

## 2019 State of the City Address

Tonight I'm honored, pleased and excited to provide a few remarks about where we've been and where we're going. As I reflected last year, some may call this a State of the City address, but as a small businessman I think of it more as a report to you, the stakeholders of our City as an update on the current state of the city's business. While there will always be elements of government that don't fit into a business strategy, this Council and this Staff can and are constantly doing more to operate with business efficiency.

It is important that in our lives and all our pursuits, collectively and individually, that we make small, incremental gains from day-to-day. Small improvements in our habits, small changes in our patterns of behavior, and small changes in our attitudes lead to big changes over time. This City is stronger this year, because it was stronger this month, and stronger this week because we make gains daily on small things. Yes, there are always minor setbacks, but small gains over time make it look easy.

The founder of Twitter, Biz Stone, is quoted as saying: "Timing, perseverance, and ten years of trying will eventually make you look like an overnight success."

In all my pursuits, personally, professionally, and as your Mayor, I believe we will achieve success with years of hard work and having goals set high. 2018 was a great year, and I am confident, no matter what 2019 brings, it will be great as well.

To my colleagues and fellow Council Members: thank you for the work you do, both here at Council meetings and behind the scenes to promote the wellbeing of our citizens and the Aberdeen community. Your work certainly does not go unnoticed or unappreciated. You deal with the large and the small, the minutia and the major events in the life of this city, and you do it with zeal, fairness and a sense of selfless service. While we don't always agree, I believe we are bonded in agreement that Aberdeen has and will do extraordinary things. Our City is on the move; and we are headed in a positive direction. Councilwoman Landbeck, Councilmen Goodin, Lindecamp and Taylor, thank you for your work and contributions. I also want to thank my and your families for their support as we, the Council, serve. It can be tough to be the husband or wife, son or daughter of an elected official so from myself and my colleagues, our sincere thanks and appreciation for your contributions.

My last City Update began by talking about our challenges. While there's still a few, fortunately not as many as when this Council came into office. We've been together for over three years, and for all but Councilwoman Landbeck, this is our first experience in a municipally-elected position. Please recognize that your City Council, myself included, are just people.

So to you who have disagreed with a decision or action this Council has taken, be assured we are aware of and respect that. You have a right to disagree. Please be open to the possibility that there is "more to the story" than you have read or have been told. We're on the same team!

So with that in mind, I believe, and feel most of the Council joins me in saying that our biggest challenge of the last year has been with has determining the best way forward with the Ripken Stadium. From our first day in office the collective goal has been to get more use out of the Stadium while reducing the financial burden on our City. That goal remains the same today. I am precluded from saying anything more since the matter is under litigation, but please know that we will continue to look at every possibility to make this a win-win for both the Aberdeen community and the team. We truly feel that when the whole story can be told, our community will better understand our position. So more will follow.

Last year was Aberdeen's 126th anniversary as a municipality, and 2018 was an absolutely extraordinary year for our City. Here's just a few things that were accomplished:

- After 40+ years of inaction, the City is breaking ground on the Middleton Road Extension, from 22 to Beards Hill. Through collaboration and engineering work with the Klein and Salvo families, owners of the properties along the extension, we're planning to have the road opened this coming Fall.
- The former Moose Lodge eyesore that was in the heart of town was sold by the City and is scheduled to open this Spring as the very popular Prost German Restaurant.
- We have a world-class Police Department. Not only did they receive their Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement recertification but they did very well in an independent review conducted by one of the nation's most senior, professional Police review organizations, the Powhattan Group. Aberdeen was recognized as Harford County's Safest City and the 4th Safest City in Maryland. Most of the crime metrics are down compared to just a few years ago.

- Aberdeen's Parks saw a resurgence in improvements and upgrades last year. We built a new Park at Church Green Square, one of the first teen and adult oriented parks in northeastern Maryland. Several new, popular features were added to Festival Park; just next door. A gazebo, a beautiful statue of an Eagle in flight, a commemorative clock right in front of City Hall, the APG workers memorial; all great additions to this gem of the Aberdeen Parks system. Victory Park on the east side saw a new Disc Golf Course and one of northeast Maryland's largest "Dog Parks" open, but there's plans for much more including what we hope is a greater partnership to increase the youth recreational activities in the City. We also are working with the County to build a brand new multi-use rec field in the Rock Glenn area, near the Med Line Corporation, and talks are on-going with a private firm to see if we can eventually make activities at the Aberdeen Aquatics Center a more year round prospect in the next few years. There is truly so much going on with our Parks and Rec initiatives it can be difficult to keep track.
- We continue to work with our partners and largest employer, Aberdeen Proving Ground, to bring new jobs and opportunities to our City. We understand that last year more than 900 jobs were filled on APG. For one

