



STATE OF THE CITY WITH MAYOR GLENN ELLIOTT FEBRUARY 26, 2019

SCHEDULE

All times *are* approximate.

12:10 p.m.

- Welcome by Vice Mayor Chad Thalman
- Invocation by Ralph Dunkin
- Presentation of colors by Wheeling Police and Fire Honor Guard

12:15 p.m.

- Mayor Elliott's State of the City Address

1:00 p.m.

- Presentation of plaques and photos with honorees

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. Welcome to the 10th annual State of the City Address in the City of Wheeling. This is my third opportunity to speak to you as Mayor for this event, and it remains my honor and privilege to do so.

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

Thank you to the City of Wheeling Police and Fire Honor Guard for presenting our national and state flags to stand alongside our new city flag.

Thank you, Bishop Ralph Dunkin, for leading today's invocation.

To my fellow City Council members: Vice Mayor Chad Thalman, Ken Imer, Melinda Koslik, Wendy Scatterday, Ty Thorngate, and Dave Palmer – it is an honor to serve the citizens of Wheeling with you.

Let me also recognize City Manager Bob Herron as well as the following department heads who keep our City running every day:

- City Clerk BJ Delbert
- Finance Director Seth McIntyre
- Public Works Director Rusty Jebbia
- Economic Development Director Nancy Prager
- Police Chief Shawn Schwertfeger
- Fire Chief Larry Helms
- Human Resources Director Tessia Haymaker
- Parks and Recreations Director Jesse Mestrovic
- City Solicitor Rose Humway-Warmuth

and all other City staff members who are here today, including Michele Rejonis, our Marketing and Community Relations Specialist.

Finally, to the elected officials in attendance, thank you for your dedication to our City, County, State, and our Nation.

PAST: Gateway Award

As we gather today in this the 250th anniversary year of our founding, I would like to begin by looking back. Not for the sake of nostalgia. But for fostering a better understanding of where we are today. Cities do not exist independently of their histories. More often than not, our current hopes and dreams stand in no small part on the shoulders of decisions made in prior decades.

Two years ago, I bestowed the City's first Gateway Award on former mayor Jack Liphardt for his efforts in the 1990s to keep Wheeling moving forward despite significant regional economic contraction. Last year, I honored former Councilman and long-time Planning Commission member Barry Crow for his years of service to our community. Today, it is my privilege to name as the third recipient of the Gateway Award someone whose service to and investment in the City spans decades, including eight years as mayor: I am of course referring to **Nick Sparachane**.

Nick is one of the original founders of Main Street Bank and Senior V-President of USI Insurance Services. His family business, Undo's is the prime sponsor for the Upper Ohio Valley Italian Festival. Today, Nick serves as a director on five local organizations and, along with Patti, his lovely wife of forty years, remains deeply involved in our community.

But I would like to focus today on the legacy left by *Mayor* Nick Sparachane and the two City Councils he served with from 2000 to 2008. It was, after all, during this time that the former Wheeling Stamping Building became the Global Operations Center for the international law firm Orrick. Mayor Sparachane worked hard to pitch Wheeling to Orrick officials—including a personal visit to their San Francisco headquarters. As a result of these efforts, there are now roughly 400 employees working in what had become an abandoned factory.

But it doesn't stop there. Bringing Orrick to the Wheeling Stamping Building helped catalyze the redevelopment of Celeron Plaza, including the Staley Communications Building and The Wagner Building. Working closely with City Council and RED, Mayor Sparachane helped facilitate the redevelopment of the Stone & Thomas Building in Downtown Wheeling, which was vacant in the early 2000s. Today, the Stone Center is nearly fully occupied, with the primary tenant—Williams Lea—following Orrick to Wheeling with hundreds of jobs of its own.

During Mayor Sparachane's tenure, the City also made important investments in its future. Major renovations to the then Wheeling Civic Center were undertaken. The City worked with various partners—including the Wheeling Convention and Visitors Bureau—to save the Capital Theatre. And so on.

However you may try, it is difficult to imagine what Wheeling might look like today without the efforts of Mayor Sparachane and the men and women who served with him on City Council. That group included Mike Nau, Babe Schmidt, the late Herk Henry, the late Gloria Delbrugge, Cliff Sligar, Vern Seals, and Barry Crow. I would like to ask Mayor Sparachane and any of his fellow Council members who are here today to stand:

Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me in congratulating Mayor Nick Sparachane, the 2019 recipient of the City of Wheeling Gateway Award, along with those he had the honor of serving with.

