the city an increase in tax revenue, including payroll tax.

The business developers who own the new hotel were courted to the city through, in part, an incentive package that offers \$4.6 million for vertical construction work. The city teamed with the Boyd County Fiscal Court to create a Tax Increment Financing, or TIF district, in downtown Ashland to capture potential new city, county and some state tax revenue for up to 20 years to fund the incentive plan.

The tax revenue the city could capture through the TIF are based on projected increases in tax revenue generated by the hotel and other new development within the TIF district, which could also result in higher sales tax revenue if foot traffic increases. City officials are hopeful the new hotel will spur more business development – from new restaurants to larger businesses – in the downtown area, which is also home to the headquarters of Braidy Industries. But if a substantial amount of new revenue doesn't flow to the city, officials will likely need to look at larger budget cuts, according to **Graese**.

*Possible Budget Cuts*

"Everything is under consideration," **Graese** said. "What I'm trying to provide to the mayor and commissions, and the entire city team, is what do we absolutely need. What if we totally

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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eliminated a service? What are the legal limitations of what we can provide in life, health and safety. You don't just cut a police department. There's some things that can be eliminated and some that's can't." An area of the city government that was heavily scrutinized last summer prior to the passage of a new budget was the city's bus system.

The current year's budget allocated about \$540,000 for the bus system, an increase of \$120,000 from the previous year. The division, which also receives about \$700,000 from the federal government annually in addition to local funding, ran out of money last March, three months before the fiscal year ended. The city pointed to a drop in ridership, along with increases in payroll expenses since 2015, as the main reasons for the high costs.

**Graese** said the city's bus system is a crucial service for many local residents, and believes management of the bus division has improved significantly since it was reassigned under the supervision of the finance department this fiscal year. "[Finance Director] Tony [Grubb] and [Assistant Finance Director] Michelle Veach have done a magnificent job of managing the bus system well," said **Graese**. The finance department has worked to cut expenses and improve bus routes to increase ridership since summer.

**Graese** said it wouldn't be right to "make a knee-jerk reaction" on reducing any services, including the bus system's, until taking a closer look at departmental budgets. Another, heavier burden on the city's finances is its employee overtime payments. The city paid \$1.8 million in overtime costs last fiscal year, including about \$1 million to the fire department, for both scheduled and unscheduled overtime. The city routinely pays more than \$1 million in overtime each fiscal year. **Graese** said the city has already taken steps to decrease its overtime expenses. "When I first came into this position (in August,) I was given a directive to reduce overtime ... the initial numbers I saw were that we are driving that down," said **Graese**. The city manager said he'd have a clearer picture of overtime costs after he receives a six-month report in the coming weeks.

**Graese** said the idea of layoffs to cut the budget is viewed as a last resort move. Instead the city could reduce personnel costs through attrition, **Graese** said. The city has already waited months to fill some vacant positions, including in the utilities department. "We've not limited one police or fire position. But in other departments, we've already slow rolled on hires. As a result, we're getting pay lags," said **Graese**. "As the department heads come to me seeking permission to hire, I've been very stingy about that. Can we continue to move along with what we've got? Yeah, we could. But based on my analysis, the city is not fat in personnel. We have to continue to make sure we're providing the best services possible to the citizens and customers."

*Water System Problems*

The City of Ashland produces water for homes and businesses throughout the area, but also loses nearly half of it every year. The city has been mired in infrastructure problems in recent years, causing pipes to burst and customers to lose water service temporarily. The city responds to about 250 breaks per year, according to the utilities department.

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In October, the city hired a private firm, BlueWater Kentucky, LLC, to study the city's infrastructure and provide consulting. The firm's president updated the city commission on early findings last month, and said the city loses more than 40 percent of its water, an abnormal amount. "By any standard across the country, in the state of Kentucky that's high," he said. The city is hoping to budget funds to replace sections of its 300 miles worth of water lines – some of which are more than 100 years old – but face costs that will likely be substantial.

"It's very sobering when you look at our system," said **Graese**. "But I'm still very optimistic about water infrastructure. I think everybody knows about the work ethic of our guys in the field, how hard they work and how dedicated they are. We've got a very competent workforce." **Graese** said he doesn't want to sound as if he has low standards, but he does want the city to reach a level of water loss at least on par with national averages. "To do that, we know we're going to have to invest resources. There's no money tree, and we have to be cognizant of what our citizens are paying in taxes. But we know we need to work hard to tackle this issue. It took us years to get to this point, and it's going to take years to get where we need to be."

In the short term, the city is looking to improve sections of its water system to provide services to Braidy Industries' \$1.3 billion aluminium mill. The company, which closed on the purchase of more than 200 acres in nearby EastPark, said it still plans to break ground on the mill in April and open in 2020. The company pledged to hire 550 full-time workers. **Graese** said he looks to Braidy to not only be an economic driver for the city and region in terms of employment and business growth, but contribute new revenue to the city for utility costs.

*Vision for the New Year*

**Graese** said his broad goals and objectives as city manager haven't changed since he first arrived. "No. 1 is still implementing the vision, goals and objectives of the mayor and commissioners," said **Graese**. "The real broad goal is making Ashland the best place to live, work, play and stay." **Graese** said despite the looming financial challenges facing the city, his optimism remains high. "I'm very optimistic. I know it's going to be a tough year, but I think our foundation is strong, and the sky's the limit on what we can accomplish," he said. "There's no place I'd rather be than in Ashland."

