

**State of the City
City of Wheeling, West Virginia
Mayor Andy McKenzie
February 26, 2013**

Welcome and good afternoon. It's my honor to serve as your Mayor, and my special privilege today to deliver Wheeling's 4th annual State of the City Address.

Before I begin, I'd like to recognize and thank my fellow Wheeling City Council members: Vice Mayor Gene Fahey, Councilwoman Gloria Delbrugge, and Councilmen Herk Henry, Donnie Atkinson, Ken Imer, and David Miller.

I'd also like to acknowledge City Manager Robert Herron and the City of Wheeling Department Heads. On behalf of City Council, I want to thank you for your hard work and dedication to your job and to the citizens of Wheeling. Honor, respect, responsibility, accountability, and cooperation are just a few words that characterize the employees who work hard to make Wheeling a great, safe, functioning city.

To Police Chief Shawn Schwertfeger – welcome. Chief, I want to commend you for your leadership over our police force and the positive things that have been happening within the department since you took over last year.

I also want to thank all of the other elected officials with us today. We recognize and appreciate your dedication to our City, County, and State.

Finally, I want to thank my family – my wife Carrie, our 3 sons Austin, Levi and Quinn, and my mother, Karen – for your unwavering love, commitment, support, and understanding.

I will now begin with a quote from President Lyndon B. Johnson who said, “When the burdens of the Presidency seem unusually heavy, I always remind myself it could be worse. I could be a Mayor!”

As with prior State of the City addresses, I cannot possibly touch on every accomplishment or challenge in our community, but I will cover the areas that I feel are most important to share with you today.

Reviewing the current state of our city requires taking an honest look at the trials Wheeling has faced in the past. We're continually looking at what worked and what didn't, and we're exploring new solutions. It's no secret that change does not come easy for our community, but the past few years have shown us that change can be great for Wheeling.

Let's review what we've accomplished since the first State of the City address. City Council and the administration have eliminated fire service fees on personal property, eliminated 74 licenses for our business community, and reduced permits required in our city.

We've invested in East Wheeling by removing a block of dilapidated buildings to make room for the new JB Chambers East Wheeling Recreation Complex and, for the first time in a long time, new residential housing. By razing most of the 1100 block, we have created the opportunity for new investment. We've traded empty, crumbling structures for a clean slate primed for new construction. Downtown Wheeling isn't what it used to be, but thanks to these changes, it is on the brink of an exciting new future.

City Council has also worked toward preserving solid, historical structures in our city and created the First Historical District in Center Wheeling. This year, I will ask Council to expand that district to include all of Centre Market, as well as establish other historical districts in East Wheeling and North Wheeling. These designations ensure that our historical architecture is preserved, and current building owners will not be able to abandon or destroy the buildings. Perhaps if this had occurred in the past, the 1100 Block, the East Wheeling Block, and the old Jefferson School would have been properly maintained and would continue to be a viable part of our community.

Fortunately, this very building is one that we haven't lost, thanks, in part, to the efforts of City Council. The Capitol Theatre has benefitted from more than \$600,000 invested by City Council to make sure entertainment will be available in Wheeling for future generations.

And speaking of entertainment – Denny Magruder, you and your staff do an outstanding job. Not only have we enjoyed 21 years of Wheeling Nailers hockey at the Arena, but in the past year, Elton John was here, Seinfeld was hysterical, and the Wheeling Symphony Orchestra filled every seat at Cirque de la Symphonie. In just the past month, the Capitol Theatre has hosted 6 sell-out crowds. The quality of entertainment in Wheeling rivals, and arguably exceeds, what you'd find in cities three and four times our size.

In 2012, our community gained another amazing entertainment venue with the opening of the J.B. Chambers Performing Arts Center. Not only is this a world class structure, but a great investment toward enhancing the quality of education for our children. Under the dedicated leadership of Superintendent Dr. Dianna Vargo and the Ohio County Board of Education, our public schools continue to earn awards of excellence that give all of us a reason to be proud of our schools

Wheeling is also fortunate to be home to Wheeling Country Day School – a nonprofit, independent elementary school that has grown to 160 students in its 84-year history. In 2012, Liz

Hofreuter-Landini lead Country Day's Campaign for the Next Chapter, raising more than \$1.8 million to transform its campus by replacing older classroom buildings with new state-of-the-art educational facilities. The school was also recognized by the state with the Maple Leaf Award for having the healthiest school culture in the state of WV. Liz, your commitment to your students creates a positive impact on our entire community.

