

I would like to thank you all for being here. I am grateful for your interest, and I am thrilled to see such a nice crowd.

Welcome back to the location of the 2014 State of the City Address. As you can see, this area looks remarkably different from this time last year...and the many years before it. Much like my grandchildren cleaning up their toys, sometimes things look worse before they look better.

What you see here before you today is progress.

We are thrilled to be so near completion of phase 2 of the Carroll Creek project, and I hope you will all join us for the grand opening event next spring! We've already celebrated the opening of the new Galleria Fountain section of the linear park and will soon turn on the East/West Fountain located near Market Street across from La Paz.

Let us not forget that 2016 marks 40 years since the 1976 flood. Therefore, as we celebrate the opening of phase 2 and the completion of this vision, we should remember the tragic flood that put the wheels in motion to create this attractive and innovative solution. To me, that is a hallmark of Frederick and its people. We take a negative and turn it into a positive. We have properties like Union Mills, which will soon be home to Regent Education; this building that has long been vacant will be re-envisioned thanks to this mantra.

McCutcheon's Apple Products, is also making plans for an upcoming expansion. Both of these are local companies that are staying, growing, and redeveloping in the City. Phase 2 of Carroll Creek is not even complete yet and we can already see the dramatic changes for which this project has been a catalyst.

At the same time, we continue to make progress on many other projects throughout the city. We're getting ready to begin Phase 2 of Monocacy Boulevard, connecting the section at Schifferstadt Boulevard all the way to Route 15, where the State will be making a highway access ramp (the groundbreaking of which will be held this Wednesday!). We're also moving forward with the expansion at the airport, thanks to a \$4 million dollar grant from the FAA.

One of our largest projects is the state mandated upgrade to our wastewater treatment facilities in an effort to protect the Chesapeake Bay. The state required this \$46 million dollar upgrade without funding the project. After years of back and forth and negotiations the City is moving forward with this project and the \$28 million dollar loan that our water and sewer system must repay. We've committed to this project and we've committed to the debt so we MUST make sure the Water and Sewer Fund is solvent.

To that end, I have tasked key members of our staff to take a comprehensive look at the City's water and sewer rates with the goal of finding the appropriate balance between monthly rates and sustaining the fund for not only this year, but also for many years down the road.

As development continues, our community grows, and infrastructure needs expand, public safety also becomes increasingly more important.

We have a new chief of police at the helm of the Frederick Police Department. I am excited for what Chief Hargis brings to the city and look forward to what he will be able to accomplish.

I am proud to say that in 2014, part 1 crimes in the city were the lowest they have been since 1991! Part 1 crimes are the most serious crimes and include things like assault, robbery, and homicide. While this reduction in crime is a combination of many factors, I would like to recognize all of the men and women of the Frederick Police Department who serve our citizens and keep all of us safe every day. This decrease in crime is also significant because it shows the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by our Frederick Police Department, which are Community Policing, Data Driven Policing, and Problem Solving.

While many communities are struggling with tensions between the police and the citizens, I am proud to say that we have a police department that works very diligently to maintain strong relationships with citizens. Chief Hargis has already expressed his commitment to preserve and strengthen those relationships. Partnerships like those maintained by our police department represent another common theme for Frederick; we are a community of partnerships.

As they say, "it takes a village" that is why partnerships have been a crucial part of my administration. We continue to partner with the Golden Mile Alliance, Downtown Frederick Partnership, the Tourism Council, East Frederick Rising, and our Biotech Incubator (known as FITCI). I have also enjoyed an excellent working relationship with the first County Executive, Jan Gardner. We meet monthly to discuss current projects and have stood united on several issues to demonstrate to the State and other partners our willingness to work together.

Our partnership with the state has also flourished. All three members of our delegation have experience in municipal government, specifically with the City of Frederick. It is great to know that we are top of mind in Annapolis.

I have had the opportunity to meet with many Department Secretaries and other staff in the current state administration, and several have made the trip out to Frederick – a few even informed us that they are coming back and bringing their families to visit!

I am also working closely with the Governor's office for an opportunity to show off our City and the sites for several future projects.

We count on these relationships at the State level as we promote great initiatives like the Downtown Hotel & Conference Center. I have said it before; but it is rare to see a project invoke so much support. When it was presented, the Tax Increment Financing received unanimous support of the Board of Aldermen and the County. The project was also unanimously supported by the Frederick County delegation in Annapolis. We have the Chamber of Commerce, The Tourism Council, Downtown Frederick Partnership, the County, and the City working together to move this initiative forward.

We will continue to push, continue to apply for grant funding, continue to reach out to the state – we will approach this project from every angle to achieve the goal set by of the Chamber of Commerce Major Employer’s Group...to bring a hotel and large meeting space to downtown Frederick.

In addition to partnerships like these, Frederick is also well represented throughout the state on many boards and commissions. We currently have representatives at more than 20 outside groups, including the Maryland Municipal League’s Board of Directors and Legislative Committee, the Metropolitan-Washington Council of Government Board of Directors and Transportation Planning Board, the County’s Child Advocacy Center Executive Board, Commission on Aging and Human Relations Commission, to name a few.

These partnerships have sparked some of the great innovation in our city, innovation, like that from our partnership with the University of Maryland. Last year we partnered with their “PALS” program, which is the Partnership for Active Learning in Sustainability. The students in this program brought creative ideas and a freshness to city projects as only college students can! Much of what these students have created will save the city thousands of dollars in consultants and design.