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
November 26, 2017

**Audit of City of Ashland reveals two findings**

Author/Byline: Andrew Adkins

The City of Ashland received two marks in an audit of its financial statement, including a failure to competitively bid two purchases. The audit by Ashland-based firm Kelley Galloway Smith Goolsby, PSC found the city did not follow proper procurement procedures when it bought two mast arm poles, and 4,000 tons of mulch last fiscal year. The mast arm poles were bought for new traffic lines at the intersection of 9th Street and Central Avenue. The city paid West Virginia Supply Co. \$52,025 for the poles. The mulch was bought around the time the city drained its water reservoir in October 2016. The city's engineering and utilities department needed the material to absorb the drained sludge. The city paid Bobby's Mulch \$32,978 for the 4,000 tons. According to management, the city obtained quotes for the mast arms and the mulch, but the items weren't procured through competitive bidding. City policy requires all items bought in aggregate of more than \$20,000 must be purchased through a bid approved by the board of city commissioners, or at state and federal contract pricing. The lack of competitive bidding also violated a Kentucky statute. The city responded to the findings with planned corrective action. "The finance department has stressed to departments that aggregate purchasing exceeding \$20,000 will need to be bid and they need to monitor, especially on larger jobs."

The auditor's second finding was related to sick leave payout. On Nov. 11, 2016, the commission adopted an ordinance that allowed employees who have more than 120 days of sick leave accrued at the end of the fiscal year to be compensated for the days, in excess of 120, at 50 percent of their hourly rate. Previously, city employees with more than 120 sick days banked were not compensated for the excess days at all. On June 9, 2017, the commission adopted another ordinance that repealed all previous policies and procedures related to compensation, in order to adopt the new policy. But the newly adopted policy erroneously left out the paragraph related to the payout of sick leave in excess of 120 days. City employees who qualified for the sick leave pay out still received the money – a total of \$92,000 – at the end of the 2016 fiscal year on June 30, 2017. In simpler terms, the city should've included wording in its new policies and procedures ordinance on June 9 to formally include the sick leave payout policy. The city corrected the issue through ordinance during the commission's meeting this month by adding the language to city policy.

City Manager **Michael Graese**, who became city manager in August, a month after the 2016 fiscal year ended, said the city must follow its policies and procedures in the future. The Ashland commission meets again on Dec. 14 in its final regular meeting of the calendar year.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
September 2, 2017

**City moves forward on plan to hire public information officer**

Author/Byline: Andrew Adkins

City Manager **Michael Graese** said a recent string of water main breaks and the rollout of a hotly-debated ordinance draft were prime examples why the city needs a public information officer. Now, the city plans to hire one. The commission took the next step in creating the position in its most recent meeting. The position's salary range was set between \$41,000 and \$62,000. The move still needs a second round of votes before final passage. Commissioners and Mayor Steve Gilmore initially only budgeted \$35,000 for the position's salary during budget work sessions in June. But after consulting with **Graese** and defining the job description, the pay range was increased in hopes of attracting stronger candidates.

The communication specialist's responsibilities will include relaying information from the city to the general public and media, organizing press conferences, running the city's website and social media pages and organizing special events. The job description for the position is nearly identical to the description of the City of Huntington's 4-year-old communications director job.

The city currently doesn't have any employees whose sole responsibility is to communicate with media or the general public. The city technically has a Facebook page, but it was shut down in early July. Some members of the commission, including Commissioner Matt Perkins, said they felt upkeep of the page took time away from employees whose jobs weren't supposed to include running social media pages. The Facebook page is scheduled to be back online after the city hires its public information officer. Perkins said he is optimistic the new position will streamline conversation between the citizens and the city building and help ensure employees are focused on their main tasks. "I championed for (a public information officer) during my campaign," said Perkins, who is in his first year as a commissioner. "Department heads have degrees in their respective fields, not in public relations. It takes the eye off the most important part of their job."

In mid-August when more than seven water main breaks in one week impacted 10,000 city water customers in Boyd County, the city issued news releases and department heads fielded calls. Community and Economic Development Director Chris Pullem served as the main contact and City Engineer Ryan Eastwood also provided updates throughout the process.

"I think that's probably a good example where a PIO would've been able to be very beneficial," said **Graese**. "In a situation like that, we have the public works folks trying to fix the problem. That's where their focus has to lie. But we have a responsibility to provide correct information efficiently, and be nimble and efficient in informing the public." **Graese** said the city is developing a plan to ensure direct updates from the city on water, traffic and proposed ordinances are explained to the general public and media correctly. The city was pummeled by residents last week through Facebook comments and phone calls after an initial news report about a proposed ordinance. The ordinance was aimed at curtailing crimes related to drugs and

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**

**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**

*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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prostitution by notifying property owners if their premises become a public nuisance. A property could be labeled a public nuisance if it's used for two or more crimes related to prostitution or any illegal drug activity within 12 months, the proposed ordinance stated. Property owners would be notified if their property is repeatedly being used for the specific felony crimes. They could face a fine of between \$250 and \$500 if they do not take steps to stop the problem — by eviction or other means — within 30 days of receiving the notice.

The initial false rumors surrounding the ordinance stated that property owners could face jail time if felonies were committed on their property. The city this week pumped the brakes on the new ordinance and does not plan on putting it up for a vote in its next regular meeting. **Graese** said he doesn't think the city bungled the rollout of the proposed ordinance — which was requested by Police Chief Todd Kelley. But having a public information officer and news release in place to better explain the ordinance might help prevent a spread of misinformation, he said.

