

Headline – Donchez achieving goals outlined in 2014 State of City address.

State of the City 2017

March 9, 2017 - ArtsQuest – 8:00 a.m.

Slide 1 - opening

Good morning and welcome.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank ArtsQuest, the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, all the SPONSORS, my department heads and members of City Council for attending this breakfast this morning.

I think I speak for all of us, when I say that we are proud of Bethlehem. We have a long history of economic growth, safety, and community involvement. A history that evokes a sense of pride for having been an important part of the American story.

Slide 2 – Historic Bethlehem

Founded in 1741 on Christmas Eve, our community just finished celebrating its 275th Anniversary, and for being 275 years old...I think we're looking pretty good for our age. Our history, and our deep commitment to the preservation and retelling of that history, has been a calling card of Bethlehem.

Our historic district is a national landmark, and recently, our city was placed on the U.S. tentative list as a World Heritage Site. This list, includes about 1,000 sites worldwide, representing "masterpieces of human creative genius." Sites include the Pyramids of Giza, the Great Wall of China and the Statue of Liberty.

I want to commend the hard work of Historic Bethlehem Museums and Sites, specifically Charlene Donchez Mowers and her Board, for their ongoing efforts to broadcast the story of our City.

Bethlehem has 275 years of rich history. Some of that history speaks to the prosperity of our community, and some of the history highlights challenging times. But one thing we have learned throughout it all, is that if it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't change you.

We have always risen to the occasion and created a better, more stable future for our community, and our children. We are hardworking and determined. Our strength comes from our partnerships, and our ability to work together. United...we can stand up to any adversity.

Financial Information

Slide 3 – Financial Health

During my tenure as Mayor, the city has made great progress in achieving the goals that were outlined in my first State of the City speech just three short years ago. We committed ourselves to several initiatives and improvements, and I'm pleased to say many of these have been accomplished and expanded.

At the center of these goals, is one that will ensure the viability of our City: making Bethlehem financially sound. I am pleased to announce that the state of the City is strong.

Slide 4 – Financial Advisory Committee

Over the last three years, through consultation with my Financial Advisory Committee, changes have been made within City Hall, which have made us leaner, stronger, and

strategically prepared, to tackle and meet the challenges of the future.

Slide 5 – Financial Health - Bond Rating Bar Graph

When I took office, the City had a five year, 40 million dollar projected deficit and a BBB bond rating. Today, the five year projected deficit has been reduced to 12 million dollars and the bond rating has been increased to A- positive outlook. And just 2 weeks ago, S&P increased our rating from A- to A while maintaining a positive outlook. This has been accomplished in 3 years and with a no tax increase budget in 2017. We are leaner...stronger...and it is our ability to work together, with City Council, that has made this progress possible.

Slide 6 – Financial Efficiencies

We have made these improvements through efforts like consolidating departments, embracing new technologies, and remaining committed to delivering important city services to our residents. Last year, City employees paved more miles of road than ever before, and we will continue to invest in the infrastructure of our neighborhoods.

We have become more energy efficient, through the installation of LED traffic signals. We replaced 7,500 feet of water mains in the city and immediate service area, because we are committed to improving the infrastructure needed to support the expansion of businesses. Our water and sewer operations have been able to reinvest capital, from operations at the highest level ever, reducing the need for borrowing. We are moving in the right direction.

This year, we will look to implement automatic meter reading for commercial water customers, and equip our code enforcement and housing inspectors with technology to improve their efficiency.

Slide 7 – Financial Health - Revenues and Expenses

Since my first budget, revenue has increased by almost \$4.2 million, but, more significantly, we have reduced expenses by \$15.4 million. Further, we are working closely with Governor Wolf, Senator Boscola, and Senator Browne regarding the casino host fee, and I am confident it will be resolved.

As we have all read, the Sands is in negotiations to sell the casino. I expect to work with the eventual owners to fulfill the redevelopment commitments made a decade ago and bring further investment to the former Bethlehem Steel property.

