

Good evening and welcome to Clerestory Park! How many of you DIDN'T need a GPS to get here today? One of the reasons I wanted to present my State of the City address here, was to show off just one of the 72 public parks we have throughout our city!

Every year, as I begin to write the State of the City, I reflect on all that we've accomplished over the past year and all the contributions of City staff. I am amazed at the commitment and heart of the people who serve this city. Side-by-side with our businesses, residents and neighbors, they help make The City of Frederick a great place to live. I would like to recognize some of department Directors who were able to make it here today:

I would also like to take the opportunity to recognize and thank my wife Maryjane for being here today. We all know we could not do our jobs without our families. They are our biggest supporters, our harshest critics, they ground us, and we love them for it.

I'd like to talk to you today about the State of the City as it relates to some of my top priorities and try to look at each one from a couple of angles, looking at the progress we've made as well as the areas that need improvement, and what we're doing to make those improvements.

Safety is and has always been my top priority. One of the things I love most about this city is that Mayberry feel with a hip and cool edge. Making safety a priority is more than just lip service. Ensuring a safe community involves committed government leaders who recognize that public safety requires a police department that is appropriately staffed and adequately funded, and this administration has provided those resources.

The safety of our community is especially important in light of what's been happening around the country and around the world. With communities turning against police, and record high numbers of officer involved shootings, our goal is to keep everyone safe, and do everything in our power to keep Frederick out of those situations we read about in national headlines. How do we do that? It starts with community involvement and making sure our officers are engaging the public. Not just by driving through neighborhoods but taking the time to get out of the cars and talk to members of the community - people of all ages and ethnicities in all parts of the City. Those brief interactions go a long way in building public trust.

Our police department consists of 145 sworn officers. In many neighborhoods and situations these men and women in blue are the face of our City. They are highly visible and easily identified. These officers interact with the community respectfully and work to build trust and long-term relationships.

The City continues to experience historically low crime trends due to the professionalism, dedication, and commitment of Chief Hargis and the members of the Frederick Police Department. The FBI Uniform Crime Report shows crime was reduced 5% in 2015, when added to the reductions achieved in 2014 and 2013 respectively; the Frederick Police Department spearheaded a 25% reduction in the most serious types of crimes in this 3 year period.

A big part of that reduction in crime is due to FPD's effective use of crime data to identify patterns and determine appropriate deployment strategies to stop crime before it happens.

Chief Hargis has now been in command of the FPD for a year. He has taken the time to get to know the officers and the community stakeholders and has attended many goodwill events throughout the City. I support the direction he is taking the FPD with his forward thinking and proactive strategies.

Most areas of the City are extremely safe and people tell me on a regular basis how comfortable they are walking around our community. But we do know there are pockets within this City where residents witness drug deals and sometimes violence outside of their windows. I want the residents to know that I have directed Chief Hargis and the Frederick Police Department to focus on these areas. To work with Parks and Recreation, Engineering, Planning, the Frederick Community Action Agency, and any other City Department they need, as well as neighbors, and community groups to discuss and strategize about solutions for these targeted areas of concern.

The police use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, a strategy that discourages crime by taking advantage of a property's physical design features.

While this is an example of an effective tactic used by our police officers, we also encourage and welcome ideas from anyone in the community.

It is my responsibility to look at ALL aspects of safety for the city, and this includes ensuring that both the public, and our over 800 full and part time employees feel welcome and safe in any City of Frederick facility.

Inside these facilities, our Risk Manager, Joe Lindstrom has the task of providing public and staff safety. Joe completed a full risk assessment of all City facilities and I am working with him and Chief Hargis to determine the best safety protocols.

Another of my top priorities is infrastructure. Many of the elements that give Frederick its unique charm are also some of our greatest challenges. This historic character and vibrancy is what makes other communities want to emulate Frederick. Our historic architecture and quaint downtown streets also attract the awe and admiration of many visitors. But, sometimes this makes it difficult to deal with 36 inches of snow, add bike lanes, or bring in new development. I point this out only to demonstrate some of the challenges we face, specifically in our downtown. It's why projects like the Carroll Creek Linear Park are so important. They provide alternate routes for pedestrians and cyclists and, as we've all seen, a stunning backdrop and tourist attraction for our City.