Commissioner Amanda Clark said she feels the absence of a public information officer is often glaring. The city needs to have someone on staff whose sole job is to communicate with the public from the city building while elected officials represent them, she said. The city will begin formally advertising the public information officer position in the coming weeks.

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**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
August 13, 2017

**First impressions from the new city manager**

Author/Byline: Glenn Puit

Infrastructure, customer service, capital and long-term strategic plans. Each of these topics are on the agenda for new City Manager **Michael Graese**, 51, who is now approaching his second full week on the job. The Daily Independent sat down with the former Army colonel this week and talked about his first impressions and what is already on the agenda. "There is no place I'd rather be," said **Graese**, adding he's been overwhelmed by the incredibly warm welcome he's received from the public, the City Council, the mayor and city staffers.

Now, however, comes the hard work. During his first week on the job a water line broke at the intersection of 13th Street and Winchester Avenue, flooding the downtown business American Health Centers. **Graese** was impressed with the city response aimed at fixing the problem, but this incident -- along with reports from staff indicating the city has a fair share of water line breaks — made clear infrastructure is on the radar. "It's absolutely on the radar," **Graese** said.

"I saw positive things," **Graese** said of the response to the water line breaks. "I saw great work ethic from the people working there, and on the negative I saw a lack of good records. My understanding is we went through a couple-decade gap where maybe the best records weren't kept on the water pipes. So we've got a GIS (graphic information system) person...they are out in the field and when they fix a specific thing they are taking pictures of things that don't match our current GIS information. "As it is explained to me, the (water) infrastructure, we have a variety of different pipes that are throughout the city, from pipes that were put in originally that have a 120-year estimated lifespan to recently ones in the 50s and 60s which have 50 years," **Graese** said. "It is a complex issue."

**Graese** said it is way too early to discuss long-term plans for addressing the city's infrastructure needs. But what he does want to tackle right away is securing the information and data necessary on the water lines to assess what is the true situation with the city's water infrastructure. "When they go out and don't have a good map of what they are looking at, that is part of the problem," **Graese** said, adding "Without good diagrams they don't know cause and effect."

**Graese's** wife, Francie (Simpson) Graese, is an Ashland native. The two met in college at Eastern Kentucky University, and married at Rose Hill Baptist Church in 1989. The couple has three children, one of whom currently lives in Ashland with his fiancé. One of his wife's brothers, Rob Simpson, is a sergeant for the Ashland Police Department. **Graese** has served in the Army since 1984. He was the base commander for Fort Hill in Virginia, and for Fort Jackson in South Carolina for a combined eight years.

**Graese** said he looks forward to working with the mayor, City Council and the public in making sure the city's long-term strategic plan is as solid as it can be. He also wants to make sure the city

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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is prepared to accommodate all of the future needs of business growth associated with Braidy Industries, which recently announced a \$1.3 billion aluminum mill near South Shore, creating 550 advanced manufacturing jobs.

"How is our comprehensive plan?" **Graese** said of one of his immediate goals. "I haven't had a chance to read it and look at it yet but just with the Braidy Industries (announcement) lets say it was done a year ago. It probably needs at least a serious review. What is our overall vision for the city? What type of business are we going after? What is realistic to go after based on the resources we have to improve the economy and improve our quality of life? What is the zoning? What is the pure industrial and what do we have for office space? What do we have for green space, how does it tie together and how do we market that to bring people in to improve quality of life and improve job opportunities."

**Graese** and city leaders are already working on customer service to residents. The city website has been updated so that, when one loads the website, residents are greeted with a tab asking "How can we help?" Residents can enter their information and issue and will receive a prompt response. "Providing world class customer service to our citizens and being good stewards of the resources we have," **Graese** said.

"I want this to be the best place to live," **Graese** said. "Why can't we be the best place in America? I really don't know what is wrong with saying that. With my experience whenever we've set a vision and a mission we always stay away from what is not measurable (but) I want this to be the best place to live. Live work play and stay. A great place to work. A great place to live. A great place to stay."



**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Daily Independent, The (Ashland, KY)  
May 28, 2017

**Can city manager curse be broken?**

Author/Byline: Andrew Adkins

In a unanimous vote, the Ashland city commission hired a 51-year-old Army veteran for the city's top job. Elected officials touted the man's experience running a military base as evidence he could manage a city facing an economic downturn. His name was Randy Robertson. The date was July 24, 2006. Eight months after Robertson stepped into the city manager's office, he was gone. He resigned amid a growing wave of discontent by Mayor Steve Gilmore and the same commissioners who hired him.

Former Public Services Director Steve Corbitt, now interim city manager again, replaced Robertson. When Corbitt retired in December of 2013, the commission replaced him with a 31-year-old senior management analyst from Arizona named Ben Bitter. Two tumultuous years later, Bitter was terminated by the commission in a 3-2 vote. In February of 2016, former City Attorney Richard "Sonny" Martin stepped in as interim. Nine months later, Corbitt subbed in for Martin. After a rollercoaster search that spanned five months, the commission hired another 51-year-old Army veteran as permanent city manager on Thursday.

**Michael Graese**, of Arlington, Va., is set to take the reins as soon as August. After eight years as a commander of two large Army bases, **Graese** is now in the process of retiring from the military and leaving his post as an executive officer at the Pentagon. The commission voted 5-0 to hire the man some once considered the "No. 2" option behind the city's initial pick, Gary Huff, of Piqua, Ohio. Huff had accepted the job in March then backed out two weeks later.