of their most challenging career fields, cyber security, the City undertook a job fair with more than 100 in attendance. The ability to talk with prospective employee outside the APG fence was a major attraction from many attendees. Aberdeen also partnered with APG's leadership in continuing to work issues on their federally owned property to the rear of the Amtrak property. As you may recall in 2017, for the first time in years the Proving Ground resurfaced APG road, which has opened up a great cooperative relationship between the City and the installation. Many of you may not know this but the City of Aberdeen is contracted with APG to provide water and waste water services. We've held that contract for nearly two decades and it has been a great association for the City and Army. Last summer, with Major General Taylor by our side, we broke ground on a multi-million dollar effort to bring water production inside the installation and plan to have the new plant operational by later this year.

- The Old Aberdeen High School, right across the street from City Hall, should be sold by this time tomorrow. The purchasers are committed to repurposing the long-empty building to serve our Aberdeen Seniors.
- Starbucks has broken ground and is scheduled to open its first store in Aberdeen in just a few short months.

- This Wednesday January 16, at 7:40AM, I hope you'll join me and the corporate American leadership of Lidl's Grocery when they open their doors on their newest and first smaller footprint store in the U.S. at their Route 40 location. This is Lidl's first "New Store" concept in the United States.
- A personal highlight of 2018 for me was that after decades of talk, inertia and no movement, through community efforts we persuaded the U.S. Post Office to build a handicap-accessible ramp at the downtown Post Office. While in some communities that might not merit special recognition, those of you who have been here for any period of time know what an accomplishment it was to get the Post Office to build a ramp.
- Working with Harford County's Office of Drug Control and Johns Hopkins University, Aberdeen will be a test site for one of Maryland's first "Community That Cares (CTC)" drug intervention programs, one of nation's most effective drug intervention programs. Like every city and county across the County, we are seeing the scourge of drugs far too frequent and far too costly. With the Community that Cares initiative Aberdeen has the potential to be a leader in the State in combatting drug use at the middle and high school ages.

- After nearly five years, the road-building work on Route 22 is complete. It took too long, but now that it's done, we're starting to see some of the pent-up value that's been held back for years. I want to thank our engineering and Public works team for their constant encouragement and support to the State Highway Administration to get this done. Although it wasn't a city project, many people saw Aberdeen the lead for the work. I welcome this—As the Mayor, I view every problem that happens in Aberdeen as my problem—Even the stuff I have no jurisdiction over- our schools, County projects, and State roads—when somebody brings these to my attention, we look into and contact the relevant parties to close the loop.
- Later this year we look forward to work starting on a complete redo of West Belair Avenue from the lights at Route 40 to the train tracks. Even though this is another Maryland State Highway Administration project, we are actively working with them through the design stage to ensure residents, businesses and commuters are involved and kept abreast of what's happening. The City also plan to put some of its own money in to add some beautification and traffic calming measures on top of what SHA is doing.



- I'm really excited Aberdeen moved away from its "Pay as You Go" waste and recycling system. Over 9,000 waste and recycling containers were issued to over 4,000 residents early last year as the City stopped charging for trash pickup by having residents pay for tags. Today, there's no fee-for-service for Aberdeen trash pickup, and after the first 6 months of being effective we've seen a near 13% increase in recycling compared to the same period in 2017. There's still work to do, but what a great start to such a massive program like this. Think about it; it's a really tough and dangerous job being an environmental worker, so kudos to our team who have delivered timely, responsive service throughout the entire change process.
- The City has been awarded an \$850k State grant to upgrade the Amtrak Rail Station. I hope we'll all start to see those improvements start this year. What's also exciting about the train station is our partnership with the State and the APG Discovery Center to use both a grant and private funds to renovate the empty portion of the building to create a preview room for the Discovery Center. The APG Discovery Center and its dedicated team of volunteers are working very hard to fund and build a full sized museum that will focus on history, science and education of technology, especially

related to the contributions and mission of our own Aberdeen Proving Ground.

