



# STATE OF THE CITY WITH MAYOR DENNY MAGRUDER

FEBRUARY 10, 2026

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## SCHEDULE

*All times are approximate.*

**12:05 p.m.**

- Presentation of colors by Wheeling Police and Fire Honor Guard
- Invocation by Rev. Kenny Hardway, First Christian Church
- Welcome by Vice Mayor Jerry Sklavounakis

**12:15 p.m.**

- Mayor Magruder's State of the City Address

**1 p.m.**

- Photos with honorees

Good afternoon and welcome to all. It has been an honor to serve as your mayor for the last nineteen months and a privilege to stand before you today and present the 16<sup>th</sup> annual State of the City Address.

Let me begin by thanking the people who make this event possible.

Thank you to the City of Wheeling Police and Fire Honor Guard for presenting our National, State and City flags today.

Thank you, Reverend Ken Hardway, for providing today's invocation and your positive presence in our community.

Thank you, Vice Mayor Jerry Sklavounakis and fellow members of City Council; Tony Assaro, Ben Seidler, Connie Cain, Ty Thorngate, and Dave Palmer for your tireless dedication, thoughtful leadership, and genuine passion for serving our community and shaping a stronger future for our City.

A very special thank you to our City Manager of 24 years, Robert Herron. His leadership, experience, knowledge, and dedication continue to benefit our City. I also want to thank the following department heads for their efforts to keep our City running each and every day.

- Assistant City Manager/Public Works Director Bill Lanham
- Police Chief Shawn Schwertfeger
- Fire Chief Jim Blazier
- City Clerk Jessica Zalenski
- Finance Director Nathan Greene
- Community Development Director Nancy Prager
- City Solicitor Rose Humway-Warmuth
- Human Resource Director Kayla Graham
- Building & Planning Director BJ Delbert
- Parks & Recreation Director Rochelle Barry
- Information Technology Director Mike Lloyd

And all City staff members who are here today, especially Michele Rejonis, our Marketing and Community Relations Specialist, for her assistance with this presentation.

A special thank you to Nat Goudy, Michelle Witzberger and their team here at the White Palace for the great job of hosting today's event.

Also, a very special thank you to Kim Florence and the Wheeling Island Casino for their remarkable job hosting this event over the past ten years.

As well, a special congratulations to our partners at RED who will celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their incorporation as the Ohio Valley Industrial Corporation on April 1<sup>st</sup>.

I welcome other elected officials here with us today. We recognize and appreciate your dedication to our City, County, State, and Country.

On a personal note, I want to thank my family, especially my wife, Barb, for their love and support throughout my careers. That continued support enables me to serve as your mayor.

Today's State of the City will outline the progress we are making and the priorities guiding Wheeling's future. I will touch on the continued advancement of major development projects, the closure of the homeless camp with next steps to address those needs responsibly, and the streetscape project as it moves toward completion. We will honor and recognize citizens whose dedication strengthens our community, review the decision to adjust water and sewer rates to support essential system improvements, and highlight further reductions in crime across our City. These efforts reflect a Wheeling that is addressing challenges directly, investing wisely, and moving forward with confidence.

I want to highlight three major infrastructure investments that are shaping Wheeling's future---projects that improve safety, reliability, and quality of life while positioning our City for long-term growth.

First, our \$37 million streetscape project represents one of the most visible transformations across our City. This initiative goes far beyond resurfacing roads.

It includes new paving, upgraded traffic signals, and fully ADA-compliant sidewalks to ensure our streets are safe and accessible for everyone. We have also added new plants and trees to enhance the look and feel of our downtown, and simultaneously replaced aging underground utilities. Having coordinated this work, we reduce future disruptions and make smarter use of taxpayer dollars. This project is about modern infrastructure, but it's also about pride of place and building a City that is welcoming to residents, visitors, and businesses alike.

Second, we continue to make significant progress on bridge replacements, which are essential to public safety and regional connectivity. The Monument Place Bridge rebuild was completed this past year, marking a major milestone. Work on the Washington Avenue Bridge is currently underway, and the replacement of the Schilling and Baker Street bridges will follow over the next few years. These projects address decades-old infrastructure challenges and ensure that our transportation network remains safe, reliable, and capable of supporting economic activity well into the future.