Corbitt, who previously lauded Huff as the "most qualified city manager" he'd ever seen, said he's confident **Graese** will prove to be a better choice than Huff, and be a long-term city manager, unlike Robertson and Bitter, despite feeling some initial trepidation. "I was reserved when I first met him (**Graese**) because of the experience we had before," said Corbitt. "But they (**Graese** and Robertson) are completely different individuals. I was comfortable with the guy after the first five minutes."

*Based on what you know so far, do you approve of Ashland's new city manager hire?*

**Graese** appears to have a stronger grasp on what's expected of him than Robertson did, Corbitt said. "**Graese** talked about carrying out the vision of the commission," said Corbitt, alluding to a statement **Graese** made to The Daily Independent. "I believe Robertson was only interested in carrying out his vision."

*Ashland ties*

**Graese** is also preparing to manage a city in which he is already deeply rooted, unlike his two recent predecessors, Corbitt added. **Graese's** wife, Francie (Simpson), who Corbitt said his wife, Elaine, was best friends with throughout school, is an Ashland native and well known locally.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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The **Graeses** met as students at Eastern Kentucky University and married at Rose Hill Baptist Church in Ashland. One of the couple's sons currently lives in Ashland. Francie Graese's sisters and her two brothers still live in Ashland, and one of her brothers, Rob Simpson, is an Ashland police sergeant. Commissioner Amanda Clark said she's also confident the city found a candidate who wants to cement himself in the city, based on his Ashland ties and an apparent desire to begin a new life chapter post military retirement. Clark said the city needs stability in its top post to spur already-growing momentum.

"Merely having somebody in that position permanently is going to help us make strides," said Clark. "As good a job as Sonny or Steve did for the city, they were not there to make policy changes or do anything earth shattering. They were just holding down the fort." Commissioner Marshall Steen said he thinks **Graese** will "be a long-term fit for us," which is "something we haven't had for a while."

**Graese** may also be inclined to stick in Ashland based on the city's job offer. Though not yet finalized, **Graese** will be offered a contract, Mayor Gilmore said last week. The city had never previously hired any city manager under contract, but offered one to Huff in the form of three years and \$140,000 annually, plus substantial benefits.

*No contract yet*

Corbitt said the terms of the city's agreement with **Graese** aren't set. But **Graese** will likely be paid between \$120,000 and \$140,000, the salary range advertised by the city. Huff was offered the max based largely on his nearly 20 years of city or town manager experience. The lucrative offer was enough to entice Huff, but not enough to land him. During the first week of April, Huff had spent a few days in Ashland house hunting with his wife, then had lunch with Commissioner Marty Gute and dinner with Gilmore, before backing out of the job through an email. Huff, 64, said he and his wife decided they did not want to trade life in Piqua for Ashland.

**Graese** told The Daily Independent in a phone interview Ashland is the place he and his wife "want to be for a really long time." Before the city hired Robertson, it had a city manager who chose to be in Ashland for the long haul. Bill Fisher, another Army veteran, spent 21 years at the helm before retiring. The commission hopes **Graese's** tenure as city manager will be more akin to Fisher's. Corbitt will stay on as the interim and will offer to help **Graese** transition into the city's top job.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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U.S. Army  
June 25, 2015

**Graese to leave 'challenging' post, 'amazing' people**

By Wallace McBride, Fort Jackson Leader

Col. **Michael Graese** will relinquish command of the U.S. Army Garrison-Fort Jackson on Friday, bringing an end to what he calls "the most challenging and rewarding assignment" of his career. He anticipated many of the challenges, he said. Reductions in force had been a heated topic of discussion in Washington, D.C., long before **Graese** arrived at Fort Jackson in 2012. A government shutdown, changes in force-protection measures and the day-to-day supervision of life on a military installation also managed to keep life interesting, he said. "Over the past three years, every single day has been totally unpredictable, and each day presented many opportunities to excel," **Graese** said. "Coming into command, I understood the Army was preparing to reduce our overall force structure, but I couldn't appreciate the full impact of the reduction of resources -- people and money -- on the installation." **Graese** said the U.S. Army Garrison staff rose to each occasion and had been "nothing short of amazing." "The Partners in Excellence on Fort Jackson have been similarly awesome to serve and serve with," he said. Rod Celestaine became command sergeant major of U.S. Army Garrison-Fort Jackson in August 2014. Before that promotion, Celestaine said, he had the chance to observe **Graese** in action as battalion command sergeant major of the 369th Adjutant General Battalion on post. "I couldn't wait to get over here to work with him," Celestaine said. "You could tell he had an understanding of garrison operations and knew how to reach the people he was supporting."