PRESENT

We have come a long way since our founding in 1769, and I hope all residents will take part in the various celebrations and activities planned by our Wheeling 250 Committee this year. I'd like to thank Chairman Jay Frey and his fellow Wheeling 250 Committee members for their many hours spent planning for this special year.

Let us now try to take stock of what is the true state of the City of Wheeling in 2019. Let us address what the City is doing well and where there is need for improvement. And let us pay tribute to some special members of the Wheeling community who have made themselves part of the solution through their contributions.

I shall start by focusing explicitly on the heart and soul of Wheeling: its **neighborhoods**.

Neighborhoods are more than just geography. Our neighborhoods can help define our own sense of identity. They are the backdrops for our respective life stories. They are the lens through which we view the rest of our city. There is no formula for a successful city that does not include healthy, connected neighborhoods.

We are fortunate to have many proud, thriving neighborhoods in the City of Wheeling. But even some of the healthiest can show their age. Properties are not being uniformly maintained. Many of our streets—and the sewer infrastructure underneath them—demand attention. Some neighborhoods have seen their connectivity compromised. While there are no simple solutions to any of these issues, we recognize that the City needs to take a proactive stance. To this end, let me share a few initiatives we have been working on.

Last year, we rolled out the Wheeling 311 tool on the new City website at *wheelingwv.gov*. It permits residents to request non-emergency services online through a user-friendly system that collects and then forwards complaints and photos to the appropriate City staff. It can be used for building code violations, property maintenance complaints, road maintenance needs, issues with trash, leaves, dumping, and so on. Once a request is made through Wheeling 311, it can then be tracked to ensure the issue is addressed in a timely manner. While the City maintains an active social media presence, we encourage everyone to utilize Wheeling 311 instead when requesting these sorts of non-emergency services.

We have also sought to streamline our enforcement of the City's property maintenance codes. A frequent complaint we have heard is that our enforcement process takes too long and leads to too many repeat offenders. To address these issues, Councilman Dave Palmer has been working with City staff to implement a system of expedited enforcement that provides property owners with incentives for early compliance. The goal of this initiative is to lead property owners into compliance, not to issue fines.

When it comes to our City streets, City Council has heard all the complaints loud and clear. Last Fall, we approved nearly \$1 million for 44 paving projects throughout the City—the largest one-time paving contract in City history. Many of these projects have already commenced, but due to weather conditions, some will not be completed until later this Spring. And lest there be any doubt, we will be revisiting the state of our streets going into the 2020 budgeting process.

Likewise, we are moving forward with plans to improve our underground infrastructure. This City Council has approved a multi-year sewer-improvement plan that will span many Wheeling neighborhoods. Neighborhoods cannot grow and thrive in the 21st Century with underground infrastructure in some cases dating to the 19th.

Another way to promote healthy neighborhoods is to make sure they include parks and playgrounds that are inviting and well-maintained. As promised, this City Council has made its commitment to improving our neighborhood playgrounds unambiguous. In the past two years, we have dedicated nearly \$400,000 to renovating 11 of the City's 22 neighborhood playgrounds—with more improvements planned this year for playgrounds located in Fulton, Pleasonton, and on North 24th Street in Warwood.

New partnerships have also expanded our reach when it comes to recreation. Consider the recent agreement among the Ohio County Board of Education, the City of Wheeling, and the Woodsdale PTO Playground Committee, of which one of today's honorees, **Kathleen Wack**, is a member. Working with Principal Ashlea Minch and other members of the PTO Playground Committee, Kathleen raised more than \$225,000 for a spectacular new playground installation at Woodsdale Elementary School. She then helped arrange for a shared use agreement between the Board of Education and the City by which the playground could function as a city park during non-school hours. Last year, Governor Justice awarded the PTO Playground Committee a Commendation for Volunteer Services. It was well deserved, but for Kathleen, this is not about being recognized—it's about children's health. To Kathleen, who is joined today by her husband Josh and three children, thank you for helping to improve the quality of life in our community.