Bike and pedestrian transportation and shared use paths are vital to our City's infrastructure, so I am thrilled with the new Shared Use Path Connection that consists of a bridge over Carroll Creek and a tunnel under the US 15 ramp at Rosemont Avenue. We're getting ready for the grand opening of this path connection. This new addition connects 2.1 miles of trails through Baker Park to the network of 1.75 miles of trails on the west side of town. The new tunnel allows users to make this connection safely, without crossing multiple lanes of traffic at the on-ramp for US 15 and Rosemont Avenue.

As we stand here today, you can see first-hand a major road project happening within our City. Behind me you'll notice the State Highway Administration's work on the new intersection over US 15. This project is tentatively scheduled for completion in early 2018. The City has spent years and millions of dollars to complete the connecting roadways. Monocacy Boulevard Center Section Phase I is the section that runs from Shifferstadt Boulevard to Route 355 near COSTCO. We are now preparing to begin Phase II, to expand and realign the roadway from Church Street at Shifferstadt to Gas House Pike. This section includes an additional bridge over the Monocacy River as well as a bridge over Carroll Creek. But I guess the most important thing to most of you is that the nasty curve on this stretch of roadway will be

realigned when this phase is complete. This project came back significantly more expensive than anticipated. Right now, staff and I are working diligently to ensure this project remains on schedule. This and other projects have recently gone out to bid only to come back with construction costs significantly exceeding the estimates. We've seen it with County schools and other construction projects, and now we're seeing it with some road projects. I've directed staff to update our Capital Improvement Plan and budgeting processes to develop a system that will minimize the variance between estimates and final project costs. This will be a lengthy process, but if effective, the benefits will improve the budget forecasting for CIP projects for this and every future administration.

We also continue to make other advancements in our infrastructure throughout the City. Upgrading street lights, improving our underground water and sewer network, roadway repairs, and other miscellaneous projects. We are well underway with the upgrade to our waste water treatment plant. We are even working on a test program to better inform residents about our snow plowing operations. On a daily basis we have hundreds of Public Works staff on the streets, as well as below the streets, in the parks, and in the trees. Their workday is filled with projects that maintain or improve your quality of life. Making sure you have clean water when you turn on the faucet. Ensuring that your trash is picked up. Maintaining all the city parks and the equipment in those parks - such as the items you see right here. All things we probably take for granted. It takes a large team of experts to support and deliver these items on a daily basis.

But again, I recognize that it's not always perfect and we cannot cover every square inch of the City. You are our additional eyes and ears and my staff and I encourage you to report issues or things that don't seem right. We have stream-lined our online submission process but for the quickest response, I ask you to get out your phones right now and save the number for the Department of Public Works switchboard. That number is 301-600-1440. This switchboard is operated 24-7 so whether you're an early bird or a night owl, you don't have to wait to call during regular business hours. Trash issues, water main breaks, and potholes don't just happen 9 to 5 Monday through Friday. We have honed our system and all calls to the switchboard are prioritized and sent to the appropriate staff. That number again is 301-600-1440.

Another critical element to the success and vibrancy of our city is economic development. Our staff works hard to attract new businesses to come to The City of Frederick and help those already here to grow. The diversity of our economy puts us in a great position to withstand changes and to some extent, help buffer us during recessions. Our city is made up of 40% residential and 55% commercial and institutional use...with the remaining 5% for park use, which provides a healthy variety in our local economy.

A crucial part of our diverse economy is the arts. The City owns the Weinberg Center for the Arts that operates as a partnership with the Weinberg's non-profit Board of Directors. The Weinberg hosted over 70,000 guests during the 2015-2016 season which included 138 events. The Weinberg Center for the Arts generates an estimated \$6.5 million annually*. In addition, more than 11,000 Frederick County Public School students attended educational programming at the Weinberg Center last year. All while a major, million-dollar, HVAC replacement project was completed around the season's performance schedule.

**Based on formulas developed by Americans for the Arts and the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development's Maryland State Arts Council*

We want to continue to engage and build upon our vibrant arts and theater community. In addition to the Weinberg, we have the Maryland Ensemble Theatre, Way off Broadway, and the newly opened East Street Arts Center, just to name a few. Plus, new and unique ideas, like the "Sky Stage" are being introduced to the community. We have the Arts Council's Annual Festival of the Arts and Downtown Frederick Partnership's Alive at Five that continue to grow and expand the exposure of the arts and music in the community. The arts also induce a great deal of tourism to the City and County. Speaking of tourism, I believe it is an indispensable part of our City's economy. Did you know that on average, visitors to Frederick County spend a little more than \$1 million per day. That is an AMAZING tribute to all that Frederick County and City have to offer. I want to take a quick minute to thank John Fieseler and the Tourism Council of Frederick County for all their hard work in promoting both Frederick County and The City of Frederick. Now, some may ask how the City benefits from those dollars. Those tourism dollars help provide customers to our retail stores and restaurants. They buy tickets to a play or a Key's baseball game. Those dollars help keep our businesses thriving, which keeps our local economy sustainable.