Finally, I want to address our water and wastewater system improvements, which are critical but often unseen. We are investing \$20 million in water system improvements and \$46 million in wastewater system projects, including \$31 million in upgrades to our wastewater treatment facility. These improvements are necessary to meet regulatory requirements, protect public health, and ensure reliable service for generations to come. To support this work, a 38 percent increase in our user rates was implemented. While rate increases are never easy, I want residents to know that after these adjustments, Wheeling's water rates are in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, and sewer rates are in the 52<sup>nd</sup> percentile compared to communities across our state. The new rates cover the debt service and routine operating increases, putting our systems on solid financial footing.

Together, these investments represent a commitment to responsible planning, fiscal stability, and a stronger future for Wheeling. They are not just projects--- they are foundations for growth, safety, and opportunity in our City.

Today, as we reflect on the progress of our City and the people who make it stronger, we pause to recognize a man whose life's work has helped shape the

spirit, identity, and joy of our community. It is my honor to recognize this year's Gateway Award honoree, Bill Bryson.

Bill is a 1971 graduate of West Liberty University, and from that moment forward he committed himself to making this City---not just a place to live---but a better place to belong.

Early in his career, Bill served as General Merchandise Manager and Marketing Director for L. S. Good & Company, where he spent ten years bringing creativity and excitement to downtown shopping. Many of us still remember one of his most beloved contributions: the famous talking Christmas tree at the Goods department store. It wasn't just a marketing idea---it was magic. And in a beautiful example of Bill's commitment to preserving our shared memories, just a few years ago he had the iconic tree restored, allowing it to reappear at Center Market, delighting a new generation while reconnecting us to our past.

Bill's professional impact continued as Marketing Director for the Boury Corporation, where he worked alongside race director Hugh Stobbs to help build one of the region's premier road races. What began as the Elby's Distance Race continues today as the Ogden Half Marathon, a tradition that still brings athletes, spectators, and pride to our City year after year.

In 1989, Bill and his wife Sally purchased the Uniglobe Ohio Valley Travel Agency, further expanding his role as an ambassador for our region---helping people discover the world while always keeping Wheeling at the center of his work.

But perhaps Bill Bryson's most visible and enduring contribution to our community came in 1986, with an idea sparked by a family trip to Disney World. Inspired by what he saw, Bill returned home with a vision and presented the Wheeling Chamber of Commerce with a proposal: a new lighted Christmas parade that would bring people downtown, together, and into the holiday spirit.

The Chamber's response was simple and prophetic: "If you will chair it, we will do it".

And the rest, as they say, is history.

The Fantasy in Lights Parade has become one of Wheeling's most cherished traditions---and Bill's involvement continues today. Over the decades, he has recruited parade entries, selected Grand Marshals, chaired countless planning meetings, promoted the event tirelessly, and on parade night, coordinated units up and down the route.

And when the lights dim, the floats roll away, and most of the City has gone home, Bill does something uniquely Bill Bryson.

He gathers committee members at DiCarlo's on Main Street, grabs a pizza box, and writes down ideas---right there on the cardboard---about how to make next year's parade even better. That simple image says everything you need to know about his leadership: practical, passionate, and always focused on improvement.

Beyond these signature accomplishments, Bill has given his time generously. He has served on the Chamber Board, is a current member of the Convention and Visitors Bureau Board, coached countless young people in baseball, softball, soccer, basketball, and hockey, served with the Wheeling University Cardinal Athletic Club, and chaired the Our Lady of Peace Festival for six years.

At the heart of all of this is family. Bill is married to his wife Sally, and together they raised three children---Lisa, who is lovingly remembered, Scott, and Erin. His commitment to family, faith, and community has guided every chapter of his life.

Bill Bryson reminds us that leadership doesn't always come from a podium. Sometimes it comes from an idea, a meeting, a late night, or even a pizza box. His legacy lives in our traditions, our celebrations, and the countless people whose lives he has touched.

For a lifetime of service, creativity, and unwavering dedication to making our City better, it is with deep gratitude and great pride that we honor Bill Bryson as our Gateway Award recipient.

Please join me in thanking him.

Public safety in Wheeling remains strong and continues to improve because of the professionalism and dedication of our police and fire departments. Over the past

two years serious criminal offenses have declined by 25 percent, while misdemeanor offenses are down 21 percent---clear evidence that our community is becoming even safer. We have also seen a remarkable 61 percent reduction in overdoses and an 82 percent reduction in overdose deaths, outcomes driven in large part by the life-saving work of our Crisis Response Unit. Last year alone, the Wheeling Police Department responded to 20,784 calls for service, while the Wheeling Fire Department answered 8,244 calls, demonstrating both the demand for and reliability of our public safety services. Our firefighters and police officers proved their commitment once again during the deadly flash floods in June, conducting multiple rescues both inside and outside the City under extremely dangerous conditions. With the dedication of highly trained personnel, state-of-the-art equipment, and the opening of our new, modern Fire Department Headquarters last September, Wheeling continues to set a high standard for public safety and emergency response.