At last year's State of the City address, we announced a new award that honors a key contributor in our community. Susan Hogan was the first recipient, and this year, the Wheeling Community Spirit Award goes to Lorraine McCardle. In partnership with Easter Seals, Lorraine has been a tireless advocate for athletic opportunities for special needs children in the Upper Ohio Valley. Because of her hard work and dedication, soon children from around the Ohio Valley will have the opportunity to play baseball at the Miracle Field. Through her leadership, they were able to rally community support for this wonderful project and raise more than \$1 million to make this a reality in Wheeling. This project shows our community has compassion for all of its youth. Thank you, Lorraine.

As we move into 2013, our children's safety is top of mind, particularly in the aftermath of the Newtown, CT tragedy. Beyond the emotional turmoil, those horrific are prompting administrators to examine safety protocol and take any steps necessary to protect our children.

Please know that the City of Wheeling is committed to maintaining strong relationships between the schools and the Police Department to ensure the protection of our most precious resources. Through direct partnerships with Ohio County Schools and West Virginia Northern Community College our Police Department staffs Resource Officers in the schools to provide a heightened level of security.

In November, the citizens of Wheeling voted to change the way police officers patrol our city. For more than 30 years, a codified ordinance dictated that two officers be assigned to every cruiser. Wheeling was the only city in the United States that limited the ability of our Police Chief and officers to patrol our city streets in a way that best suited the citizens. But this council did what others would not or could not do.

We asked the citizens to decide if they wanted more officers on their streets. With an overwhelming majority, the citizens voted to have more officers patrolling our streets. Now, several months later, Wheeling has more police cruisers out in the community, with additional cruisers being purchased to give the department enough vehicles with the best equipment to patrol our city. So as we hire new officers, they can be assured their job is secure. Thank you, City Council and the voting citizens who chose to keep our city safe.

We've also taken steps to make the City-County Building safer and more convenient for the public. We relocated and updated our city council chamber for the first time in over 40 years. Now the chamber is located on the first floor so our citizens have easier access to public meetings. With the addition of large screens and electronic voting, Council Chambers is set up to be more user-friendly, making it easier for the attendees to follow along with meeting agendas and review voting results.

We have also moved council meetings to more convenient times – one at noon and one at 5:30 pm. This means our citizens can attend during the day when they feel safer, public transportation is available, and it's not at the end of a long day. No longer will government meetings be conducted at night, but will take place during the light of day.

Our form of government has served our city well, especially with the financial success and quality of life we all enjoy here in Wheeling. Cooperation within government and our community remains the essential cornerstone of any successful form of government.

Therefore, I propose this year that City Council form a Charter Review Committee to evaluate our current Charter. The Committee's purpose would be to analyze and assess the Charter and make recommendations on how Council can improve and modify our present format to better serve our citizens.

If the Charter Review Committee feels that changes are needed, then on the May 2014 ballot, I would ask that Council add the election of a Charter Review Commission. The changes would then be placed on the November 2014 ballot.

Last week, Wheeling City Council met with Governor Tomblin to discuss many important issues concerning our community, including the importance of extending Home Rule. We're continuing to look for ways to reduce taxes and fees on our citizens, grow our community, save our pensions, and invest in our workforce.

For example, we can look at Charleston and Huntington as to how they are changing the tax structure of their cities to address specific needs, which includes reductions in B&O taxes. Home Rule empowers the local community and allows elected officials to address needs specific to our city.

We talked to Governor Tomblin about the Highway Project that the state has planned for our area. I want all of you to know, the city plans to work very closely with the state on this. We addressed our concerns and the problems we had with the Wheeling Tunnel Renovation and the I-70 work at the Oglebay Park exit last year.

While we understand the work on I-70 must happen, we want it to be as painless as possible. They are currently working on a proposal that could spread the work out over a 2-year period, closing the interstate, or an 8-year period with lane restrictions.

We also spoke about housing issues. The increase of oil and gas workers living in our city has created a demand for housing in and around our neighborhoods. Speaking with the governor and the Director of the West Virginia Housing Development Fund, we expressed our concern about the growing need for housing as well as the possibility of creating a partnership here in Wheeling between banks, the Development Fund, private developers, and government to produce new housing in our community.

I have asked Governor Tomblin to personally see to it that Wheeling be a statewide leader in working with investors and developers with the WV Housing Development Fund to enable new construction of housing in our city.