It's not just in Woodsdale where we have seen community volunteerism make a difference. Since 2016, **Grow Warwood Pride** has been enlisting the help of volunteers to bring about positive change in the City's Warwood neighborhood through community projects. And at the center of Grow Warwood Pride are my next two honorees today: **Matt Rafa** and **Julie Davis**. Grow Warwood Pride was the result of their recognizing a hunger by their neighbors to be part of the solution for Warwood. Since its founding three years ago, this organization has spurred volunteer efforts to paint the fence around Garden Park, to clean the Veterans Memorial located therein, to organize school-supply drives for local teachers, to engage in community clean-up days, and so much more. Julie and Matt were also behind efforts to establish the Warwood Farmers Market and the now-annual *Trunk or Treat* event. These collective efforts have made Warwood a better neighborhood and Wheeling a better city. And for that, please join me in thanking Julie Davis and Matt Rafa of Grow Warwood Pride.

As we close out our focus on neighborhoods today, let us remember that are those living among us who through one reason or another have found themselves homeless. There is no one single cause of homelessness, nor is there any simple remedy. But we want the City to be at least part of the solution. And so today I would like to announce a new partnership between the City and the Greater Wheeling Coalition for the Homeless, which is led by Executive Director Lisa Badia. While details are being finalized, this partnership will allow the City to employ a small number of Homeless Coalition clients. Each such prospective employee would be screened by Ms. Badia's staff and recommended for positions suitable for his or her skill sets—with the goal being to help otherwise unemployable individuals prove their worth and build their résumés. Stay tuned for more details as we move forward.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT AWARD

Each year at this address, through the Community Spirit Award, the City recognizes one local citizen whose contributions have embodied civic engagement and helped bring pride to our community through service, generosity, and general love of Wheeling.

Today, it is my honor to bestow that recognition on someone who was an absolute force for positive change in the City of Wheeling. I am referring to the late **Robert Scatterday**, known to many of us by his nickname “Scat.” Throughout his life, Scat was serving causes beyond himself. For 37 years, he served his country in the U.S. Air Force, including logging more than 4,000 hours on 136 combat missions during the Vietnam War. But it is for his service on behalf of the community of Wheeling that I would like to focus today.

If you look closely, you will find Scat’s fingerprints all around us. We are fortunate as a community to have a rich network of walking/biking trails. Nobody played a bigger role in the development of these trails than Scat. As a former manager of Project Rails to Trails, he and the late Dr. Ben Stout were tireless advocates for expanding and enhancing our city’s recreational outlets. Scat also served as a longtime race director for the annual Ogden Newspapers Half Marathon Classic. He served his community in so many other ways on various boards and committees—too many to note here today.

But it is his service on one cold February day eleven years ago that I would like to highlight today. While driving West on Interstate 70 near The Highlands, Scat saw a man lying motionless on the highway. Scat immediately pulled over, slammed his car into reverse, and sped back to near where the man was located. He quickly realized that there was no way to stop traffic in time to save the man’s life, so he stepped onto the road and dragged the man by his belt and jacket sleeve off the highway—putting his own life at risk as tractor-trailers were struggling to slow down.

Scat’s Good Samaritan act made quite the impression on another stalwart of Wheeling society who left us very recently—the incomparable Ann Thomas. Ann wrote a beautiful letter to her friend. I would like to read a brief excerpt today:

*Dear “Scat”, your selflessness saved a life God had given to this person.
My prayers go out to both of you... Just wanted you to know how I feel. ...Good
to know you as a friend. In friendship, Ann Thomas.*

The same can be said by the greater Wheeling community as well—it has been so very good to know Robert “Scat” Scatterday as a friend. To his son Chuck and daughter-in-law Tara, and to his daughter, Wendy, who brings her father’s sense of service to our City Council, I say thank you for sharing Scat with us. Please join me in recognizing them in receipt of this year’s Community Spirit Award on behalf of Robert “Scat” Scatterday.

DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Let us now consider some familiar areas of focus for this City Council, starting with Downtown economic development.

Our goal is ambitious: We want to restore Downtown’s status as a destination in and of itself. As I said here last year, the question for Downtown Wheeling is no longer *if* but when this is going to happen. We must fill those missing pieces needed for Downtown to be a place where people can live, work, and play.

The private sector has already taken note of the development opportunities available. Many of our historic properties are under new ownership having ambitious goals.

The City must do its part and make investments in infrastructure necessary for development while continuing to use partnerships to catalyze more private-sector investment in Downtown.