**Graese's** dedication to Fort Jackson didn't stop when the workday is over, Celestaine said. "It's the unseen things that he does, the personal sacrifices that he makes to stay on top of any of the garrison issues," Celestaine said. "I've worked with a number of people, but I've haven't worked with many people that sincerely care about the job they're doing -- or the support they give to Soldiers and their Families." Today, Fort Jackson looks quite a bit different from the way it did when **Graese** arrived. Obsolete buildings and structures have been demolished, Hilton Field -- one of the post's busiest destinations -- received a facelift, and the post opened a 24-hour Child Development Center. All occurred under the guidance of the U.S. Army Garrison commander. **Graese** won't be here to see one of the post's most historic changes come to pass, though. As garrison commander, he created a plan that included elements of the Army Training Center and U.S. Army Garrison Command in the post's new command headquarters. Garrison command offices now are attached to the post headquarters building on Jackson Boulevard, a World War II-era structure scheduled for demolition as part of the relocation project. **Graese's** next stop is the Pentagon, where he will be executive officer to the assistant chief of staff for Installation management for the Department of the Army. "The (Columbia) community lives up to its mantra of the 'most military-friendly city in America,'" **Graese** said, also speaking for his wife, Francie. "We have never felt so welcomed on such a scale as we have at Fort Jackson and in the surrounding community." **Graese** will relinquish command Friday to Col. James Ellerson during a 9 a.m. ceremony at Post Headquarters.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Post and Courier, The (Charleston, SC)  
November 7, 2014

**New policy restricts Fort Jackson access**

Author/Byline: by jeff wilkinson

Visitors to Fort Jackson now will have to be escorted or be vetted by the FBI and receive credentials to have access to the post, although the rules allow flexibility for some large events, according to the garrison commander.

Previously, visitors simply had to show their driver's licenses to visit the fort's water park, museums, golf course and other destinations. The restricted access is to comply with new Army regulations intended to protect soldiers and their families from attacks such as the one in Ottawa, Canada, last month in which a lone gunman killed a soldier guarding that country's National War Memorial, Col. **Mike Graese** said. "We're taking prudent measures to ensure that soldiers and family members have proper protection," he said.

However, **Graese** said the new rules allow flexibility for some large public events on installations, such as Fort Jackson family days on Wednesdays and graduations on Thursdays. Those events draw about 6,000 people to the post each week. For now, commander said, visitors to those events can continue to enter with only a driver's license as the installation tries to develop measures to meet the new Army regulations. "This policy is still being developed," **Graese** said.

Meanwhile, Joint Base Charleston has not made any recent changes to its visitor policy, spokesman Sgt. Anthony Hyatt said Thursday. "Joint Base Charleston is a controlled access installation with many categories of visitors. All personnel and vehicles entering JBC are subject to identification checks at any time," he said. "These checks are conducted as an installation protection and security measure."

On other days of the week, Fort Jackson's visitors will be required to be screened, he said. Temporary credentials can be issued on the spot through the Physical Security Office at the fort's main gate on Forest Drive and Interstate 77, after visitors' names are checked through the FBI National Crime Database.

The lightly traveled and well maintained roads in the fort are popular with cyclists, who flock there by the hundreds on after-work or weekend rides. Many were surprised when soldiers at the main gate began refusing them access without a Department of Defense ID last week. Brian Curran, owner of Outspokin Bicycles on Devine Street, said most of the cyclists he has spoken with on the issue "will do whatever we need to do to be able to ride there. ... It's hard to imagine a better place to ride in an urban area."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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WIS News 10  
November 15, 2013

**Fort Jackson officials say groundwater contamination not a health risk**

Officials at Fort Jackson knew about groundwater contamination for more than a year before reporting the irregularity to the state, according to Department of Health and Environmental Control director Catherine Templeton. In an October 25 letter to Fort Jackson's public works director, Templeton says it is DHEC's belief that the fort has been aware of the presence of Royal Demolition Explosive (RDX) in certain monitoring wells since July, 2012. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say the chemical compound used in ammunition can cause seizures in people who swallow a lot of it.

About 47,000 soldiers train annually at Fort Jackson and some will toss at least a couple of live hand grenades. But then those grenades blow up and leave something behind. "We've got the old adage 'we need to train as you are going to fight' and we want to make sure these soldiers, especially these soldiers, many of whom will be going to combat sometime very soon have the most realistic training they can have before they go to combat," said Fort Jackson Commanding General Bradley Becker. The fort's permit states any potential area of concern must be reported within fifteen days of discovery. "We request that you immediately test any potentially impacted drinking water wells down gradient," wrote Templeton.

Fort Jackson's public affairs office sent out news release Thursday to alert the media and public about the discovery in the groundwater at the southern edge of the Army training base. The release did not mention when the irregularity was first reported. Base officials said they plan to test private wells near the fort to see if there is any contamination. A collection of samples will take place the first two weeks of December. Officials will notify property owners of the results approximately four weeks later. In the event RDX is detected above risk-based levels, appropriate action will be taken, base officials said. "The results of our assessment are encouraging," said Brig. Gen. Bradley Becker. "Although there are detectable levels of munitions components from operational ranges near the installation boundary, they are below the EPA health advisory levels."

Becker said Army and Fort Jackson officials take the safety of community partners and the health of the environment seriously and as stewards simply want to be certain. "We are first and foremost committed to transparency in everything we do," said Becker. "We want to make sure that RDX is not migrating off the installation." Barbara Williams with environmental management said their is no health risk as this time. "2.0, that's the level at which if you were to drink water at 2.0 parts per billion of RDX for your entire life it's still not considered a health risk and so ours on the range is 0.78 so, it's one third of that," Williams said. "So we could drink the water on our range for the rest of our life and it would not be considered a health risk according to the EPA."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**

**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**

*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Post officials are planning town hall meetings for property owners within a 2-mile radius of the southern boundary, just east of Weston Lake. Citizens will be able to speak with post and USAEC experts, as well as members of the firm conducting the study. "We've already sent out the information, we sent out the requests for entry, we sent out a RDX fact sheet and also a letter from myself that explains the situation," said Col. **Michael Graese**.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Targeted News Service (USA)  
July 7, 2012

**New Garrison Commander Takes Charge**

By Mr. Andrew R McIntyre (Jackson)

The U.S. Army issued the following news:

Col. **Michael Graese** assumed command of U.S. Army Garrison -- Fort Jackson from Col. James Love in a ceremony in front of Post Headquarters Friday, June 29. He most recently served at Headquarters, Department of the Army, in the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, Air and Missile Defense Directorate as the Air and Missile Defense Integrator. Love heads to Fort Hood, Texas, to serve as III Corps, Deputy Chief of Staff.