As with any issue, success largely depends on our willingness to listen and the art of compromise. Our past and present successes have been the result of hard work, clear vision, and thorough discussion. Tomorrow's success requires foresight, courage and determination today! That will translate into results.

Presently, the City of Wheeling is reviewing a city-wide Comprehensive Plan that will outline a path for leaders to follow during the next 10 years. Dictated by state law, the Comprehensive Plan must be reviewed at least once a decade.

The Plan is a document that articulates the city's goals for land use development, design, and enhancement. It is a set of policies for guiding the physical development of our city, depicting how or where development should occur, the promotion of efficient growth patterns to maximize our social and economic potential.

Generally speaking, our Comprehensive Plan is a road map of where we are today and where we see the city in the future. We have established a Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee to undertake this task. The 7- to 8-member committee will be created from a true cross-section of the community who will define a plan to guide City Officials and administration through 2025.

One of the fastest-growing sections in our downtown area is West Virginia Northern Community College. They are preparing to complete their expansion into the former Straub Honda dealership. The addition of a campus Barnes & Noble, Starbucks, and student lounge will be enjoyed by the Northern community as well as the general public. West Virginia Northern has

been and will remain an anchor in Downtown Wheeling. I believe, under the leadership of Dr. Martin Olshinski, this is just the beginning of new things to come.

And Downtown Wheeling might soon house other higher educational facilities. I'm very excited about the possibilities. This proves that being positive and shifting our thinking in a new direction could be the beginning of redefining Downtown Wheeling. We could hear a few announcements about this in the future!

Downtown Wheeling is proud to be home to Kalkreuth Roofing, which continues to rank as one of the top 10 roofing companies in the country. Kalkreuth recently purchased the Riley Building and has renamed it The Kaley Center. They are renovating the building to be their new corporate headquarters. The Kaley Center will be a state-of-the-art marquee building in Downtown Wheeling once completed. Thank you for your significant investment in our downtown.

As we work to reinvent our downtown, we must be willing to make changes that benefit those who are interested in our community. People want to invest in Wheeling, and we should be looking for ways to better accommodate them. With this in mind, I will ask council to eliminate the current B & O tax deduction that we have for downtown businesses. I will ask that we establish a new B & O Tax Credit for anyone that invests in the downtown area. This credit could be used against construction and sales for a period of time. I would also ask that we work to create a flat permit fee for any construction that takes place downtown for a period of 5 years, to sunset in 2018.

While our city as a whole has grown and seen many businesses open and expand, we have not enjoyed that same level of investment in our downtown. By eliminating barriers for development, I hope to encourage new investment and even give current businesses the opportunity to move into downtown.

I will also propose to City Council that we relocate the Operations Center and sell the property in Clator. This site off the Wheeling Hospital exit is prime real estate for development. Council could evaluate sites throughout our city to determine the best location for the operations center. I believe through a mutually-beneficial sale of the property, we can build a new state-of-the-art operations center, while generating new development and investment in our city.

Also this year we will aggressively market the old Robrecht's site next to the Wagner Building downtown. This property is next to the Ohio River, WesBanco Arena, and Orrick, making it a prime site for development. Along with the 1100 Block and the old Reicharts Furniture property, I think now – like never before – we have an opportunity to invest and change the future of downtown.

With the approved tax credit, these properties could lead to exciting possibilities. Now, it won't happen overnight. It may not even happen in the next year. But we must start now to move forward on these properties.

One East Wheeling property has been given new life thanks to Good Mansion Wines and INWheeling Magazine. For more than 5 years, David Allinder and Dominic Cerrone have worked together to create the definitive portal into the Wheeling's society and lifestyle. With a circulation of 8,000 and more than 20,000 projected readers, INWheeling Magazine engages the most savvy and influential readers in the tri-state area with distinctive and intriguing insights into our City. Their magazine makes us all proud to be in Wheeling. Thank you both for giving our city such a great publication.

Wheeling has many great stories of small entrepreneurial success. One is Tom Tuttle with Family Medical Supply. Tom started with just one employee and has grown to a staff of 14 and recently expanded and renovated his facility on Edgington Lane. Family Medical Supply has been an important part of our local economy for over 22 years and offers an invaluable service to people in need of various types of medical equipment. Tom, thank you for your investment.