One of those investments is in our Downtown streetscape. For several years now, the City has been collaborating with the Division of Highways on a complete facelift to the streets and sidewalks spanning our downtown core. Most of the streets included in this project are State-owned and, as a result, it is the State—not the City—that will be bearing the vast majority of costs. When complete, the result will be a Downtown that is far more aesthetically pleasing, far more pedestrian friendly, and far more cohesive in look and feel throughout.

We have also been working hard to expand the menu of events available for residents and visitors at WesBanco Arena. In less than one month from today, Arena Football will be making its return to the Friendly City as the West Virginia Roughriders kick off their 2019 season. Joining the Wheeling Nailers, the Roughriders will give the City a second professional sports franchise to go along with a symphony, a world-class waterfront feature, and the Oglebay park system. I can think of no city of 27,000 or fewer people that can boast that many big-city amenities.

And next week, the Mountain East Conference men’s and women’s basketball tournament will tip off at WesBanco Arena for the first time, relocating from its longtime host city of Charleston. There are a lot of people who deserve credit for working to make this happen. Starting with the MEC Commissioner himself, Reid Amos. Commissioner Amos is with us today, and I’d like us all to extend to him a warm Wheeling welcome. When we first learned in 2017 that the

MEC was open to relocation, we put together a team of City staff and local stakeholders to help prepare our bid.

But it is one of those local stakeholders who really rose to the occasion and helped make the MEC in Wheeling possible—and that's my next honoree, **Jim Pennington of The Health Plan**. In our first meeting several years ago, Jim made it very clear to me that he saw his company's move to Wheeling not only as a corporate relocation but also as a charge to be part of our City's revitalization.

Whether that has meant partnering with Ogden Newspapers to expand the Half Marathon Classic into a full wellness weekend or partnering with the City to sponsor the bike-share program announced just yesterday, Jim has delivered time and time again. And so it should surprise no one that The Health Plan came through as a lead sponsor of the MEC tournament in Wheeling.

We are very fortunate to have members of our business community committed to local economic development. Please join me in thanking Jim Pennington for keeping his promise to have The Health Plan be part of the solution in Downtown Wheeling.

While on the subject of basketball tournaments relocating to WesBanco Arena, I would be remiss if I did not mention the efforts of another of today's honorees, **Dr. Gregory Merrick**. In his day job, Dr. Merrick is a world renowned urologic oncologist. Twelve years ago, he came up with the idea to combine his passion for mens' health with his passion for basketball. The result was the Cancer Research Basketball Classic—a national invitational high school basketball tournament televised on ESPN. For its first 11 years, the CRC tournament took place on Wheeling Jesuit University campus. But with concerns about outgrowing that venue, Dr. Merrick approached us in early 2018 to discuss bringing the CRC Downtown. We were more than happy to oblige.

Those who saw the CRC live at WesBanco Arena or on ESPN last month witnessed seven of the top 13 high school basketball teams in the nation competing in a state-of-the-art venue. What a wonderful reflection on our City. But for Dr. Merrick, this tournament is ultimately about educating men on the simple steps they can take through preventative health care to extend their lives. For that lesson, and for his passionate work to develop and grow the CRC into a world-class basketball showcase, please join me in thanking Dr. Merrick.

The more missing pieces we can fill in Downtown Wheeling, the sooner we can achieve the coveted destination status.

We have worked with City partners like **Wheeling Heritage** on installing banners Downtown, a proposed Wheeling History Museum, and expanding the footprint of the Independence Hall site to include the relocated Soldiers and Sailors Monument and a future outdoor amphitheater.

But one project has the potential to take Downtown development to the next level. And that's the rehabilitation of the **Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel Building** into market-rate residential

apartments. This project is several years in the making and will require the City's participation to be finalized.

People often ask me why I find this project so important.

There is a simple formula cities across the country have followed to revitalize their aging downtowns: Filling vacant properties with market-rate housing. Why? For one, vacant buildings amount to blight. As they deteriorate, they act as cancers on their blocks and bring down property values. Downtown Wheeling still has a number of vacant buildings that used to house office space or retail. We lack sufficient demand for those uses right now, but the demand for market-rate housing is far outpacing the supply.

There's another benefit to this approach. Downtown market-rate housing puts people with disposable income in a position where they are likely to spend money in the restaurants, coffee shops, grocery stores, and other first floor retail outlets. From a city-planning perspective, if you want to spur more first floor retail downtown, it helps to build in your supply of willing customers.

