

One year on – Harrisburg remembers city administrator and planner Michael McMahon

November 2, 2023, marked a major milestone in Harrisburg. After five years of planning and nearly seven months of construction, the city's \$5M roundabout at Willow Street and Cliff Ave opened to traffic. A goliath effort, it was the city's biggest project that was set into motion by Michael McMahon. But Michael never got to see the finished product. He died 10 months before its completion.

January 4, 2024, was the one-year anniversary of Michael McMahon's death. Michael was 70 years old. A dedicated public servant, he served as Harrisburg's planning and zoning administrator for a decade.

Attention to detail and a long-term focus were hallmarks of Michael's service to the city. From the start, he was part of the Harrisburg growth process and saw the city double in size. "Building the best Harrisburg" was always on his mind; in turn, he developed a deep knowledge of the community. In his decade of service, he had a pulse on all the factors that went into the development of a growing community from the unglamorous water and sewer expansion projects to facilitating the largest annexation for the city. He loved the city parks. During his career as a planning and zoning official, he was instrumental in completing the grant application that brought \$74,000 in state funding to the community to support the Hugh Robinson Park revitalization project. He never got to see the \$250,000 project completion that took place last fall. And there were fun projects that gave the community wide paths to run or walk. He was instrumental in the two, three-mile trails that run along Willow Street and Highway 115 after obtaining \$540,000 in grants from the SD Department of Transportation.

If you think about what goes on behind the walls – what goes on that people don't see; what a handshake means; what it takes to be a good listener or to withstand criticism; what takes place that is very important in terms of the efficiency of running a department – that was Michael's legacy.

Michael grew up on a farm east of Lyons, SD. He graduated from Tri-Valley High School in 1970 then went straight from high school to serve in the Marines. After completing service in California, North Carolina and Cuba, he was honorably discharged and became a reservist for the Air Force until 1976. He then attended SDSU and studied Geography. It was in Brookings that he met and married his wife, Lois.

McMahon started working in the planning field when he was appointed to the Pennington County Planning Commission in 1987. He returned to school completing his degree from SD School of Mines and Technology graduating in May of 1992. While enrolled in his master's study, he went on to write a book on stormwater management.

Before taking the job in Harrisburg in May of 2013, the South Dakota native served as the planning coordinator for 5 ½ years in Box Elder, SD. Michael noted when he took the Harrisburg job that he would be moving to the fastest growing town in South Dakota from Box Elder, the state'

second-fastest growing town. Despite the difference in terrain and makeup, he felt the two cities shared the same challenges because both faced continued growth.

Besides Box Elder, Michael also promoted growth and economic development in the communities of Rapid City and Custer.

In his free time Michael enjoyed reading. Books by authors W. E. B. Griffin and Tom Clancy filled his library. He was also a WWII history buff.

Michael is survived by his wife Lois and two children, Robert McMahon and Angela (Andrew Myer) McMahon.

The Harrisburg city staff continues to recognize, remember and reflect on Michael McMahon, its former city planner known for cultivated consensus. He has been missed.