Another great example is Columbia Sales, Inc. The Palmer family started Columbia Sales in the 1930s and has been manufacturing their unique products in Wheeling since then, long enough to be the only business of its kind remaining in the United States. Your company has been an important part of our local economy for over 76 years. All businesses should take a "tip" from you. Thank you, Peggy, Joe, and Jack Palmer.

Nearly as old as Columbia Sales is the City's Water Treatment Plant. The current facility is over 80 years old but will soon be replaced with a new plant. This will be one of the largest public works projects in the state of West Virginia.

Other upcoming projects include the Market Plaza renovation, the various gateway projects, and the construction of the Heritage Park on Main Street.

One of the highlights of 2013 will be West Virginia's 150th birthday. The City of Wheeling has spent two years building up to the Statehood celebration, and this year, we will honor West Virginia right here where our statehood began. We'll host a week of events, including the WV Day Concert on June 20, featuring the Wheeling Symphony with guest performances by West Virginia artists. It will be an unforgettable day at Heritage Port.

You can't talk about Heritage Port without mentioning Bob Scatterday. Better known to everyone as Scat, he has been actively involved in the development and expansion of Wheeling Heritage Trails. His love of our trails has helped to secure more than \$1.1 million in grants, as

well as the installation and donation of chairs and benches near Heritage Port. Scat serves as the Race Director for Ogden Newspapers Half Marathon and leads the Trail Ambassador program. Scat, thank you for your hard work in our community.

Wheeling is fortunate to be full of individuals and organizations that spend their free time working to improve our city. The Elm Grove Business Association, founded in 1999, strives to promote awareness of local businesses to the Elm Grove community. The Elm Grove Business Association is bustling with over 60 active businesses as members, as the Elm Grove area continues to lead the city with B & O revenue. In 2012, the EGBA held their annual fundraising event – A Taste of Elm Grove – and the group was able to award \$5,000 in scholarships. Thank you for your dedication to our city.

Speaking of Elm Grove, it is the home of Sledd Co. Under the dedicated leadership of Rob Sincavich and Randy Emanuelson, Sledd Co. has become a regional leader in wholesale food and retail merchandising. The company grew from a 15,000-square-foot facility in Downtown Wheeling to a new \$13 million, 200,000-square-foot distribution center in Elm Grove, employing more than 200 people.

Rob and Randy thoroughly evaluated various options in determining where to make such a magnificent investment and chose to do it right here in Wheeling. This project represents one of the largest private sector investments in our city in the past several years. Rob and Randy, your use of innovative marketing and cost-effective automation and process improvements makes Sledd Co. a leader in advancing a better economy in Wheeling.

2012 was a successful year for capital improvements and investments throughout our city – most notably, the completion of OVMC Adolescent Center, the new Med-Express in Elm Grove, many small business openings in Centre Market, and the ongoing expansion of the oil and gas industry in the Ohio Valley. It was a record year for revenue from Hotel/Motel taxes.

The budget for the 2013-2014 Fiscal Year was submitted to council today. Once again, the City Manager delivered a balanced budget. This allows us to invest in our city, maintain our workforce, invest in our pensions, make improvements, and move our city forward. However, deciding how to allocate funds continues to be more challenging due to increasing costs of healthcare, pensions, inflation, and maintaining city services, just to name a few.

The state of our city remains solid, and your City Council is as committed as ever to preserving and enhancing our abundant quality of life. We are resistant, yet not immune, to the impacts of the global recession. As a whole, we are going in the right direction, and we're working to control what we can while planning for the future.

This year in the budget, Council will disperse our Community Development Block Grant funds more fairly to several nonprofits, such as Wheeling Health Right, Wheeling Soup Kitchen, Greater Wheeling Homeless Coalition, and Seeing Hand Association. While maintaining the Nelson Jordan Center and the Human Rights Commission Board, Council will also seek deeper relationships with the State Human Rights Commission. Our City Council is committed to providing funds that impact the greatest number of our citizens.

The strength of a community often lies in its ability to communicate within its government and with its citizens. In the events that have challenged us, we have seen the character that will continue to deliver us. We have been tried and tested over the years, and we have seen the greatness of Wheeling. The ultimate certainty of all is the talent and dedication of our citizens to continue the momentum into the future for even more success.

To my fellow City Council members, if we abide by the standards of fiscal conservatism and good management, we will better serve our City.

In conclusion, this year I again say to our City and its people, this is our charge. Thank you and May God bless America and the City of Wheeling.