- I hope some of you were there with me and the City Council at Aberdeen High School auditorium late last May when we held the City's first interactive "Listening Session." Over 300 citizens packed the school for close to two hours while they had the opportunity to use real time technology to provide their input on city programs and potential policy issues. It is one of the most exciting exercises in the democratic process I've had the opportunity to participate in and the results continue to influence the short and long-term goals your City Council are pursuing.
- Aberdeen ended 2018 on solid fiscal ground; with approximately \$250,000 in a budget surplus. What that demonstrates is looking at every expenditure as if it was your own. The City received a clean audit and continues to be ranked by both Standard and Poor and Moody's rating agencies as a sound investment. I want to thank Mr. Jack, our Finance Director and his team for their keen, proactive oversight of our money. On that note, we are actively working with our colleagues and partners at Havre de Grace to cooperatively blend our water services. We believe this strategy could result in a savings of more than \$100,000 per year. Money

that will be reinvested into expanding our services and upgrading our aging water infrastructure. I hope you'll be hearing more about that initiative in the near future.

- Possibly the biggest news of the year was Upper Chesapeake Health Care's announcement of building a multi-million-dollar medical campus, on the Merritt Building site off SR 22 in the heart of Aberdeen. That will be a game changer.
- Recently, I was invited to speak at the Route 40 Business Association luncheon about Aberdeen and the things we are doing – consider it a practice run for this speech tonight—the reception was tremendous—there's so much exciting stuff happening in Aberdeen, and Aberdeen is the center of gravity for awesome stuff happening in Harford County.

So where do we go from here? First, both Council and Staff need to continue their work to maintain financial stability while balancing the needs of the community. I'm extremely pleased to see some of the positive economic spin offs from the legislation this Council passed last year to incentivize new businesses and development across the City. We want to continue to monitor, refine and possibly add incentives as necessary. We must stay competitive and appealing.

Next, we all believe that at the heart of the matter, it will be economic development serving as the catalyst if Aberdeen continues the past improvements.

2018 was an extraordinary year, and early indications are 2019 will be good too. But we must always keep in mind that hard times can and will come. We must grow prudently and judiciously; not grow for the sake of growing but invest in quality. The conditions I noted in my last update remain the same. There are almost 20,000 cities and counties in the US; and they all want the same things—economic opportunities for their citizens, healthy families, and prosperous futures.

The City must sustain its efforts to ensure Aberdeen remains a safe community. The City is looking at new technology, like body-worn cameras, new policing tactics like more foot patrols and new programs, like the Community that Cares. But at the end of the day it ultimately comes down to attracting and retaining a world class team. Just tonight you've seen some of high caliber individuals who we will allow to join our force. They are the best of the best.

And finally, the work of this Council, our professional staff, the schools, churches, non-profits, volunteers and citizens across our community must continue to focus

on our quality of life, the foundation for all growing communities. It can't be all done through government; but the active time and "sweat equity" of business, , religious, social, military men and women, volunteers or employees that make Aberdeen the community that it is; and the City we want it to be. Mrs. Curry and her team who plan and run the Christmas parade, Sandy Osborn and her team at the Chamber of Commerce, Steve Horne and the folks of Horne Construction who volunteer countless hours, time and resources to help those less able; Don Ewing and Sanford Fisher who have given so much to youth through their coaching and mentoring; and the volunteers of the City's Economic Development Board who are actively working to grow Aberdeen. Mentors and role models working with scouts, church youth groups, seniors and homeless, new parents, inside our churches and with the homeless, with Habitat for Humanity and those afflicted by drug use. We all must use our skills and passions to improve our community, together. Paraphrasing President Kennedy, it may not be what your community does for you but what you are doing for your community.

So I conclude my remarks by not focusing on the wonderful things that have taken place in Aberdeen this year, but on the opportunities and possibilities of what may come. Aberdeen is a City on the Move, but it takes each and every one of its citizens, male or female, young or old, black white or brown; all of us to continue

this positive momentum. I and the City Council are extraordinarily privileged and deeply honored to serve you. On behalf of my Council colleagues, thank you for allowing us to serve you and thank you for all that each of you have done and will do to make Aberdeen, Maryland's premier community. We are truly excited about 2019 and another challenging but rewarding chapter in the history of our City. Thank you. God bless you and God bless Aberdeen.