Additional sustainability projects are also being implemented throughout the City. In the coming months, we will replace about 300 of the oldest streetlights in the City with more energy efficient technology.

We’re also focused on protecting all of our land, trees, and water sources. We’ve placed barriers in our Watershed to protect several wetland areas from vehicle traffic and soon we will install cameras in an effort to control illegal dumping in this area.

Just a few weeks ago, we held a workshop to proactively notify residents of the City’s plan to address the Emerald Ash Borer, a pest now in Maryland that attacks Ash trees, of which the city has over 600.

All of this innovation has contributed to the city’s economic viability.

Frederick has a fantastic local economy. Our unemployment rate is currently 5%, down from 5.5% in August of 2014. The City has enjoyed unemployment rates lower than the state and federal averages throughout the great recession.

Frederick city employs more than 20% of the people who live in Frederick County – making us the most common employment destination for residents working in the Frederick region, according to a 2015 Department of Labor Licensing and Regulation study on commuting patterns in the Frederick workforce region.

From 2014 to 2015, the labor force size in Frederick increased by more than 400 jobs! Our commercial vacancy rate is less than 15%, which is below the I-270 corridor average of 17.1%. So we have more jobs and more businesses renting commercial space throughout the City. We are fortunate to have terrific employers who continue to grow their businesses one job at a time. We applaud their decision to invest in Frederick.

In an effort to encourage more investment, I put forth a proposal to phase out the business personal property tax over a 10-year period, which was passed unanimously this year, by the Board of Aldermen.

The City has a diverse business environment; we built our economy on small mom and pop shops like The Velvet Lounge, Rick's Fish and Pet Supply, Brown's Liquors and Deli and Audio-Video Group as well as large employers, like AstraZeneca, Frederick Memorial Hospital, Leidos BioMedical Research and, our largest employer, Fort Detrick.

The diversity of our local business community was noted as a major factor in the City's recent credit rating upgrade from Moody's Investment Service. This upgrade to Aa1 reflects the highest rating in the City's history. This is a direct result of our economic development efforts and our responsible fiscal management policies. The Board of Aldermen and I, along with staff have worked together to move the City in a positive direction. I am very proud of this upgrade; it reflects the expansion of our tax base, above average resident wealth and healthy reserves.

Because our economy has remained stable and we are a community with ample opportunities for employment as well as lots of fun things to do, The City of Frederick has been recognized both locally and nationally.

This year alone, Frederick was named one of the Most Caring Suburbs in America by a prominent real estate website and one of the "Top 100 Best Places to Live", ranking in the top 5% of small to mid-sized cities in the U.S.! This is the second year in a row Frederick has made this list...moving up almost 10 places from number 41 to number 32. Moreover, most recently we've been named the "Brooklyn of Maryland", according to the Huffington Post's Thrillist, for our hip restaurants and unique stores.

One of the reasons we receive all of these accolades is our ability to be mindful of our surroundings.

So, I would be remiss if I didn't speak about blighted properties. This is an issue that I know many residents are passionate about. Our Code Enforcement Department has been working very hard to address this issue. When our blighted property list was first published, we had 4 properties that met the criteria to be considered "blighted". Now, this is strict criteria but for a good reason. If the goal of a blighted property list is to work closely with these property owners to see significant improvement or, if no improvement is made, to move these properties toward receivership, then strict criteria is essential. In June of 2014, 26 properties were added to a blighted property "watch list". With those 30 properties in mind, here are some facts and figures:

There are 23,183 individual properties in the City.

Those 30 properties that make up the City's Blighted List and Blighted Watch List, account for 1/10 of 1% of the total individual properties within the City...and only 4 of those properties are considered blighted...that is 1/100 of 1% of all properties in the city!

Our Code Enforcement staff is making improvements every day and I am proud to say that as of August 1st, one property has been removed from the blighted property list and four have been removed from the watch list.

The fact that we've already seen **5** properties qualify for removal from the list after 1 year of scrutiny shows that, for the most part, we have citizens who truly want to keep their property safe and well-maintained. There are a few exceptions, of course, but I have directed staff to continue to push resistant property owners toward compliance and when compliance is not received, to follow the protocol and issue appropriate fines and citations.

When I gave the State of the City address last year, I announced the implementation of "Talk to the Mayor Tuesdays". Over the last year, I have opened my doors on the 4th Tuesday of the month to allow residents, business owners, visitors, non-profits, individuals, and groups to sit down with me and ask questions, get answers or just vent. I have been thrilled with the unique opportunity this has provided and I have met some of the truly amazing people we have here in the City. This has afforded me the opportunity, in a one-on-one environment to discuss issues that are important to you.

Since the inception of Talk to the Mayor Tuesdays, nearly 60 people have participated. However, I know there are more of you out there – more questions, more concerns, and more people who want to talk to me.

Therefore, I will continue to offer this opportunity once a month. If there is additional demand I will set aside other days or times. I am here to serve the City and to serve you.

As you may have noticed, I didn't start this talk as I have in the past, the way many elected officials normally do, by stating in one word, the state of the City. Well, that is because I believe that The City of Frederick, our city, is greater than a one-word description. I believe the state of our City is progressive, safe, values partnerships and innovation, is creditworthy, economically viable, renowned, mindful of our surroundings, and open.

I continue my promise to you to keep our great City a vibrant community where people want to visit and a desirable location where people want to live.

Thank you again for taking time out of your busy schedule to be here and have a great evening.