



Fiscal Year 2017
State of the City Address

Mayor Dennis P. Williams

Thursday, March 31, 2016

WELCOME

Good evening City Council President Theopalis Gregory, honorable members of City Council, City Treasurer Henry Supinski, distinguished guests, my wife, First Lady Shayne Williams, City employees and my fellow Wilmingtonians.

Mr. President, thank you for extending the invitation to speak before Council, and the opportunity to present my State of the City Address.

Ladies and gentlemen, on January 8, 2013, we started this journey together.

We started working to build safe and strong neighborhoods. We started creating sustainable job opportunities for local residents. We started making city government operate more efficiently to better serve our citizens. We started opening our doors to welcome new businesses and development projects that have created new economic growth across the city. We introduced new arts and cultural events and free music festivals to bring a vibrant energy downtown. We started establishing new opportunities for our youth through job programs, internships and countless extracurricular activities.

We started all of these efforts together, and we can't stop now!

Now is the time that we must continue to push Wilmington forward and ensure it remains a place where families raise their children, businesses set up shop, young professionals choose to live and visitors come to enjoy the restaurants and entertainment venues.

And we have seen our efforts paying off. Hundreds of apartments downtown and along the Riverfront are full. There's more than \$350 million worth of private investment taking place in our city. Approximately 200,000 tickets were sold to performances at The Grand, Playhouse, World Café Live at the Queen and Delaware Theatre Company, in 2015 alone.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is what I call progress and that's why we can't stop now.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Nothing is more critical to establishing a vibrant, prosperous city than public safety. That is why insuring the safety of our residents and visitors remains the top priority of my Administration.

In 2014, I created the Wilmington Police Department's first-ever homicide unit, and last year we added 12 officers, expanding the group to become the Homicide/Violent Crimes Unit. Increasing the size of this unit allowed for a comprehensive approach to investigating violent crime. Additionally, the department's renewed focus on community policing has led to an increase in crime clearance rates and has strengthened relationships between the police and the community.

Specifically, the department has produced a 50 percent clearance rate for homicide cases in 2015, a rate multiple times higher than the clearance rates in previous years. The men and women of this department also solved six cold cases last year, bringing closure to families who've longed for justice.

The Wilmington Police Department has also continued to work closely with the Violence Reduction Network (VRN). As one of the first cities across the country to be selected to participate in the VRN, Wilmington police officers have received high-level training, expertise and resources from this elite federal network. For instance, the VRN provided our entire police department with Blue Courage Training, which teaches officers to transition from a mindset as "warriors" to a mindset of serving as the community's protector. The training emphasized that community policing should not be determined by participating in a specific unit, but rather, that every officer is a community police officer.

A great example of this is Sergeant Gary Tabor, who created and spearheads the department's Book 'Em program. The Book 'Em program promotes positive interaction between police and city youth, as officers provide age-appropriate books to neighborhood kids. In the past year, the program has expanded to include 20 Wilmington Police Officers who distribute over 4,000 books to city kids every month.

Yes, we all know there is still much work to be done, but these all highlight steps in the right direction, so we can't stop now.

That is why we instituted DISRUPT, a violence reduction deployment strategy that floods hot spot crime areas throughout the city with an increased number of uniformed police officers. Placing these additional officers on the streets increases the visible presence of law enforcement, and also strengthens relationships with residents who live in these neighborhoods as more officers are now walking the street.

That is why I hired former Commissioner of the Philadelphia Police Department, Charles Ramsey, as a public safety consultant for the Wilmington Police Department. Commissioner Ramsey served as Co-Chair of President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. He's led police departments in Chicago, Washington D.C. and Philadelphia. He is the top cop in the country and he is here to help the city of Wilmington.

Folks, we can't stop now.

That is why we have increased the use of technology to more efficiently respond to crime. For example, the department now uses Match Point, a machine that analyzes and matches shell casings to others entered into a nationwide database. It used to take months, but today, our police can determine if a gun was used in multiple crimes in just a matter of minutes. The department has also implemented a body camera pilot program. Many of our officers are wearing body cameras, which will help to provide transparency and accountability to the community. Lastly, the department is gearing-up to open the Real Time Crime Center, which will allow police to monitor all areas of the city from one central location.

I don't care what the headlines say. Ladies and gentlemen, we are beginning to turn the corner and seeing signs of progress. So, we can't stop now.