Public Safety

Slide 8 – Public Safety

A healthy community is not based only on its financial stability, it also includes the safety of its residents. Police, Fire and EMS departments have continued their excellent work and community outreach during the past year. We have purchased and upgraded public safety equipment, to keep the City's emergency services exceptional.

The purchase of new dash cameras, body cameras for the Police Department and new breathing apparatus for the Fire Department, will enhance the City's ability to respond to emergencies in a timely, professional and safe manner.

Bethlehem is a city that welcomes many tourists each year who support our economy, and I am committed to solidifying special event safety, by having our new Emergency Management Director, former Fire Chief Bob

Novatnack, spearhead efforts to keep these events problem free and fun for all.

Slide 9 – Public Safety

Bethlehem continues to be one of the safest cities in Pennsylvania. The men and women of our police force provide our citizens with a high degree of professionalism and are extremely active in the community, which has become a cornerstone of the department. Our police officers deliver gifts to children in our hospital's pediatric units; connect with youth through Cops N Kids; serve dinner to New Bethany clients; participate in the South Side Trick or Treat night and can be found playing pickup basketball with kids all over the city.

Slide 10 - Ambassadors

The Southside Ambassadors, who continue to ensure a clean and safe experience for businesses, residents and visitors alike, have expanded their service area to Hayes Street which includes the 4 Block International District.

This initiative wouldn't be possible without several partners, including BEDCO, the Bethlehem Redevelopment Authority, Sycamore Hill and 5th Street Capital partners. However, there has been no bigger supporter of this project than Lehigh University.

Without Lehigh's commitment to fund this initiative over the past three years, it would not have happened. And so today, I'm happy to announce Lehigh University's continued support of this initiative for the next three years.

Slide 11 – Vision Zero & “Take me Home”

A few months ago, I announced the implementation of Vision Zero, a program aimed at reducing the number of traffic accidents involving pedestrians in the City. The “Project Lifesaver” and “Take Me Home” initiatives protect the most vulnerable of our citizens, who have difficulty protecting themselves.

Engaging the community is one of the things I enjoy the most. It is rewarding to get to know the hard working residents of our city. Through this public engagement, we have been able to provide meaningful services that are sometimes lifesaving.

Last year, the Fire Department responded to a kitchen fire at a home near Liberty High School. The family was alerted to the fire because of a smoke detector, which was installed only months earlier during one of my neighborhood

walks. Without that smoke detector sounding the alarm, firefighters would have encountered a larger, more dangerous fire to fight. That one smoke detector, which was one of over 1,500 distributed since I have been Mayor, may have been the difference between life and death for this family.

911 Merger/311 Management Center

Slide 12 – Phone Numbers

Two years ago, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania mandated that the City’s 911 center be consolidated with Northampton County, by June 2019. At that time, all 911 calls will go to the county to be dispatched. Because of this consolidation, and my commitment to maintain a high level of service, the City is exploring the possibility of implementing a 311 central access number for all non-

emergency city issues into our emergency operations center.

This will provide more efficiency, better customer service, and more accountability to the public.

Parks

Slide 13 - Parks

Parks and recreation are an essential part of a healthy and livable community.

Last year, I committed to focusing on our park system, and to that end, we have just completed a comprehensive parks and pools study. This study was commissioned to evaluate our park system and to ensure that the citizens of Bethlehem have access to vibrant recreational areas.

This study not only prioritizes necessary improvements, but examines the resources needed to maintain a quality recreation program. This examination was critical in our

ongoing efforts to streamline city operations, and deliver services in the most cost effective way possible, building off the 2014 pledge to you, to operate more efficiently and economically.

One major improvement over the last few years, was to Saucon Park, where I made difficult decisions on how to curb the destruction occurring each weekend. I'm pleased to say the new policies were effective and a peaceful quality of life has been restored to our adjacent neighborhoods.

