



2020 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Good morning and greetings to those who have joined us here at City Hall and those who are joining us through channel 99 or the City's website. I am thrilled and honored to have the opportunity to share with you the City's most recent activities and, more importantly, where we are headed in 2020.

First, I would like to take a moment to thank our Board of Aldermen for being here. Thank you for your continued commitment to our City and active partnership each day.

2020... it has been called the year of focus by many, and here at the City of Frederick, that couldn't be more appropriate. During 2019, we committed ourselves to creating new opportunities from our challenges and thoughtfully worked to devise ways forward as our City experiences a time of unprecedented economic opportunity and recognition. These plans, which include Community 2030, Frederick's first strategic plan, and the launch of a comprehensive plan update, allowed you, our community, to share feedback and suggestions with our City staff and elected leadership.

Through these discussions, it has become clear that we are experiencing a crossroads of extraordinary progress and evident challenges. We cannot be satisfied simply because aspects of our City are flourishing. We know that there are community members who aren't seeing the same wins. And we know we have work to do.

For these reasons and many more, 2020 will be a year of intentional action...for the 62nd administration to address our challenges and to celebrate our continued progress. Today, I am sharing how our recent work will launch and maximize our work for the coming year.

To begin, I'd like to impart the latest actions reaffirming our commitment to the diverse housing and human service needs of our community. As many of you know, just a few weeks ago, the Board of Aldermen approved a new department within the City of Frederick – the Department of Housing and Human Services. This department will have two divisions: the Frederick Community Action Agency, leading the human services division, and a newly consolidated housing services division.

These divisions, along with our strong community partners, will work together to meet the growing needs of our community. This new path forward allows us to elevate the work of human services and housing with new collaboration, urgency, and intention. All of which will be led by a new director. I am happy to report that the search committee has met and is finalizing the job announcement, and we will soon share details on the many ways you will be able to provide feedback during this hiring process. And this week I will be meeting with our volunteer board partners to continue building on the collaboration necessary for a successful transition.

This hire and the creation of this new department is simply a beginning step in addressing the needs of our entire community. Our goals of providing for a continuum of housing needs and assessing our human service programs require innovative collaboration. That is why my administration, with the full support of the board of aldermen, transferred the surplus land site at Haywood Road which will allow the Religious Coalition to open the county's 1st permanent family shelter...where families with children can stabilize their lives and receive needed services to help get them back on the road to self-sufficiency. It is innovative partnerships such as this that will help move us closer to the City we want to be...with the services we know are needed in our community.

In addition to housing and human services, we know that safe neighborhoods make our City strong. Our police officers continue to do outstanding work, and we are trending in the right direction based on 2019 data. Our crime statistics are the lowest they have been in the City's last twenty years. However, we understand the importance of feeling safe and acknowledge that crime statistics do not equate to the feeling of safety.

Despite saying goodbye and happy retirement to Chief Hargis last week, we know this is not the time for us to wait to act. There are things we can do and must do to address your concerns. The City and the Frederick Police Department, under the leadership of Acting Chief Patrick Grossman, are actively discussing steps to increase police presence, to respond to the constantly changing nature of crime in our community, and to ensure our residents and visitors feel safe as they enjoy the spring and summer seasons in beautiful Frederick.

We also know it requires more than a police force to make our neighborhoods safe. It takes the active engagement of our citizens and community groups. The Downtown Safety and Services Initiative is one of those groups with whom the City is actively partnering. DSSI has an upcoming meeting at New Spire Arts Wednesday evening at 7pm, and I encourage all to attend.

And I pause here to share the importance of where we are as a City in terms of setting the foundation for the next 10 to 20 years in key services provided within our community. The hirings of a new Police Chief and a Director of Housing and Human

Services are critical. These leaders and their visions will greatly impact quality of life in this community. Both searches will offer many opportunities for the community to weigh in, ask questions, and share feedback. Please engage with these processes. They are very important to Frederick's future and our ability to create a safe and thriving environment for all.

Another important component of public safety is our infrastructure and how we respond to necessary and responsible growth. We are dedicated to creating a multi-modal community; one with diverse transportation offerings to meet the diverse needs across the City... we want Frederick to be walkable. Bikeable. Drivable. And connected.

We continue to work through our capital improvement needs and have several projects moving forward to improve our City infrastructure. The road improvement project at Christopher's Crossing is a critical link between the northwest corner of the City to Route 26 and Route 15. This project combined with the opening of Monocacy Boulevard will lead to better connectivity in growing areas of our City. Recently, a portion of the Christopher's Crossing project was completed, the traffic circle at Walter Martz Road, and the overall project is on schedule.