While public safety is critical to a thriving city, it is not the only story Wilmington has to tell. Wilmington is also becoming a city with an increasing number of residents moving to the Riverfront and downtown. Wilmington is becoming a hub for economic development with the establishment of new businesses. Wilmington is becoming a center for arts and culture.

GENERAL FUND BUDGET

A city that's attractive to residents, visitors, developers and investors is one that has a strong financial outlook. I have worked with my department heads to insure that this budget is balanced, and have tasked them to do more with less.

The Fiscal Year 2017 General Fund operating budget expenditures total **\$154,651,440** - up \$2,954,582, a 1.9% increase from Fiscal Year 2016.

This year, the City had to absorb \$6.8 million in additional expenditures, of which unanticipated healthcare expenses attributed to \$4.5 million of the increase. The City cannot sustain the burden placed on the general fund from the uniquely rich healthcare plan that City employees enjoy. We can no longer kick the can down the road when it comes to containing our healthcare costs, and my Administration is already working on a 3 Year Strategic Healthcare Plan to curb these costs.

Due to the sacrifices made across the board by all City departments to reduce expenditures, in addition to strong financial management, I am able to present a balanced budget without increasing any taxes or fees, or laying-off any city workers.

Our financial outlook remains strong, and Moody's Investors Service and Standard & Poor's Ratings Service have affirmed the City's stable outlook. The Bond Ratings are the best they've ever been.

WATER/SEWER BUDGET

The Fiscal Year 2017 operating budget expenditures total \$73,348,174 - up \$2,038,792, or 2.9% from Fiscal Year 2016. This increase was due mainly to start-up costs for the Renewable Energy Bio-Solids Facility, a project that will harness harmful greenhouse gases from the landfill and collect them to power the City's sewage treatment plant. This project will have considerable future cost savings as well as a significant environmental impact.

There is no increase to water, sewer, and storm water rates.

We are reducing expenditures and managing our finances effectively, but that's just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to operating an efficient, responsive government.

EFFECTIVE CITY GOVERNMENT

Service to our constituents, both residents and businesses, is something that government must do effectively and efficiently. It is not enough to simply go through the motions. We have a duty to deliver the highest-quality service to you, our customers, and we've been committed to exploring new ways to be more accessible, responsive and "customer-friendly."

However, operating more effectively and offering better customer service is not limited to the City departments.

As Mayor of the City of Wilmington, I have a responsibility to be more creative in finding ways to provide better service to our citizens. While I have taken pride in not being a "ninth floor" Mayor, I realized I could not reach everyone on the street. This meant I had to find a way to make myself even more available to those in need. That is why I instituted an open door policy. Every week, anyone with a concern, complaint or idea has an opportunity to share it with me directly in "Walk-in Wednesdays."

And after hearing from many members of the community, my Administration worked diligently to have the Office of Vital Statistics return to the city. It is very difficult for many of our fellow residents to gain critical official identification and documentation. While some of us may take this documentation for granted, they are absolutely critical to anyone who is seeking to rebuild their lives, and especially those applying for a job or enrolling children in school. Beginning in June, our residents will be able to take advantage of this office right here in Wilmington.

In addition, technology will be key to enhancing our ability and capacity to serve the citizens of Wilmington. Specifically, the Office of Information Technology is leading the charge to design a new, responsive website so city services become easily available on-the-go and across mobile devices. The Finance Department is ready to implement online bill payment software, so citizens will have the option to view and pay their utility or property tax bills online, rather than having to pay in-person at the City/County Building.

This summer, we will also implement a digital parking permit system, which will automate the City's residential parking permit application process. Residents will be able to access the system any time, day or night, to renew their residential parking permit from the comfort of their home.

Moving services online is not the only way we are looking to make things more convenient for our constituents.

Currently, the City of Wilmington bills its utility customers quarterly. This can result in bills being costly and, maybe, a little more difficult to pay on time. We are looking to change this. By the fall, our goal is to begin sending utility bills out monthly. Monthly billing will allow our customers to budget more efficiently by aligning the utility bill with their other monthly expenses. It will also provide our customers with a more timely record of water usage and gives customers an opportunity to find and repair leaks sooner to prevent incurring an abnormally high water bill.

The City will also be implementing an online service that will streamline the request for a building permit. This online permit process will facilitate and encourage everything from home renovations to the construction of new office towers, keeping Wilmington a place where businesses start and grow.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Since taking office, we have worked to maximize Wilmington's potential as an emerging place for businesses, job creation, strong neighborhoods and economic opportunity for everyone in our city. With over 53,000 people employed in the City of Wilmington, our city's unemployment rate has dropped from a high of 9.7% in 2012 when I took office, to 6.0% today, a 3.7% drop. And our strongest industrial sector, the financial industry, which employs over 12,000 people, has nearly 2,000 more workers in Wilmington now than it did before the Great Recession.