I want to take a moment to recognize the dedicated City of Wheeling employees who serve our residents every single day---often behind the scenes and often for long hours. These men and women plow our streets and remove snow in the dead of winter, collect our trash, patch and sweep our roads, repair water and sewer lines, cut grass and remove weeds, inspect buildings to keep citizens safe, and ensure our finances are managed responsibly. They write grants, balance budgets, and keep the day-to-day operations of a \$41 million-a-year organization running smoothly. And when emergencies strike---fires, floods, snowstorms, road incidents, and other unpredictable events---they respond without hesitation. Their professionalism, commitment, and pride in public service are the backbone of this City, and Wheeling is stronger because of their hard work.

After much thought and careful deliberation, City Council and the administration made the difficult decision to close the Wheeling homeless camp. This was done for two primary reasons. First and foremost was the concern for the health and safety of those living there. The camp was exposed to freezing weather and plagued by severe sanitary issues, fire hazards, environmental risks, and the presence of drugs, bullying, and criminal activity. These were simply unlivable and unsafe conditions for any human being.

Second, we listened to the voices of nearby residents and business owners. Crime and vandalism were increasing, fear for personal safety was growing, and questionable activity was occurring around the clock. These concerns could not be ignored.

I want to express our deep gratitude to the Life Hub for stepping up by expanding bed capacity and services, and for partnering with the Salvation Army to help meet immediate needs. Moving forward, the City is committed to working with local faith communities and social service agencies to develop lasting solutions. We must also confront the reality that mental illness and addiction make up a significant portion of our homeless crisis. Wheeling will strongly advocate with state and federal leaders for the creation of treatment centers that provide real pathways to recovery, stability, and dignity.

Today, as we focus on where we are going, it is fitting that we pause to recognize someone who has spent a lifetime ensuring that no one in our City is left behind.

That person is John Moses.

For more than 46 years, John has served the people of this City---its children, its families, its neighborhoods---through a lifelong commitment to social service work. Much of that work has been carried out through his long service with Youth Service Systems, an organization that has been a lifeline for families across our community.

John's impact can be felt in every corner of our City. In homes where the heat was about to be shut off. In neighborhoods where parents were doing everything they could to hold things together. In moments when children needed not just help, but hope.

Over the decades, John has helped provide clothing, food, shelter, and utility assistance to thousands of families right here at home. But if you ask those families what mattered most, they won't just talk about the services. They'll talk about John.

They'll talk about someone who answered the phone. Someone who took the time to listen. Someone who didn't treat them like a case number, but like a neighbor.

John is a beacon for those in need in our City. He hears them. And he walks alongside them---often through the hardest chapters of their lives. He has built bridges between families and systems, between crisis and stability, and between struggle and opportunity.

At a time when it's easy to feel disconnected, John's work reminds us what community really means. It means showing up. It means staying. And it means believing that every child, every family, and every person in this City matters.

John Moses' legacy is woven into the fabric of our City. It lives in the children who grew up safer and stronger. It lives in families who found their footing and moved forward. And it lives in a community that is better because of his compassion, consistency, and care.

His legacy is not measured in years alone, but in lives touched, families strengthened, and futures changed.

John Moses is truly a treasure in our City. His life's work reflects the very best of who we are and who we strive to be.

On behalf of the City, on behalf of our neighborhoods, and on behalf of the thousands of lives you have impacted---John, thank you.

Wheeling continues to show real momentum in business growth and economic development, and that progress is visible across our neighborhoods. Along National Road, the opening of Unified Bank and the soon to be completed 7Brew project bring new investment and confidence to a key corridor, while in Center Wheeling, Fabio's Pizza adds both jobs and a locally rooted business that strengthens our community fabric. We are also seeing long-standing companies reinvest in Wheeling in a major way---Sheetz has undergone a significant rebuild at its original location, reaffirming its commitment to the City: ACE Garage has expanded with a new complex in East Wheeling: and National Equipment is

relocating into a new, state-of-the-art facility in Elm Terrace, even as we speak. These projects signal growth, stability, and belief in Wheeling's future.