"Out of all the great opportunities and assignments throughout the years by far I am most amped for the opportunity to command the garrison here at Fort Jackson. I am excited because I understand the value of strong garrisons to Soldiers, families, and partners on and off post," **Graese** said.

"To the people of Fort Jackson, the surrounding community warriors' families and civilians, I promise to give you all I have on a daily basis to ensure myself and the garrison team do everything in our power to provide a unsurpassed quality of life for you to thrive," **Graese** said. "I want each of you to truly believe, if you don't already, that Fort Jackson is the best place in the entire Army to train, live and work. Victory Starts Here, Army Strong."

His previous assignments include a history of command positions as an Air Defense Artillery Officer while assigned stateside and serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, Operation New Dawn. Also, he has served as a Garrison Commander at Fort A.P. Hill, Va., and Deputy Secretary of the General Staff, Fort Bliss, Texas.

"Garrison Command is the centerpiece for Army Installation Management Command and our garrison commanders are crucial to successful mission accomplishment," Davis Tindoll, Jr., director, IMCOM- Atlantic Region said. "Col **Graese**, I am confident that with your demonstrated leadership you will build upon the capabilities and success of previous garrison commanders and bring new energy and excellence to the Fort Jackson team," Tindoll said.

"We have been particularly blessed to have Col. **Michael Graese**, his wife, Fracie, and their sons, Corey, Taylor and Evan join the Fort Jackson team," Brig. Gen. Bryan Roberts, Fort Jackson commanding general said. "**Michael** is the right man for the job. He comes with a sterling record, and previous garrison command expertise. **Michael** is a seasoned officer with a breadth of joint, command, and staff experience that will serve him well. I want to welcome you and your family to the greater Columbia community and the Fort Jackson team where victory truly starts here," Roberts said.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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The News Enterprise  
August 22, 2009

**Graese is promoted to colonel**

By The Staff

**COL. MICHAEL GRAESE.** Michael Graese, a 1983 graduate of North Hardin High School and a graduate of Eastern Kentucky University, was promoted to colonel in the U.S. Army on June 19, 2009. He is the son of the late Marvin Graese and Marilyn Graese who now lives in Foley, Ala. He is married to the former Francie Simpson of Ashland, and they have three sons. Col **Graese's** sisters, Diana Graese Haynes and Karen Graese Mooney, both reside in Alabama.



**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Michael [Mike] Graese** is listed below.]

Free Lance-Star, The (Fredericksburg, VA)  
November 9, 2008

**Abstract: Names & Notes**

K. Lynn Gouldin, a Union Bank and Trust employee, was awarded the first C.I.V.I.C. award from the Caroline County Chamber of Commerce's 30th anniversary celebration recently.

Fort A.P. Hill's commander, Lt. Col. **Michael Graese** also received a special recognition.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Free Lance-Star, The (Fredericksburg, VA)  
May 10, 2008

**Abstract: Fort A.P. Hill wins two top Army awards**

By RUSTY DENNEN

Fort A.P. Hill has finally scored a bull's-eye in its quest for a top Army award that puts the Caroline County post in elite company. One of the Army's premier training sites, it placed first in the Army Chief of Staff Communities of Excellence competition. The results were announced two weeks ago, and a contingent from A.P. Hill went to the Pentagon on Thursday to accept the honor, along with another top military commendation.

The Communities of Excellence award recognizes exemplary support to soldiers, civilian employees, retirees and their families. It includes a cash prize of \$2 million. "This honor caps a nearly decade-long journey of analysis and introspection of what makes Fort A.P. Hill a great place to live, work or train," said Lt. Col. **Michael Graese**, the base commander. "It is a key milestone in a journey of continual improvement-improvement that benefits the tens of thousands of men and women of America's armed forces who train at Fort A.P. Hill annually."

A.P. Hill has been aiming high. It was runner-up for the award the past three years, collecting about \$2.75 million for improvement projects such as picnic areas, handicapped-access trails, a racquetball court, and state-of-the-art electric signs. "There's been a whole variety of quality-of-life and facilities improvements," said Ken Perrotte, director of A.P. Hill's Plans, Analysis and Integration Office. The latest award will push the total to nearly \$5 million. Since the base won the top prize this year, it must sit out the competition next year. The \$2 million must be obligated for a project this fiscal year. A base committee will consider options in coming weeks. The money could benefit ongoing projects or some new ones. "Do we put in a lap pool for swimming? Do we further build out the conferencing complex we have at Beaverdam Pond?" Perrotte said.

Richard A. Cody, the Army's vice chief of staff, who presided over the ceremony, said quality installations help retain quality soldiers and their families. "You know that a community of excellence is based around leadership and taking care of people," he said. Fort Meade, Md., was runner-up, collecting a check for \$1 million. To compete for the award, Army installations must complete detailed organizational self-assessments in leadership, planning, management, customer focus, personnel and business results.