This is reflected in the many new, modern housing opportunities across Wilmington that have been created, such as the development of Market Street Village, the Walnut Street Development Project, the Lofts at Clifford Brown Walk, and the expansion of the Harlan Flats. In addition to the 116 new housing units, four new hotels are also being built downtown and along

the Riverfront. The new Homewood Suites by Hilton, Residence Inn and Marriott hotel will work to further enhance Wilmington's reputation as an attractive, regional destination for conferences and conventions. They will also draw leisure travelers to explore our historic city, nearby restaurants, entertainment options and many retail shops.

However, these projects are not the only development efforts happening in our city. Today, there is more than \$350 million worth of private investment currently underway in Wilmington.

Ladies and gentlemen, Wilmington is open for business and we can't stop now.

There are key projects like the Residences at Midtown Park, where \$70 million has been invested to build a luxury residential complex targeting millennials; the 2000 Pennsylvania Avenue project with \$40 million invested to redevelop property into high-quality mixed-use space of residences and commercial businesses; Sacred Heart Village with \$7 million invested to provide housing for low-income seniors, and the \$3 million redevelopment of the historic Harper Thiel site into a shopping plaza for nearby residents. It's clear we have made it a priority to build on the existing development activities, encourage further development, streamline our government services to improve the development environment and emphasize that Wilmington is getting stronger and remains an excellent location for investment and development.

In the last three years, over 3,000 new business licenses have been issued in the City of Wilmington, 21 new storefronts opened in downtown Wilmington, and over 400 local business owners received entrepreneurial training and technical assistance through the City's Diverse Business Exchange.

However, the City's ability to assist new and established businesses through the leveraging of funds to create incentives has been limited by the depletion of the Economic Development Strategic Fund. The FY'17 budget includes an \$800,000 infusion into the Economic Development Strategic Fund, and also a \$400,000 infusion into the Housing Opportunities Fund, in an effort to attract and retain new businesses and new housing development.

We are excited to welcome this new era of entrepreneurs and economic

growth throughout the City of Wilmington, and if we want their businesses to grow, we can't stop now.

YOUTH

While we tout the progress of our city's economy, we must all ask ourselves, what good is it to grow businesses if we are not equally growing our future generations?

No, the City does not control our children's education system. But that cannot and will not stop us from playing an active role in sharing educational opportunities, exposing the youth to diverse cultural activities and providing much needed services and support to our city's youth.

Under my Administration, the Department of Parks and Recreation has rededicated itself to supporting the mental, physical and social needs of our children through structured programming. Gone are the days supervisors would unlock the gym, roll out the balls and just watch kids play. Today, our youth need more.

Over the past three years, the Department of Parks and Recreation continued to increase the funding for the Summer Youth Employment program, which provides local youths with valuable work experience. Through this program, children aged 14 to 20 years old learn about job readiness, customer service, financial literacy, and conflict resolution. In 2015, the number of youth participants rose to 570, compared to the 340 participants in the summer of 2012. We hope to have a record number of participants this summer.

In addition to the Youth Employment program, Parks and Recreation also supports the educational advancement of our youth by offering access to college tours, SAT prep courses, and college and career fairs.

More importantly, the department also oversaw the Summer Food Program, which distributed close to 8,000 breakfast meals and over 10,000 lunches daily to youths at more than 45 sites throughout the City of Wilmington, including summer camps, vacation bible schools, parks, recreations centers, summer enrichment programs and summer schools.

But like I said before, impacting our youth is not just a job for one department. My office must roll up our sleeves as well. That is why I increased five-fold the Office of the Mayor's Academic Scholarship fund, and provided nearly 75 college-bound city youth with a scholarship. My office also hosted several game day events at local community centers across the city, and presented a Back to School concert in partnership with local organizations, and passed out 1,250 stuffed book bags for children in need.

We must all do our part to insure that our youth become motivated to succeed with the ability to shape their own futures. My administration supports the efforts of Dr. Tony Allen and the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission to restructure the school districts that serve Wilmington. These changes are necessary to help end the disruptive fragmentation that has persisted in our city's public education system for decades. I call on my former colleagues in Dover to approve these proposed recommendations in a timely manner

While we might not be sitting behind the wheel and dictating the educational future of children in Wilmington, we can't stop now.