Other major attractions for millennials and folks of all ages are breweries and distilleries. We've updated our Land Management Code to make it easier for breweries, wineries and distilleries to do business in our City.

All the things I mentioned are the elements that provide the great quality of life we experience here in the City...they attract people, whether to work or visit or to put down roots and make Frederick home. On another economic development front, we also continue to move forward with the Downtown Hotel and Conference Center. We recognize the critical need for this facility and the important void it fills. While complex, the details of this project are incredibly important. I have stressed to the hotel advisory committee and staff that we must structure an agreement that protects the City and taxpayers both now and in the future, so the public sector will not be responsible for any ongoing maintenance or operational expenses. This one project encompasses elements of each of my top priorities for the City.

Too often, in communities taxes are reduced or eliminated as an incentive to bring businesses to town, in many cases, this puts more of the burden on residential property owners who are left to support all of the community's infrastructure and basic utilities. In this case, we honed in on a need expressed by our businesses, to provide a facility that we believe will benefit the entire community, and we continue to move forward with this project for that reason.

You all know by now that we received word that Walmart pulled out of the Fredericktown Mall site. While this is disappointing, it also presents a new opportunity. I have been in discussions with the property owner, the Golden Mile Alliance, and other groups and have expressed the City's willingness to help secure a new plan for the site. The west side of the city presents both opportunities and challenges. The business retention rate on the Golden Mile is one of the highest among all areas of the City. We have new businesses coming to the area all the time, WaWa will be open before we know it.

And while funding will be a challenge, the City continues to move forward with the Master Plan for the development of Hargett Farm, now known as Westside Regional Park. Following approval of the Master Plan by the Board of Aldermen, I will establish an Ad-Hoc committee to begin working with sponsors, local leagues, and interest groups. I believe partnerships are the best way to move large projects like this forward now and in the future.

We find time and again that people come here, proactively LOOKING to open their business in Frederick. We have a great setting and a prime resource to promote. According to the most recent data, our office vacancy rate is only 12.7%. We continue to maintain higher occupancy rates than both the Washington, DC and I-270 Corridor markets.

But, not every building or retail space is occupied. I am very aware that we have some highly visible, long-standing vacant properties scattered throughout our community. Myself, my Executive Assistant, the Director of Public Works, the Director of Economic Development, the Chief of Police, the Deputy Director of Engineering, the Deputy Director of Planning, our City Attorney, our Code Enforcement Department, our Permits Department, a group of volunteer citizens serving on a task force, and the Board of Aldermen are just a sampling of the staff and resources we dedicated to this issue. All of these and more work diligently and continuously for solutions to bring these properties back to productive use.

People have accused me of not being vocal on this issue so let me state right now, that I AM passionate about this and I certainly want to see improvements, but most importantly I want us to address the REAL issue. In my opinion, there are a few property owners who don't want to play by the rules. Frankly, I believe a hand-full of property owners are always going to figure out how to comply with only the bare minimum standards no matter what we do. I don't want the City to create rules or processes that make it harder for the average, compliant property owner to get things done. With the help of the Blighted and Vacant Property Committee's recommendations, I hope that we can turn our focus to resolving the real issues without negatively impacting the rest of the community, and I am committed to that goal.

This is Frederick through the lens of my top priorities. The goals may change and the projects may change, but I have been consistent in my priorities for the past 7 years: Public Safety, Infrastructure, and Economic Development and I think we've been able to move the needle in a positive way. We live in a truly great city, inside a great County, within a great State. The challenges we face today are not vastly different than a lot of other cities our size and they are not insurmountable. I know this city, I love this city, and I am confident that together, as partners we will continue to work to keep our City SAFE – WELL MAINTAINED, and PROSPEROUS!

Thank you all for coming out today. God bless each of you and God bless the Great City of Frederick!