Downtown, we are experiencing a new style of business activity that is bringing fresh energy and creativity to our City center. Business ventures like the Jingle Bar and the Urban Collective are redefining how people gather, shop, and experience downtown Wheeling, helping to attract both residents and visitors. We are also on the cusp of two major milestones, with groundbreaking coming very soon for the WVU Cancer Institute St. Joseph Regional Cancer Complex and the anticipated Gateway Center next to the Suspension Bridge---projects that will have lasting impacts on healthcare access, economic vitality, and the gateway to our City. In addition, two other major downtown projects continue to move forward and progress toward becoming reality.

To support and build on this momentum, the City has strengthened its own capacity by adding a new economic development specialist to our staff. This investment ensures we are proactive, responsive, and strategic as we work with existing businesses and welcome new opportunities. Taken together, these developments make one thing clear: Wheeling is moving forward with purpose, investment, and confidence in the future of our City.

Today, we are proud to recognize Dave Rotriga, owner of Miklas Meat Market, as a prominent business leader in Wheeling and, more importantly, as a man whose generosity and heart have made a lasting impact on our community.

Dave's story at Miklas Meat Market began in 1977, when he started working alongside his uncle, the owner at the time. It was there that Dave learned the craft of cutting meat, but he also learned something just as important---the value of hard work, customer relationships, and serving the community with pride. It was also at the market where Dave met his wife, Laura, beginning not only a lifelong partnership in business, but in life.

In 2008, when Dave's uncle passed away, Dave stepped forward and took over the business with a promise---that Miklas Meat Market would continue to serve Wheeling with the same quality, integrity, and care that customers had come to

expect. And he has done exactly that. Under Dave's leadership, the market has remained a neighborhood cornerstone, known not just for great food, but for great people.

Dave's commitment to giving back became even more personal in 2013, when his nephew, Hines, was diagnosed with neuroblastoma cancer. Later, in 2017, Dave and his family welcomed a granddaughter who was born with numerous medical challenges. These experiences deepened Dave's dedication to helping others, and he has supported fundraisers not only for his own family, but for countless individuals and causes throughout our community.

Dave is a strong supporter of Easter Seals, the Miracle League, and many other local charities. He is also known for a simple but powerful tradition---making sure that first responders have something to eat on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, because he believes those who serve our community should always feel appreciated.

Dave often says that Miklas Meat Market is "the little store with the big heart". And anyone who knows him knows that phrase couldn't be more accurate. His generosity, compassion, and dedication embody the very best of what a local business owner can be.

Please join me in recognizing Dave Rotriga---for his leadership, his kindness, and for proving that when business and heart come together, an entire community benefits.

Across our City, we are seeing tangible investments that reinforce a shared sense of optimism and confidence in Wheeling's future. From the extensive remodeling of the YWCA and the expansion of the Chamber's YMCA, to the West Virginia Northern Community College's upgrades and exterior restoration of its historic structure, these efforts strengthen both our neighborhoods and our sense of place. WVU Medicine's conversion of the former Continuous Care Center into a new Pediatric Outpatient Center reflects a deep commitment to caring for our families, while the significant improvements and overhaul of the dining spaces at Wheeling Island Hotel-Casino-Racetrack enhance our local hospitality and

entertainment landscape. These projects represent more than bricks and mortar--they reflect organizations and leaders who believe in serving Wheeling, investing in its people, and building its future. With that spirit of service in mind, it is fitting that we now recognize Kim Florence and the Wheeling Island Hotel-Casino-Racetrack for their continued dedication and service to our City.

Kim's journey with Wheeling Island began in 2003, when she joined the team as a marketing coordinator. Through hard work, vision, and a deep understanding of both the business and the community it serves, she advanced through multiple leadership roles before being named President and General Manager in June of 2016. Her career path is a testament to dedication, integrity, and the belief that strong leadership is built from within.

Under Kim's leadership, Wheeling Island Hotel-Casino-Racetrack has remained a vital economic engine for the Upper Ohio Valley. The casino continues to employ nearly 600 people year-round, providing stable jobs and supporting countless families. Just as importantly, it remains a key tourist destination, helping drive visitors, revenue, and visibility to Wheeling and the surrounding region.