Downtowns

Slide 14 - Downtowns

Maintaining the infrastructure of our community builds a strong foundation upon which we rely. Strong code enforcement, public works, EMS, Fire and Police are all essential services that are the backbone of our community.

But we are more than a strong foundation...we are not just a City...we are a community...a place people call home.

And it is our ability to forge and maintain partnerships that allow us to take the work of the people beyond the essentials, and further enhance the quality of life that makes Bethlehem unique.

The City has made great strides and remains focused on attracting visitors and promoting our downtowns as appealing destinations.

The face of retail is changing and evolving...and to remain strong and relevant, our downtowns must change and evolve.

It is safe to say, that while online purchases increasingly dominate the retail market, we need to focus on our independently-owned bricks and mortar establishments, that make up our unique shopping districts. We recognize that the strength of our community begins in the core downtown districts.

Slide 15 - Downtowns

We continue to focus revitalization efforts on initiatives that are inclusive and representative of the community; that highlight Bethlehem's distinctive characteristics and historic buildings; and that foster a strong local-business environment.

We will achieve the goal of strengthening our core districts through the implementation of the Downtown Market Analysis, and through the implementation of our

recent internet traffic study, that provides information about the community's online road map.

The Downtown Market Analysis will outline our market demand and the gaps that currently exist. This information will allow us to align our recruitment strategy to the types of businesses that are most likely to become successful within our community.

To further bolster our business districts, I have added a new line item in the 2017 budget that will be used to strategically invest in key areas. First, we will invest in new projects that attract visitors to our community. Second, we will invest in streetscape and capital improvements that will enhance the downtown experience such as street music and art installations. Third, we will refocus the existing staffing efforts that are currently in place to support the downtowns.

Blight Remediation

Slide 16 – Goodman Building

To further stabilize the City’s housing and real estate market, we’re strengthening our blight remediation efforts.

We have increased our efforts to certify problem properties as blighted, in order to have them redeveloped and returned as contributors to the tax base and to their neighborhoods.

The most visible of these efforts has been the Goodman building on the south side. Using the PA conservator statute, we have been able to take control of the building, and are now poised to work with the private sector in rehabilitating this anchor building. This will end years of negative impact it has created for the neighborhood.

Let me be clear: if blighting a building is not enough to get the attention of the property owner, the City is prepared to take control of these buildings and facilitate their redevelopment.

Furthermore, my administration has launched a new project in which buildings, with potential indicators of blight, are being inspected by city staff to prioritize them and determine where best to commit resources.

In addition to assessing the physical structures in the City, we launched a landlord training program, initially developed by the U.S. Department of Justice, to give our city landlords tools, to better manage their properties. We understand that maintaining healthy communities takes a multi-pronged approach and requires the help and partnership of others.

Slide 17 – Housing Rehabilitation

Our housing rehabilitation program continues to improve the housing stock of our city for our lower income residents. We completed 29 of these projects in 2016, repairing everything from broken heating systems and leaking roofs, to the removal of lead paint.

Healthy, safe and affordable housing has a tremendous impact on all facets of life, from the ability of a child to remain in their neighborhood school, to the ability of our area businesses to maintain a strong quality workforce.

I am committed to ensuring our residents have homes that are safe and within reach of the average working family.

I am looking forward to working with Moravian College, the Bethlehem Area School District and the North Side neighborhoods surrounding Thomas Jefferson Elementary and William Penn Elementary Schools to create a community initiative designed to improve the quality of life of our residents. City Council President Reynolds and I will be making an announcement regarding this initiative in the near future.

This is just another way in which the city looks to forge partnerships to leverage resources and improve our communities.

Now, I want to share with you an example of how partnerships, and working together, can make a community stronger.

Slide 18 – Toledo Family & Housing Partnerships

Earlier this year, a once abandoned and blighted property on Garrison Street, which was razed and turned over to Habitat for Humanity for rehabilitation, saw new life as a brand new single family home. The new owners, Rafael and Cindy Lyn Toledo, are in the audience today.