So consider the project at hand. You have arguably Downtown's most magnificent building—a 12-story, 144,000 square foot, historically significant work of elegant architecture. And for two years now, we have been working with a developer who specializes in turning buildings just like this one into premier housing.

We knew early on that this project would not happen without incentives. We successfully lobbied our Legislature in 2017 to increase the State historic tax credit to be on par with our surrounding states. As you may have heard, we have been negotiating with nearby property owners so that the City could build a garage to provide parking capacity needed not only for future Wheeling Pitt tenants but also for future job growth. As we gather here today, the developer of the Wheeling Pitt Building is pursuing financing to proceed with the project.

If the developer opts to move forward, City Council needs to be prepared to act. We must figure out how to make this project a reality. There are no inexpensive options here. We understand this, as have prior City leaders looking to stimulate private investment in our Downtown. We also understand that at the end of the day, whatever incentives we provide need to be fair and justifiable for Wheeling's taxpayers.

Despite whatever you may have read or heard, nothing—and I repeat, nothing—in this regard has been agreed to by anyone acting on behalf of the City. Our negotiations regarding the proposed parking garage are preliminary and open to further discussion. The only thing we know for sure at this point is that without a new parking structure, there will be no Wheeling Pitt Lofts. Not now, and perhaps not ever.

And so I implore you: Please consider whatever actions City Council takes to make this project happen versus the alternative of doing nothing. We can choose to let this majestic building continue to sit empty. We can watch it deteriorate in plain sight atop our skyline. We can wait

until a future City Council is bombarded with calls for its demolition. And we can envision the gaping hole its demise would create where Wheeling's only skyscraper once stood.

These are not hypothetical scenarios. We have seen this episode before. Inaction is a choice. Every vacant lot or parking lot in Downtown Wheeling today sits where there used to be a building of lesser significance than Wheeling Pitt. The future is watching. And from what I have read, decisions to sacrifice buildings of this magnitude rarely age well.

In the years ahead, I fully expect Downtown Wheeling to continue to redefine itself. We will never again see it be the retail mecca it was in the 1950s. But we should not refuse to dream about what is possible. What separates our Downtown from so many "retail" outlets these days is its authenticity and its uniqueness.

And when I think about what is possible in Downtown, I think about the efforts made by the next of today's honorees to capitalize on the authenticity and uniqueness of her business product: I am referring to **Susan Haddad**, founder and longtime owner of **Later Gator** in Centre Market.

The path towards one of Wheeling's most iconic restaurants began when Susan took a leap of faith in 2000 and purchased a 19th Century saloon that had long been neglected. At the time, much of nearby Centre Market consisted of empty storefronts. But Susan saw the potential for her building and the neighborhood. After much thought and several years of painstaking renovations, Later Gator opened in 2006 and provided the Ohio Valley with something entirely new. Historic photos and a remarkable collection of Wheeling Steel memorabilia decorate the walls under a restored original tin ceiling. Its menu is unlike any other in the Ohio Valley.

It took guts, vision, and fierce determination for Susan to turn her dream into a reality. And when I look at Downtown Wheeling today, I hope there are a lot more Susan Haddads out there channeling their own dreams into unique, authentic answers to the questions before us. Please join me in thanking Susan Haddad for daring us to dream.

PARKS AND RECREATION

In the time we have remaining, let me briefly touch on two familiar topics, beginning with parks and recreation. As noted earlier, this City Council has been delivering on its commitment to rehabilitate the City's 22 playgrounds.

We have also been thinking of how to enhance our parks and recreational footprint. Just last week, we announced plans to proceed with the early phases of a new Gateway Park on the East side of Wheeling Island, just South of the Suspension Bridge. This work will be made possible thanks to a generous gift to the City of \$150,000 by the Fitzsimmons Foundation.

And we recognize that our parks and public spaces must offer more than physical recreation—they must also offer an opportunity for us to reflect. And sometimes, to pay homage. Since last summer, the City has been working with John Nanny of the Marine Corps League

towards the erection of a Gold Star Families Memorial Monument in the Veterans Amphitheater section of Heritage Port. This tribute to families who have lost loved ones in service to their country will enhance what is already a solemn collection of veterans memorials at that location.

PUBLIC SAFETY

You cannot have a thriving city without ensuring the public's safety. I have said on this stage before—and I repeat now—that we cannot afford to take our City's excellent public safety statistics for granted.

