



Mayor Steve Williams
City of Huntington

2019 State of the City Address

Mr. Chairman and members of City Council, this message and the accompanying budget are submitted to you in accordance with Article 10, Section 10.2 of the Charter of the City of Huntington, WV.

Last year in my State of the City Message I said that we had affirmed we had an expense problem, not a revenue problem. When we control our expenses, we control our destiny.

City Council, you have conscientiously monitored the financial activity of each department. Your oversight has enabled the city's financial status to become an example of professional pride. A few areas of financial success that have been cited during the past year are:

- An annual audit that held zero findings.
- Public safety pension payments that at one time were seven or more payments in arrears have now been reduced as of this month to one payment behind.
- For the 2nd consecutive year, the budget is projected to have in excess of a \$6 million surplus while funding staffing levels to recommended levels and funding unsurpassed capital expenditures without a tax or fee increase.

City Council and this administration have learned that attention to facts matter. When presented with factual data, effective policy can be enacted. We live by the mantra, "In God we trust, but with everything else, we expect data."

We have controlled our expenses. Hence, we are controlling our destiny.

I am proud of this budget.

The budget presented to you is flat. However, we continue to be ambitious in our aspirations, and this budget reflects the heart of the community.

Our priorities are safety, efficiency, and innovation.

When faced with a problem, create a solution.

We are in the midst of negotiating contracts with each of our bargaining units. We are proposing a 2% raise for each of our bargaining units and administrative personnel in addition to a guarantee of the present insurance program for three years. Naturally, the compensation package and manner in which it will be implemented is subject to negotiation with each of the bargaining units. Our employees deserve a pay raise and certainty in their health benefits for the foreseeable future.

Finance

- Problem – uncontrolled expenses.
- Solution – tight fiscal controls.

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The Finance Department continues to manage every expense and collect every tax and fee that is owed. There cannot be enough praise for the women and men working in the Finance Department. City Manager Cathy Burns, Finance Director Kathy Moore and their team are proposing reorganization within the department to facilitate efficiency and increased effectiveness.

Public Works

- Problem: aging infrastructure, abandoned and substandard buildings.
- Solution: innovation, invention, and aggressive demolition program.

The Public Works Department continues to provide innovative solutions, saving tens of thousands of dollars by designing and building their own equipment.

Since 2013, \$7,366,000 has been allocated for paving, totaling 35.7 miles.

Since 2016, 109 sidewalk projects have been completed, totaling 1.35 miles. Property owners have invested \$61,142 in this public-private program.

Public Works is in its third year of a citywide alley-sweep program. Areas that have been cleaned include Altizer, Guyandotte, Highlawn, Fairfield, Southside, West Huntington, and Westmoreland. Public Works also has continued its weekend street clean-up program in the downtown area during the spring, summer, and fall.

This spring, \$1.5 million of paving will be provided to complete paving for the present fiscal year. Additional paving in the amount of \$800,000 will be scheduled for the fall paving program.

\$2.5 million for paving, street repair, street construction, sidewalk construction and emergency repairs are recommended for capital improvements for FY 2020.

100 buildings are targeted for demolition in 2019. Thirteen of those have already been taken down. 53 dilapidated structures were demolished between late fall 2017 and the end of 2018. Amazingly, more than \$400,000 has been donated by private individuals for demolition. Most have been anonymous donors. Realtor Necia Freeman and her company, Old Colony, donated \$8,000 and have issued a challenge to other Realtors in the area to match their donation. We all have witnessed Necia's passion for our community and appreciate the fact that in every public appearance, she challenges her audience to donate to demolition efforts.

Police

- Problem: perception of lack of safety.
- Solution: innovative staffing, partnerships.

The budgets for the past two years have been the largest Police Department budgets in the 10 years since I returned to City Hall.

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A strategy to re-establish partnerships with federal and state law enforcement agencies has brought helpful technical assistance and resources that enable us to restore safety to our neighborhoods. U.S. Attorney Michael Stuart, Secretary Jeff Sandy of the West Virginia Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety, and Major General James Hoyer of the West Virginia National Guard have been steadfast in their support of our efforts.

The command staff of HPD has set a standard that permeates throughout the department. There is one goal – the renewed sense of safety in our neighborhoods. New deployment and scheduling strategies are ensuring more officers are on the street. All hands are on deck. One mind – One goal.

The results speak for themselves. Murder is down 52.94%. Robberies are down 30.28%. Burglary is down 17.58%. Aggravated assault is down 20.42%.

Violent crime is down 20.94%. Property crime is down 12.28%.

Total offenses in 2017 were 10,125.

Total offenses in 2018 were 8,292 – a reduction of 18.10%

We are not where we want to be – but we are trending in the right direction.

We are again budgeting for 108 officers in the coming year. The command staff has adjusted their recruiting strategy. I believe strongly that we have to raise the starting salaries of the new recruits. Last year, City Council budgeted for a signing bonus for police officers who are already certified. We are committed to attracting and retaining the best and will not sacrifice quality for quantity.