The Butterfly Lane project, which is in partnership with the State Highway Administration, will improve the traffic flow in a very congested area of the City. This project is also on schedule and, in addition to improving flow and safety, will support the City's plans for Westside Regional Park, one of our 73 parks that add to the quality of life in Frederick.

In addition to transportation infrastructure projects, the City is investing in other needs and opportunities.

Climate change is no longer something in the abstract...it is real. It is here....and for our residents who are experiencing flooding because our stormwater management systems weren't designed for 100-year floods happening every other year...it can be a household crisis. We want our residents to be safe and we want our residents to retain the value of their properties. To help address this issue, we are working with US Army Corps of Engineers to design and improve stormwater systems. We will share the latest progress on these efforts this spring.

Vacant buildings are another concern of our residents. In 2019, we made progress by enabling the City to use the definition of habitual vacancy as a criterion of blight. This allows us to use all of the tools in our code to bring these properties into productive use.

We are currently working on the next phase...a vacant property registry, which will track vacant properties and monitor the health and safety implications of those

properties. I appreciate the community's dedication and attention to this initiative. You are helping to connect the work of public policy and the economic prosperity of the City. Thank you.

Another critical piece of infrastructure tied to the economic prosperity to our City is the Downtown Hotel and Conference Center. We continue to work with Frederick County, Visit Frederick, the Frederick County Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Frederick Partnership, and Plamondon Hospitality Partners and we will be announcing very shortly the path forward. Because we will be opening a downtown hotel and conference center.

To make all of this work possible – there are two critical groups of resources: our City staff and our business partners. I would like to take a few moments to share some of our progress in ensuring both of these groups are engaged and maximized.

City employees and business partners help us achieve our goals each day. Since I took office, I have been committed to improving diversity and inclusion throughout our City because I believe every employee deserves the opportunity to come into a workplace that values them, affirms them, and celebrates their unique strengths and experiences. To grow this type of culture, our Human Resources Department has been working with our City employees on a variety of initiatives, trainings, and measures. We take our educational and training responsibility seriously, especially in the areas of diversity, inclusion, and sexual harassment. This work will continue in 2020 as we aim to employ a workforce that reflects our community through consistent, inclusive, and fair recruitment and hiring processes.

We also have been focusing on the partners with whom we do business. We are working to improve the procurement process to ensure all businesses are given a fair shot to work with the City. With the advocacy of the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program Review Panel, the Board of Aldermen recently approved a disparity study, which will further explore whether there is a disparity between the percentage of available, qualified minority businesses within Frederick and the percentage of dollars spent on those services by the City. Through these efforts and more, we, as a City, are committed to be an employer and partner of choice; one that values the strong diversity of and opportunities for all in our community.

And, what is the common thread that ties these initiatives and projects together, to work as a stronger force? Quite simply—it is you—our most valuable asset—our citizens of Frederick.

To ensure you know about our progress, and to allow for you to easily and continually provide feedback, the City's Communications Department has begun to introduce new ways to stay informed. These improvements include new communication channels, continued enhancements to our improved City website,

and dedicated staff resources. Our goal is to leverage timely, accurate, and complete information to better our community.

We understand that communication is also active listening. In addition to the one on one opportunities to meet with me each month at my fourth Friday Q&A sessions, we will be introducing City town halls. I am proud to announce the dates for our 2020 events....an evening town hall on May 12th and a weekend town hall on October 24. More information regarding these events will be announced as they approach. We hope you find these opportunities helpful as we truly value your engagement with our boards and commissions, NACS, and City staff.

Today, I have highlighted a few areas of focus in 2020. But there is much more to be done, and our employees are dedicated and acting in many other ways. Our Department of Economic Development continues to attract and retain businesses in our community. We know 2020 will be another year of opportunity for business retention, expansion, and attraction.

Our sustainability efforts have led to considerable progress in protecting the environment, including the exciting announcement that we will achieve our goal of acquiring 100% of our energy from renewable sources by the end of this year. Exceeding our goal of 20% by 2022, we have also renewed the contract for renewable energy credits through 2025, which will save the City over \$450,000 in energy costs.

To align our goals and actions, the Budget Office is working hard to allocate our resources to the areas of opportunity. I will share my fiscal year 2021 budget in a media briefing on March 24th and invite you to join me for that unveiling here at City Hall. The budget hearing schedule is also posted on the City's website.

When I first took office, I committed to you and proclaimed that together we could move Frederick forward. I am confident that through the intentional work in 2019, we will see the movement we all believe is possible in 2020. Thank you for joining me today, and as we celebrate our 275th anniversary this year, thank you for joining the story of Frederick.