Our first responders today are part of a proud tradition of excellence spanning more than a century in the City of Wheeling. Nobody embodies that commitment to service more than the last of my honorees today, U.S. Army veteran and retired Wheeling Fire Chief **Cliff Sligar**. For 40 years, including 24 as chief, Cliff came to work at the Wheeling Fire Department to keep us safe. As chief, he was instrumental in bringing Emergency Medical Services to the Fire Department. Under his leadership, the Department's investigation division was launched and the Police and Fire Departments combined their communication systems. After his impressive career at the department, Cliff was elected to Wheeling City Council in 1996 and 2000.

I have no doubt that our community is safer today thanks to the efforts of Chief Sligar. Please join me in thanking him and Sherry, his wife of more than 50 years, for these decades of service to the City of Wheeling.

Now, for the words you've all been waiting for—"In closing. . ."

Let me address the public safety issue of the day facing this City Council. For decades, we have asked our first responders to provide first-class services while operating out of undersized, antiquated facilities. And yet they haven't blinked.

It was, after all, just a few short weeks ago, on one of the coldest days of the year, when they showed their mettle combating what could have been a deadly fire at the Ziegenfelder plant in East Wheeling. In reality, our Fire Department had started fighting that fire before it happened. How? Improvements to the plant made in recent years included fire prevention systems required by our inspectors. And before firefighters arrived onsite dealing with frigid temperatures and dangerous chemicals, they knew the plant layout and understood what sections were detrimental to keep fire from spreading to. The result was a contained fire that never became a catastrophic fire.

Lisa Allen, President & CEO of the Ziegenfelder Company, had this to say:

We share our whole-hearted, thanks for the safety, support, and love we have received from the City of Wheeling and our entire surrounding community. Our First Responders are true heroes, without whom our lives would be much different today. The fabric of our community is well-woven and strong, and our Ziegenfelder Tribe is humbled and grateful for our Wheeling community.

Like the members of the Ziggy Tribe, I too consider our first responders heroes. They have not asked us for much. None entered their professions expecting fame or fortune. But they and their chiefs *have* asked us to address the constraints imposed by their facilities. And to that end, last year, this City Council gave voters the opportunity to approve a property tax levy for the construction of a new public safety building to house our police and fire headquarters in Downtown Wheeling.

A solid majority—nearly 54%—of City voters said ‘yes.’ In most—if not all—States, a 54% vote would have sufficed, and the project would have gone forward. But West Virginia is different. Our State constitution does not trust a majority of any city’s voters to approve new revenue sources for municipal investments; it instead requires a 60% supermajority. That’s a high burden, and it is holding cities across West Virginia back from making the tough decisions they need to compete in a rapidly changing world.

For better or worse, this provision of State law is not changing anytime soon. And we cannot afford to wait to solve the problems created by deficiencies in our facilities today. We must act. We cannot keep asking our first responders to give us 100% when we’re not even meeting them halfway. Our public safety is too important.

Now, you may ask, what does “act” mean? I see two steps in front of us:

First, we must decide on a solution. Do we move forward with the new building that 54% of City voters supported last November? Do we instead pursue one of the alternative solutions considered last year? I have asked our City Manager to reconsider the various alternative sites considered last year. I have also asked that he revisit the proposed concept for the new public safety building to identify areas where cost savings could be achieved. I expect his recommendation in the coming weeks and hope that it will give City Council enough information to act on a solution.

The next step, however, is the tougher one: We must decide how to pay for that solution. Chances are that you have heard we are considering a so-called “user fee” for those working within City limits. All other cities in West Virginia of comparable or larger size have enacted user fees for services such as police and fire protection, infrastructure, parking facilities, or the like. Typically, such fees are assessed on a weekly basis, such that a \$1 user fee amounts to \$52 per year. The main advantages to a user fee are twofold: First, it spreads the burden of paying for city services more broadly to include non-residents who work within city limits and therefore benefit from such services. Moreover, it exempts and protects our senior citizens living on fixed incomes.

City Council understands the tough choices in front of us. If and when we consider a user fee to finance improved facilities for our first responders, you can expect a healthy and thorough debate within this body with every member voting his or her conscience. This is, after all, what we signed up for.

Let me end my remarks today just as I did last year by stating what I hope is readily apparent. And that is that as we convene here today in February of 2019, the State of the City of Wheeling is strong and getting stronger each and every day.

Thank you.