Presently, every officer working a patrol zone is driving a new, marked cruiser. Eighteen new vehicles have been purchased this year. Ten cruisers have been purchased utilizing general fund appropriations. An additional 8 vehicles were purchased using asset forfeiture and seizure money.

We are budgeting for an additional five vehicles for FY'20.

Fire

- Problem: aging stations and equipment.
- Solution: renovate or replace stations, create annual rotations for apparatus/equipment acquisitions.

The budget passed for the Fire Department last year was the largest in the history of the department. This year's recommended budget is even larger. The rank and file have been involved in significant planning regarding facilities during the past year.

We have particular concerns about 3 of our 6 stations that must be addressed immediately.

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- We are scheduling the complete overhaul of the Guyandotte station.
- A new fire station will be constructed on 20th Street and 9th Avenue to replace the present station on 20th Street and 6th Avenue. Property has been acquired. Plans have been commissioned. The replacement station is being funded utilizing CDBG and general fund appropriations.
- A new station in Westmoreland will be constructed to replace the old station. An architect will complete the planning process, which will affirm where the station will be located. Once that is completed, plans will be commissioned.

We also have an aging fleet and we need to begin an annual schedule to replace vehicles and apparatuses. This year, we have purchased a new pumper truck and a new vehicle. The proposed budget is also recommending a new vehicle purchase and a new apparatus that will be determined by the command staff of the Fire Department.

It is necessary that the rank and file have proper gear. Turnout gear was recently acquired. There is a need for each firefighter to have a set of backup gear. We are budgeting for a new set of turnout gear for each firefighter. Once that is in, the gear that was recently purchased will become the backup gear.

The Fire Department was budgeted for 95 firefighters last year. They are now fully staffed. We believe that a fully-staffed department that is outfitted with proper gear, new vehicles and new apparatuses is crucial.

Economic Development

ABC Winnings

The \$3 million prize has proven to be an enabler beyond what we imagined. The four projects are being developed in different manners and at different paces. Long-term sustainability and community involvement were among the criteria that were measured by the ABC judges.

Throughout the description of our economic development efforts, you will consistently hear of the ABC cash infusion that has allowed the projects to proceed.

The founders of the ABC competition wisely required that the winning proceeds had to be placed in a nonprofit foundation to hold, disburse, and ensure that the winning proceeds were being spent properly.

The Foundation for the Tri-State Community has held the proceeds and disbursed the dollars that have been committed. The Foundation also is responsible for requiring each organization that receives an allocation to report measurable results. When the \$3 million award is finally disbursed, we will be able to indicate specifically what resulted from the allocation and the sustainable results of leveraged investment, job creation, and measurable growth.

Highlawn

- Problem: vacant factories, declining neighborhood.

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- Solution: buy the unused factories and land, demolish the substandard homes.

The Highlawn Brownfields project has many components. HMDA has been in active negotiations with three different companies to acquire their property. The Ingram Barge Property is under option and the option expires on March 31, 2019. The ABC winnings provided \$100,000 for the option on the property. HMDA expects to exercise that option by the expiration date. HMDA is having ongoing discussions with ACF Industries.

We are excited that HMDA is getting closer toward announcing the purchase of 8 acres from Flint Pigments on the north side of 5th Avenue. The ABC winnings will provide \$500,000 toward the \$800,000 acquisition, which will enable Marshall University to proceed with their plans to build a new baseball stadium.

West End

- Problem: no traffic, dilapidated buildings.
- Solution: create a destination location, incentives for acquiring vacant properties.

On the opposite side of town, the West End has a dynamic opportunity developing because of its proximity to I-64. Exit 5 rests just one-fourth of a mile from the exit ramps to Madison Avenue and Adams Avenue. In turn, Westmoreland is a short drive down Madison Avenue and Piedmont Road. I have said numerous times that the West End and Westmoreland area are the city's diamonds in the rough.

The antique district and surrounding properties on 14th Street West have the greatest redevelopment potential of any area in the state.

More than 20 million vehicles a year pass by Huntington on the interstate. A simple trickle of that traffic off the interstate on Exit 5 to visit the antique district, museums, Heritage Farm, and other attractions would create an explosion of activity in the area.

When completed, the All-Inclusive Playground at St. Cloud Commons alone will make this area a primary destination location for visitors from hundreds of miles away.

The Coalfield Development Corporation led by Brandon Dennison has captured the imagination of the nation. Out-of-work coal miners and displaced factory workers are receiving training to combine their skills from previous occupations with compatible skills for new burgeoning businesses.

The redevelopment of the old Corbin Factory into the West Edge Factory has been an unbridled success. Coalfield Development has helped start more than 50 new businesses, six of those at West Edge. They have also trained more 800 individuals with 350 of those being trained at West Edge.

Coalfield Development has also acquired the long-vacant Black Diamond property and is applying for assistance from the U.S. EPA to help clean up the property. Our Congressional delegation is providing much-needed assistance.

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To date, more than \$670,000 has been committed from our ABC winnings to assist our efforts in the West End and Westmoreland. The beginning steps of creating a Main Street program on 14th Street West has begun through a partnership with the West Virginia Department of Commerce.