Kim's influence extends far beyond the casino floor. She is widely recognized as a leader both in the industry and in the community. She is a YWCA Tribute to Women Honoree and generously gives her time and expertise through service on several Boards of Directors, including Wheeling Health Right, the Regional Economic Development Partnership, Oglebay Institute, and the Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Equally impressive is the casino's deep commitment to community involvement and charitable support under Kim's guidance. Wheeling Island proudly supports programs such as the Salvation Army Angel Tree toy drive, The Mountaineer Brewfest, and the United Way of the Upper Ohio Valley events. Through the "Game Changer Charity Program", nearly \$30,000 was raised in 2025 for the United Way and the Augusta Levy Learning Center.

The casino also brings the community together through family-friendly events like the Eats & Beats Festival and the Independence Day Festival, creating spaces for connection, celebration, and shared pride in our City.

Kim Florence exemplifies what it means to lead with purpose. Through her vision, service, and commitment to Wheeling, she has ensured that Wheeling Island Hotel-Casino-Racetrack is not just a place of entertainment---but a true partner in the community's success. Today, we thank her for her leadership and congratulate her on an extraordinary career of impact.

Over the last few years, we have seen the construction of several apartment developments, including new downtown apartment units such as the Doris, which are both helpful and appreciated. However, housing remains our number one challenge, as young professionals and those coming to work in our expanding health care market are seeking new single-family homes. While there are still residents who enjoy remodeling and preserving our many historic Victorian homes, the demand for new housing options continues to outpace supply. Today, I am announcing the creation of a Housing Development Task Force, to examine barriers to constructing housing and recommend actionable strategies to increase the supply of quality, attainable housing within the City. Details will be announced at next week's City Council meeting.

The City of Wheeling Community Spirit Award honors individuals who strengthen our City not for recognition, but out of commitment, compassion, and love for this community. Few people represent those values more fully than Rabbi Joshua Lief.

Rabbi Lief's story is, in many ways, a Wheeling story.

He was born and raised right here, growing up in the congregation of Temple Shalom, where he learned not only Jewish tradition, but the deeper lessons of responsibility, service, and belonging. As a young person in Wheeling, Josh was active in sports, music, and scouting---experiences that shaped his sense of teamwork, discipline, and leadership. His achievement of the rank of Eagle Scout speaks volumes about his character even at an early age: dedication, integrity, and a commitment to helping others.

Those values followed him as he left Wheeling to pursue his education. He attended Princeton University, one of the world's greatest academic institutions, and then Hebrew Union College, where he prepared for a life of Jewish leadership and service. In May of 2003, he was ordained as a rabbi, beginning a calling that blends scholarship, faith, and human connection.

Rabbi Lief went on to serve congregations in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Jacksonville, Florida, where he earned a reputation as a thoughtful spiritual leader, an engaged civic partner, and a bridge-builder across communities. Yet, as meaningful as those chapters were, his story came full circle in 2017, when Rabbi Lief returned home to Wheeling to lead Temple Shalom---the very congregation in which he had been raised.

That return was more than a homecoming. It was a recommitment.

Since coming back to Wheeling, Rabbi Lief has made it clear that being a rabbi does not stop at the synagogue doors. He has embraced the idea that faith and civic life are deeply connected---and that strong communities are built when people show up for one another.

Rabbi Lief is deeply involved in Jewish life, nurturing his congregation with wisdom, warmth, and care. At the same time, he has become a tireless advocate for Wheeling as a whole. He has played an active role in community revitalization efforts, supporting the arts, business development, our parks, and public education. He understands that a thriving City depends on creativity, opportunity, and shared public spaces where people from all backgrounds can connect.

One of Rabbi Lief's most important roles has been his service as Chairperson of the City's Human Rights Commission. In that capacity, he has worked to promote equality, fairness, and mutual respect among all people. His leadership reflects a deep belief that dignity is not negotiable---and that communities grow stronger when every voice is valued and protected.

Rabbi Lief has also served as the creator and coordinator of Wheeling's annual September 11 Observance, a solemn and meaningful gathering that honors lives lost, acknowledges shared grief, and affirms our collective resilience.

In that same spirit of unity, Rabbi Lief restarted the Community-Wide Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, reminding us that gratitude is something best expressed together.

His contributions do not stop there.

He is a “faith columnist” for the local newspaper, offering thoughtful reflections that challenge, inspire, and encourage dialogue. He is a member and past president of the Wheeling Rotary Club and a frequent guest speaker at local schools helping students better understand Jewish history, traditions, and values.

And at countless public events throughout Wheeling, Rabbi Lief has offered invocations and benedictions, lending words of meaning and reflection at moments of celebration, remembrance, and civic pride.