Mr. Toledo told me, that prior to the building being demolished, he went to the property, placed his hands on it, and prayed that it would someday be his and his family's.

That prayer came true!

We thank Habitat for their good work in the city and we thank the Toledo family for wanting to live in Bethlehem and for investing over 250 hours of their own "sweat equity" into the transformation of this property. We appreciate the partnership and will continue to support organizations that are committed to bettering the quality of life of our residents.

Economic Development

Slide 19 – Economic Development

From the Old Waterworks of the Moravians, to Bethlehem Steel that built America's skyline, Bethlehem is a leader in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Today, Bethlehem is considered a haven for new startup companies and technologies. Various facilities throughout the City, house entrepreneurs focused on life science, software development, and other targeted industries.

Bright minds have chosen to call Bethlehem home above all others, and are united under the Southside Bethlehem Keystone Innovation Zone. We manage this program to ensure that these startups receive the necessary support in order to help them to succeed.

Slide 20 - Soltech

The newest company at the City's facility for entrepreneurs, Pi: Partnership for Innovation; is Soltech Solutions. They have created the Aspect...which is a state-of-the-art grow light that mimics the characteristics of natural sunlight and are perfect for the home or office. Unlike many of the startups generated locally, the three partners at Soltech came from outside of the area, in part, because of an article by CNN Money that ranked Bethlehem as one of the best places in the country to "live and launch".

Slide 21 - Small Businesses

Small businesses are a vital contributor to our economy. For over 30 years, small businesses have generated 64% of all new jobs in the nation and represent 99.7% of United States employer firms.

We are proud to welcome diverse businesses here each year and the past year was no exception. These entities are not only a major contributor to our city's economy, they also represent the hopes and dreams of their owners, who face uncertainty, and take risks, to open these businesses. We are so pleased they chose Bethlehem in which to follow those dreams, and know that they will find a supportive community to welcome them.

Slide 22 – Route 412/LVIP/Majestic

Route 412 is finally finished and the southern area of the city is now open for business and easier to access than ever. We've seen renewed interest from companies wanting to locate in this corridor including a new extended stay hotel.

You may have noticed activity at the numerous construction sites across the City making long talked about projects a reality. We look forward to the opening of Greenway Commons, the Southside Parking Deck and Greenway Park at 3rd and New Streets, and the second phase of the Fahy Bridge is underway.

Thanks to Senators Boscola and Browne, clarification has been given to the Community Revitalization and Improvement Zone legislation, allowing once stalled projects to move forward. At the same time, a small amount of CRIZ acreage became available that can now be applied to significant development projects within the City.

(Stepping away from the podium)

Slide 23 – Economic Development Numbers

Slide 24 – Greenway Commons

Slide 25 – 3rd & New Streets

Slide 26 – EcoPax, Reeb Millwork, Etc.

Slide 27 – Moravian Health Sciences Building

Slide 28 – LVHN Muhlenberg Bldg.

Slide 29 – Money Magazine Paragraph

Slide 30 – Citizen Engagement

(back to the podium)

Conclusion

It has been and will continue to be my policy to operate and conduct business with openness and transparency.

Many of you are familiar with my Open Door policy where anyone can come to my office the second Monday of each month to discuss whatever topic they choose.

This allows citizens direct access to me. In the past three years, I have met with over 350 residents to discuss issues that really matter to them.

As long as I am Mayor of the City, it will always be the citizens that are the driving force of what I do, and why I do it. I will continue to do my three Dare to Care neighborhood walks, interacting with different neighborhoods every year. In addition, there is significant community involvement with block watches, the Citizen's Academy, the Citizen's Police Academy, and the Junior Police Academy.

I feel fortunate to live in a community, where citizens are engaged, and willing to be involved for the betterment of Bethlehem.

I cannot stress enough how our ability to work together has allowed Bethlehem to succeed where others would have failed.

Slide 31 - Moonrise

Thank you.

Questions?