A NEW WILMINGTON

Ladies and gentlemen, what I have been talking about is a new Wilmington.

Tonight, I have shared stories of how Wilmington is becoming a center for new small businesses, a hotbed for a new wave of residents moving downtown and along the Riverfront, a municipality operating a more effective government, and a home for new arts and entertainment options that are attracting visitors from near and far.

We've started defining a new Wilmington and we can't stop now.

Forget the traditional means of growing and building our city. In this new Wilmington, we are starting to think outside the box and execute creative ways to address public safety, economic prosperity and a higher quality of life.

An example of this was the City's partnership with Governor Markell and State of Delaware lawmakers to establish the Wilmington Neighborhood

Conservancy Land Bank. This Land Bank will acquire, manage, and maintain vacant, abandoned and foreclosed properties to restore and repurpose them into productive use. Studies have shown that vacant properties are magnets for crime and delinquent activity, so the land bank will work to eliminate vacant properties and transform them into productive sites through private development and public use in ways that will increase property values and protect communities.

Another unique way we have tried to increase the safety of neighborhoods around the city is through initiatives like the East Side Proactive Focus Zone, a multi-agency program that aggressively addresses public safety and quality of life issues in an area just outside downtown, between the Brandywine and Christina River. This area was picked for its high number of vacant properties, and the initiative allows housing inspectors and police to walk side by side to address problem properties where officers have been receiving complaints about drug sales and loitering.

However, responding to vacant properties is not the only way to improve public safety within the communities. We all know it is the well-lit areas that tend to be the most safe and secure.

With that mind, the City will launch a pilot sidewalk lighting project, in partnership with Delmarva and the Neighborhood Planning Council leadership. Specifically, this lighting project aims to increase the amount of streetlights throughout a given neighborhood. City designers created a model for a sidewalk lamp that will attach to existing light poles and flood the sidewalk with light. This additional light will give residents an added feeling of safety as they walk through their neighborhood.

As we work to erase blighted areas within our communities, we are also working to create new, open public spaces for the youth and their families to experience.

Over the past few years, we have worked with State Representative Helene Keely, along with other community and civic partners to push forward development plans for the Wilmington Skate and Wellness Plaza. Last October, we unveiled the design plans, which presented a premier skate plaza featuring areas for walking, running, and exercising. The Skate Plaza will be located near 300 Liberty Street, the currently unused public space under I-95, directly off of Maryland Avenue. This plaza will serve as a

pedestrian gateway connecting the Browntown and Hedgeville neighborhoods with the Riverfront. Similar to lively parks and public spaces in Philadelphia, the Wilmington Skate and Wellness Plaza will be a great outdoor place for families and our young people to come together to play and relax.

Like the Skate and Wellness Plaza, the arts will play an integral part in defining our new Wilmington. Through the Office of Cultural Affairs, the production of live music festivals, film events, holiday celebrations and monthly art shows, has directly impacted the economic vitality of the city's restaurants, hotels and entertainment venues.

Just look at the numbers.

In 2015, City events such as the 27th Annual Clifford Brown Jazz Festival, the 4th of July Celebration, the inaugural Summer Stage concert series, and the Blues Fest brought close to 50,000 people to Rodney Square and the Riverfront. Each of these events had a significant economic impact on downtown and Riverfront businesses, and we look forward to drawing even larger crowds this year.

Since the start of my administration, I have publicly called for the development of a multipurpose arena in Wilmington. Such a venue would be transformative to the city. This arena will house a professional sports team, draw large conventions, and attract world-class musical acts and entertainment. We will intensify our efforts to gain support from all key stakeholders necessary to make this a reality.

Folks, Wilmington is growing. Wilmington is changing. Three years ago, I told you it was a new day and now we are walking into a new Wilmington, so we can't stop now.

CLOSE

We are at an important time in Wilmington's history.

We are transitioning from a city dominated solely by large corporations to a city in the midst of a technological revolution. Today, we have become a

go-to city for start-ups and the budding financial technology field. We are attracting coders, artists and entrepreneurs.

The city no longer shuts down at 5:00 each night.

Downtown living has been revitalized. Neighborhoods are becoming walkable and residents are less car-dependent with alternative forms of transportation like Uber and Zip Car. Opportunities have been launched in new industries, and unique urban experiences have been created.

Our city is approachable, fun and vibrant.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's embrace this new Wilmington and work together to push our city forward. We've come too far and we won't stop now.