A.P. Hill also received the 2008 Commander in Chief's Annual Award for Installation Excellence. John J. Young, undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, presented that award, which included an installation flag, a trophy and a letter signed by President Bush. Posts such as A.P. Hill, Young said, are "the backbone of our armed forces and the backbone of our defense infrastructure."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Government Press Releases (USA)  
April 17, 2008

**Fort A. P. Hill Wins Army Communities of Excellence Award**

Fort A. P. Hill, Va., will be honored as winner of the Army Chief of Staff Communities of Excellence Award for Year 2008 at a Pentagon ceremony May 8. Fort George G. Meade, Md., took second place in the Army Communities of Excellence awards U.S. Army Garrison Yongsan, Korea, took third place. The Special Category winner for the Army National Guard is the West Virginia Army National Guard. The 65th Regional Readiness Command in Puerto Rico is the Special Category winner for the Army Reserve. "We are extremely proud of these installations for preparing themselves and holding themselves up to the critical self-evaluation that is the true value of the ACOE program," said Maj. Gen. John A. MacDonald, deputy commander of the Installation Management Command. "This award represents the pride and dedication the IMCOM garrison workforce brings to making our installations the kind of home our Soldiers and Families deserve."

The ACOE awards are presented annually to recognize performance excellence in installation management by Army garrisons. The award recognizes continuous business process improvement, individual innovation, groundbreaking initiatives, and dedication to efficiency, effectiveness, and customer care in providing support to Soldiers, civilian employees, retirees, and families who work, live, train, and play on Army installations. The ACOE program uses the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program Criteria for Performance Excellence, to evaluate competing installations. The criteria are the basis for performance excellence recognition programs in 44 states and 60 nations, as well in federal agencies including the U.S. Army, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. Coast Guard. Participants are judged against this common standard and not against each other. Winning installations are selected by an independent panel of six judges, based on the evaluation of the installations' written applications and additional information gathered during site visits by examiner teams. The winning installations receive professional recognition and monetary rewards, based on their ranking.

**Fort A.P. Hill**

Fort A. P. Hill, having finished third in the ACOE for three consecutive years, will receive a \$2 million dollar grand prize in 2008 for finishing in first place. Lt. Col. **Michael S. Graese**, A.P. Hill's garrison commander, said "I am just elated at this honor and the recognition it brings to our deserving team of professionals, who bring such dedication, talent and experience to our critical job of supporting America's fighting men and women."

Fort A. P. Hill also is the Army recipient of the Commander in Chief's Annual Award for Installation Excellence. The winners of the 2008 Commander in Chief's Award were announced April 15. The five Department of Defense recipients of the Presidential award were selected for their exemplary support of DoD missions. The Commander in Chief's Annual Award for Installation Excellence recognizes the outstanding and innovative efforts of the people who

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**

**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**

*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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operate and maintain U.S. military installations. Excellence in installation management enables better mission performance and enhances the quality of life for military men and women and their families. Each winning installation succeeded in providing excellent working, housing and recreational conditions.

"Every day, I'm amazed at the performance of our staff and the employees. They're the epitome of organizational agility, coordinating challenging training scenarios, maintaining diverse infrastructure, and exercising superb stewardship in taking care of this outstanding training destination," said **Graese**.

Each winner receives a trophy and commemorative flag. The 2008 Commander in Chief's Award ceremony is also scheduled for May 8 at the Pentagon.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Free Lance-Star, The (Fredericksburg, VA)  
April 6, 2007

**A. P. Hill keeps high ranking**

**Abstract: A. P. Hill tapped as third-best Army installation for the third straight year**

Author/Byline: JENN ROWELL

Fort A.P. Hill has been named the third-place winner in the Chief of Staff of the Army's Communities of Excellence competition for the third consecutive year. The Caroline County installation finished behind Garrison Camp Zama in Japan and Fort Meade, Md.

Installations must complete an organizational self-assessment package that responds to questions posed by the Army. Criteria include leadership, strategic planning, process management, customer focus, human resource management and business results, according to an A.P. Hill news release. Following that phase, a team of evaluators visits the top installations for a week and a panel of judges then determines the final three.

An award ceremony is scheduled May 3 at the Pentagon, where A.P. Hill Commander Lt. Col. **Michael Graese** and others at the post will receive \$750,000, a trophy and a commemorative flag.

Over the next few months, A.P. Hill workers will be asked to submit suggestions on how to spend the award and post officials will choose the most beneficial use. Past winnings have been used to build multipurpose facilities and install electronic display boards.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Free Lance-Star, The (Fredericksburg, VA)  
October 20, 2006