Councilman Bates has suggested the creation of an incentive program in the West End to encourage the acquisition and redevelopment or refurbishing of vacant properties. I would suggest the establishment of a pilot project to help determine if this could be used throughout targeted areas of the city. Perhaps the waiver of the municipal service fee for a number of years could be established.

Fairfield

- Problem: declining neighborhood next to thriving commercial enterprises.
- Solution: create partnerships between local enterprises and the leaders of the neighborhood; sustainable development designed by the community.

The most active neighborhood in establishing a revitalization effort has been Fairfield. The Fairfield Alliance was created as an informal gathering of individuals, businesses, institutions, churches and faith groups, and community leaders intended to break down silos and create a means of communication to together determine the direction and destiny of the neighborhood.

Much planning has taken place and a series of initiatives has begun. A US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Choice Neighborhood Grant was awarded to the City of Huntington and the Huntington Housing Authority. The Choice Neighborhood Grant will begin the planning process to formalize the creation of a sustainable revitalization program.

A community development corporation named the Fairfield Development Corporation is in the process of being established. This is an important development. The residents of the neighborhood must be the architect and owners of their future. It is imperative that whatever developments are planned – they must be sustainable for decades into the future.

To date, \$1,707,000 has been assigned for planning and development in the Fairfield neighborhood from federal and state grants, philanthropic grants, ABC winnings, and general fund appropriations.

There is an urgent need for street lighting along the Hal Greer Corridor. Hal Greer Boulevard is a major artery into the city and is so dark it creates an impression that the area is unsafe. This is unacceptable and must be corrected immediately.

The city Planning and Zoning Department has estimated that between 204 and 165 lights are needed between Washington Boulevard and 3rd Avenue, including wall mounted security lighting in the underpass. The cost is projected to range from \$687,000 to \$550,000. The KYOVA Interstate Planning Commission is assisting the city in applying for a safety grant.



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Gigabit City

- Problem: lack of competitive infrastructure to attract 21st century investment.
- Solution: build infrastructure, attract corporate partners, and utilize university expertise.

Efforts are continuing to deploy high speed broadband and to provide latest technology information systems for the city.

Our ABC winnings have committed \$86,000 for assistance in asset mapping, data collection analysis, analysis of the city's permitting and operating procedure as well as ordinances that would impact the process for a provider seeking to locate in Huntington.

Our efforts are beginning to show results. We are pleased to announce that AT&T has committed that Huntington will be the first city in West Virginia to deploy 5G. AT&T has deployed 5G in parts of Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas, Houston, Indianapolis, Louisville and other large cities around the nation. AT&T is committed to deploy 5G in every state and Huntington has strategic significance in their corporate strategy.

Quality of Life

- Problem: perception that the community is not welcoming to diversity.
- Solution: actively show the public the loving face of the community.

Huntington has begun to receive national recognition for our efforts in advancing our values as a diverse and welcoming community.

I am quite proud of the values of acceptance and inclusion exhibited in the lives of our residents. To that end, I believe we are long overdue to reconstitute the Huntington Human Rights Commission that was abandoned more than 10 years ago. The ordinance is still in effect. We simply need to appoint new board members. I will be providing board recommendations to City Council for their consideration and approval. In turn, this budget has a modest allocation for staffing for the Huntington Human Rights Commission.

Drug Epidemic

- Problem: growing epidemic that has taken over the nation.
- Solution: identify sooner what solutions work, what doesn't and how to fix it.

Once known as the "epicenter of the epidemic," we have been visited by the U.S. Surgeon General, the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Director of the National Office of Drug Control Policy, and the British Ambassador to the United States. Overdoses and overdose deaths are down.

Instead of being known as the "epicenter of the epidemic," we are now acknowledged as the "epicenter of the solution."

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One significant example of innovation occurred right here among our own employees. Development and Planning Director Scott Lemley indicated he had read about compassion fatigue among individuals who had been assisting others who faced trauma.

We came to understand that we had to help the helpers. As much concern as we have for those fighting the disease of substance use disorder – we had to make sure we were directing our resources to help our own. After all, first responders need to be cared for in order for them to care for the community.

We applied for a grant with the Bloomberg Foundation regarding our compassion fatigue program for first responders. We were one of nine cities that received \$1 million grants to create a solution to address a significant problem that could be replicated around the world.

The results in our program can be replicated for first responders in every city and county in the nation. But it also will be replicable for other traumatic incidents such as natural disasters and school shootings. Hospital and medical personnel will benefit as well.

The epicenter of solutions.

The question then is, what is the state of our city? What is the state of my Huntington?

- A budget surplus
- Crime data down, overdoses down, overdose deaths down
- Investment in the community up
- Investment in infrastructure up
- Employee raises and protection of health benefits
- Multiple innovative solutions
- All without tax or fee increases for 4 years

What is the state of the city? Strong. The data confirms it.

Of course we have challenges. More challenges will arise. Guarantee it. But we know we were made for a time like this.

We have proven time and again in our city government, in our neighborhoods, in our businesses, in our school systems, and in our families that we have the ingenuity and the fortitude to identify and invent innovation.

What is the State of the City of Huntington?

My Huntington is strong – Huntington strong.

A city of solutions.

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