Behind all of this work is a person grounded by family. Rabbi Lief is married to his wife Rebecca, a true partner in every sense of the word, and together they are raising two daughters, Leah and Ellie, in the same community that shaped him.

What makes Rabbi Joshua Lief especially deserving of the Community Service Award is not simply the number of roles he fills, but the way he fills them---with humility, kindness, and an unwavering belief in Wheeling’s potential.

He reminds us that leadership is not about position, but presence---and that community spirit is built through consistent acts of service, compassion, and courage.

Today, as we honor Rabbi Lief, we are also celebrating the best of Wheeling: a City where people return home to give back, where faith and civic life can strengthen one another, and where community truly means something.

Rabbi, thank you for your leadership, your heart, and your enduring commitment to this City. It is with deep gratitude and pride that we present you with the Community Spirit Award.

Wheeling offers an exceptional quality of life rooted in creativity, community, and opportunity. Our City is rich in arts and entertainment, from live music, theater, and cultural festivals to galleries and historic venues that bring people together

year-round---many offering free, family-friendly events. Abundant parks, trails, and riverfront spaces provide beautiful settings for recreation and relaxation, while our strong education facilities support lifelong learning and future success. Combined with affordable living and a welcoming spirit, Wheeling is a place where residents can enjoy vibrant experiences, outstanding public spaces, and a community that invests in both people and quality of life.

One of the most visible and meaningful ways we honor our values as a City is through the Wheeling Military Banner Program. When you drive through our neighborhoods and business districts, you see more than banners on utility poles. You see the faces of sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, friends and neighbors who stepped forward to serve something greater than themselves. These banners remind us---every single day---that freedom is not abstract. It has a face. It has a name. And here in Wheeling it has a hometown.

This program did not happen by accident. It exists because of dedication, persistence, and a deep sense of respect for those who wear---or have worn--- the uniform of the United States Armed Forces.

I want to begin by offering sincere thanks to the many organizations and partners who made this program possible. To our local veterans' organizations, sponsors, City staff, and volunteers---thank you. Your time, your coordination, and your belief in this mission turned an idea into a living tribute across our City. Wheeling is better for it.

The Military Banner Program also carries a solemn responsibility, especially when we honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Over this past year, Wheeling has held special ceremonies for our “killed in action” heroes, and these moments stop us in our tracks—as they should. These ceremonies are not easy, but they are essential. They remind us that behind every banner is a family whose sacrifice did not end when the uniform came off.

To the families who have stood with us during those ceremonies: we see you, we honor you, and we thank you for trusting this City to remember your loved one with dignity and respect. Wheeling will never forget them.

At the heart of this entire program---its creation, its expansion, and its soul---is one individual who deserves special recognition today.

John Larch. John is the person responsible for bringing the Military Banner Program to Wheeling. But more importantly, he is the person who brought it with heart. From the very beginning, John understood that this was not about banners---it was about people. It was about making sure no veteran felt invisible. It was about ensuring that sacrifice was acknowledged not just on holidays, but every day. And it was about doing it the right way, with respect, accuracy, and care.

John has been relentless in the best possible sense---tracking down details, working with families, coordinating installations, and making sure each banner tells a story worth telling. He has answered calls, emails, and questions at all hours, because for him, this has never been a project. It has been a mission.

Because of John's leadership and compassion, Wheeling's Military Banner Program stands as one of the strongest examples of how a City can honor service at the local level. This is what community looks like.

John, on behalf of the City of Wheeling, our residents, our veterans, and our families---thank you. Your work has left a permanent mark on this City, and your heart is visible on every street where the banners fly.

Going forward, let us recommit ourselves to supporting this program, to caring for our veterans, and to teaching the next generation what these banners truly represent. Let them remind us that service matters, sacrifice matters, and remembrance matters.

As we look ahead, our confidence in Wheeling's future is matched by our momentum. We anticipate the spring groundbreaking of WVU Medicine's regional cancer center and the launch of our new Gateway Center---projects that will strengthen health, opportunity, and connection for generations to come. At the same time, we continue to set the table for future opportunities, laying the groundwork for growth that will follow. These investments matter, but they are not our greatest asset. That distinction belongs to the people of Wheeling---

resilient, hardworking, and deeply committed to this community. Together, with pride in our past and belief in one another, we are not just imagining a stronger Wheeling—we are building it.

May God bless the City of Wheeling and may God bless each of our residents.

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