**Military provides update - MILITARY: Area's installations are still facing some changes**  
By JENN ROWELL

Base closures and military funding were topics of discussion last night for the Military Affairs Council of the Fredericksburg Regional Chamber of Commerce. More than 150 people came to hear presentations from the commanders of Quantico Marine Corps Base, Dahlgren and Fort A.P. Hill. The event was the first for the council, but Vice Chairman Ty Schieber anticipates similar events several times a year. The council got started after the Base Realignment and Closure process last year. "We didn't really have a formal organization in the area to respond to this," Schieber said. "We made the decision that we really wanted to get out in front of this." The council was officially chartered in May of this year and a board of directors was established. Now committees are being created and members are being recruited. A broad charter will allow the council to address a variety of military issues as they come up, Schieber said. "This really is a partnership between defense, industry and local officials," he said. Although the region's military installations escaped major action in the last round of BRAC, there still are a number of significant changes that will affect the bases. Quantico will absorb roughly 3,000 new employees and new facilities will be constructed to house them, base commander Col. Charles Dallachie said. Dahlgren is already the largest employer in King George County, according to installation commander Capt. Judy Smith, and BRAC will bring in more employees. Her biggest concern now is encroachment, she said. "We have a lot of things that go boom and make a lot of noise," Smith said. The BRAC changes will nearly double the number of "warriors" who come through Fort A.P. Hill for training, Lt. Col. **Michael Graese** said. But the post continues to consider itself the best military training on the East Coast. The post ranked 22nd out of 97 Army installations for military value during the last round of base realignments, **Graese** said. "When they're not at A.P. Hill, we want 'em to wish they were at A.P. Hill," **Graese** said.

Keynote speaker Congresswoman Jo Ann Davis, R-1st District, said she wants to continue the dialogue between military bases and the community. A.P. Hill, Dahlgren and Quantico represent about a third of the region's work force, Davis said. She warned local officials to be careful of encroachment as it might be detrimental to the region in the next round of base closures. Davis said she opposes base closures, especially in light of current world affairs. "I've never felt that this was the time to be closing bases," she said. Davis also used her time at the microphone to encourage Dahlgren's effort to bring a new research and education facility to the base. Not enough people are studying math and science, Davis said, and that creates a national security issue. The U.S. once ranked third in the world of 18- to 24-year-olds getting math and science degrees, but currently ranks 17th. She also said that American 15-year-olds placed 15th among industrialized nations in basic science. Bringing the research and education facility to Dahlgren, she said, would be good not only for the strength of the county's defense forces, but also for the regional economy.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**Michael (Mike) Scott Graese**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Free Lance-Star, The (Fredericksburg, VA)  
July 15, 2006

**A. P. Hill says hello to new commander - HILL: Former commander receives merit award**  
By JENN ROWELL

Taking care of business. That's what Lt. Col. James Mis has been doing at Fort A.P. Hill for the past two years. At least that's what it played on the musical greeting card-with the lyrics from that Bachman-Turner Overdrive song-given to him by Sgt. Maj. Roger Chase. But Mis was a little more modest in talking about his accomplishments. His job as commander, he said, is "standing back and watching great people do great things. I, as the commander, just had to give guidance."

Yesterday, he officially handed the Army post over to Lt. Col. **Michael Graese**, whose last assignment was at the joint intelligence and operations center at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida. The transition will be dramatic, **Graese** said, but he and his family are looking forward to the assignment. He and his wife have three sons aged 11, 14 and 15. "It's a challenge trying to provide a steady environment for your family," **Graese** said. The new post is also an opportunity for **Graese** since it is more focused on training and long-term goals than the everyday operations of the efforts in the Middle East. "The history and tradition is remarkable here," **Graese** said. As commander, he said he hopes to continue the tradition and "never forget that we're here for the American defensive forces."

Just before the change of command ceremony, Maj. Gen. Guy Swan, commander of the Joint Force Headquarters in Washington, arrived in a helicopter to present Mis with the Legion of Merit award. "I'm just a humble boy from Brooklyn Staten Island standing here accepting this," Mis said. During the ceremony, Mis told **Graese** to continue the work of his predecessors and to have a good time. "It goes by quickly," Mis said. "Enjoy every minute."

Charles Munson has been working at A.P. Hill since August 2002 as the deputy to the commander. A change of command is just one of the many changes happening every day at the post, Munson said. "But if there's one thing that's constant, it's the dedication of the people who work here," he said. "It's like a family here and sometimes I feel like an older brother." The post has 76,000 acres of land that are used for training all service branches as well as local law enforcement and members of the U.S. Bureau Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. In the time that Mis served as commander, he said about 110,000 people came through for training. "When it comes to training warriors," Mis said, "nobody does it better." Swan also spoke highly of the post calling it "a gem." "A.P. Hill is critical to the training of our forces," he said. "You might not think that right here you can do much to support national military readiness, but you can at A.P. Hill."

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Completed by: Winona Saunder  
Colin Baenziger & Associates

# Public Records Exemptions

Enclosed please find a copy of the response documents for your public records request. The following information is provided to explain the process employed to review and produce the response documents.

Reason	Description	Pages
Pll City Attorney - F.S. 119.071(4) (d)2.w.	The home addresses, telephone numbers, dates of birth, and photographs of current county attorneys, assistant county attorneys, deputy county attorneys, city attorneys, assistant city attorneys, and deputy city attorneys; the names, home addresses, telephone numbers, photographs, dates of birth, and places of employment of the spouses and children of current county attorneys, assistant county attorneys, deputy county attorneys, city attorneys, assistant city attorneys, and deputy city attorneys; and the names and locations of schools and day care facilities attended by the children of current county attorneys, assistant county attorneys, deputy county attorneys, city attorneys, assistant city attorneys, and deputy city attorneys are exempt from s. 119.07(1) and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution. This exemption does not apply to a county attorney, assistant county attorney, deputy county attorney, city attorney, assistant city attorney, or deputy city attorney who qualifies as a candidate for election to public office. This sub-subparagraph is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act in accordance with s. 119.15 and shall stand repealed on October 2, 2029, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.	30, 34