

# CITY OF BOWIE STATE OF THE CITY REPORT



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Greater Bowie Chamber of Commerce  
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Good morning.

Thank you to the Greater Bowie Chamber of Commerce for giving me the opportunity to address you and to boast about my hometown.

Let's begin with some excellent news. The MAGLEV high-speed train project no longer poses a threat to Bowie! Last week, we learned that the remaining alignment alternative with the potential to do serious damage to our city and our quality of life, had been officially eliminated.

We appreciate the efforts of all who had a role in addressing this challenge. They include my Council colleagues and City staff who worked hard to keep the pressure on to eliminate the Bowie routes from consideration. I am also grateful to community members who rallied in support of Bowie's position. They showed themselves to be a thoughtful, civic, and resourceful group and I congratulate them for their hard work.

We also appreciate the work of our State delegation and I thank our four Congressional representatives who stood with us on this issue. Their help is noted and appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank Governor Hogan and State Transportation Secretary Rahn for their willingness to work with us and for their cooperation in making sure that if the MAGLEV train project moves forward, it will never disrupt any Bowie neighborhoods.

In light of that, this year has definitely had its moments and its challenges, but I can unequivocally say that Bowie remains one of the region's success stories.

We are a strong community.

We are a safe community.

We are a respected community.

We are a caring community.

In short, Bowie is an incredible place if you are a resident, a business owner, a visitor, or a shopper; and we are pleased you have chosen to be here. Through the combined efforts of a great many people, the State of the City is strong!

To recap where we've come from:

- In 1960, Bowie had a population of 1,000.
- In 1990, 37,000 people lived here.
- In 2000, our population reached 50,000.
- By the 2010 Census, there were 55,000 residents.

And, today, there are approximately 58,000 people who call Bowie home.

That makes us the fifth largest city Maryland, with a population now greater than 8 of Maryland's counties.

We are home to more than 30 houses of worship and 14 public schools. About 12% of our population is over 65 and another 24% of the population is under 18.

This Senior Center keeps our seniors entertained, challenged and involved. It is a very popular place and the only nationally accredited senior center in the state of Maryland and one of 115 nationwide.

We have two huge boys and girls clubs that provide recreational and athletic programs to the thousands of our youngest and while kids aren't always aware of it, while they are playing sports, they are getting important life-lessons in communications, leadership, and interacting with others.

We have an expanding business sector that provides a wide range of services and job opportunities.

We have marvelous medical and life supporting health organizations that keep us healthy and vibrant.

The Bowie Business Innovation Center, or the Bowie BIC as it is commonly known, is a wonderful resource for young businesses. Last year, a record 1,070 County entrepreneurs utilized the BIC's services--67% of them were Bowie-based businesses. This demonstrates a commitment to a new generation of entrepreneurs generally, and to women entrepreneurs in particular.

Most Bowieites are doing well:

- The median household income in Bowie is \$106,000;
- The median house value is \$347,000;
- 96% of our residents have a high school degree; and
- 50% of the population has at least a college degree.
- However, we do have a small percentage who live below the poverty line.

Communications are important. That is why we are stepping up our outreach efforts. We have developed a new Communications Plan to make sure we are reaching people where they go for news about Bowie, and why we have expanded our social media presence with Instagram and more departmental Twitter and Facebook accounts.

We have also introduced a new mobile application called *My BowieMD* to make it easier for anyone to request a service or report a problem in Bowie. With *MyBowieMD* on your phone, you can report a problem from anywhere and attach a photo. The app also allows you to pay water bills or speeding citations, find out what days your trash and recycling are picked up, who is your Councilmember, and more, all with just a few clicks on your mobile device.

One thing that will no doubt affect us this year will be recent federal actions related to taxes, federal spending, and tax policies.

- Federal tax rates have been cut for individuals and businesses;
- State and local tax deductions have been reduced;
- The healthcare marketplace is in flux; and
- More social service programs are being shifted to the state and local levels.

It is not yet clear yet how these changes may alter the State budget or if the City government's bottom line will be affected, but rest assured, we will be monitoring the situation closely and we will continue to maintain our careful approach to budgeting and spending.

That careful approach means:

- We plan and save for major expenditures;
- We balance our budgets;
- We pay our bills;
- We have strong reserves; and
- When borrowing makes sense for major construction projects, we do it at very favorable rates, thanks to our triple A (AAA) bond rating, a distinction held by only one other city in Maryland.

We are indebted to predecessors like Mayor Dick Logue and former City Manager Charlie Moore for creating a strong Pay-As-You-Go system that, quite frankly, we could not capitalize today. The groundwork they laid more than 25 years ago has kept us on solid financial footing. We are grateful to these folks and a litany of great Councilmembers and City staff over the years that built a strong Bowie for the future.

I must also take a moment to recognize the former dynamic duo of David Deutsch and John Fitzwater who managed our city government for more than 20 years. David retired in 2016 and John departed for a well-earned retirement in early January. Together they managed our multifaceted municipal organization with a firm and steady hand. We are grateful for their dedicated service.

A year into his tenure as City Manager, it is clear that Alfred Lott is continuing that fine tradition of strong leadership and steady management of a government that is always responsive to the needs of its constituents.

Finance Director Byron Matthews and his staff continue to ensure that our bills are paid and that spending remains within the budget we adopt. Moreover, he accomplishes this while maintaining a tradition of excellence in the City's finances that has earned us a Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting for every year since 1974.

This year, our Finance Department successfully negotiated a reduction in the County property tax rate for Bowie taxpayers for services that are provided by the City rather than the County. Since the City provides police services, recreational amenities, animal control, code compliance, and stormwater management services for those who live and work here, Bowie taxpayers should not have to pay taxes to the County for those services. The County agreed to a tax adjustment, which resulted in a \$0.15-cent reduction in the \$1.00 per \$100 of assessed property value, for homeowners in the incorporated area of Bowie. Or, to put it another way, if your house is assessed at \$350,000, this negotiated discount will save you \$525 on your County tax bill.

Twenty years ago, the assessable base in Bowie was about \$1 billion. Today, the assessable base is approaching \$7 billion. Retail businesses, office buildings, and other commercial entities are helping to shift the tax burden from homeowners to other sources. This has allowed us to embark on capital projects and major expansions of services while keeping city tax rates flat.

The most shining example of this is the Bowie Police Department. We began it just over a decade ago, with a detailed plan, and a caution that it would cost money and probably require tax increases. Today the full service department, with an authorized force of 65 officers, is an integral part of our community. They have obtained Bowie's respect the old-fashioned way...they earned it. And we have kept the tax rate the same for the last 8 years!

Our officers are in our neighborhoods, in commercial areas, and in the schools. They are keeping our roadways safe and they are at numerous community events. In the last week or two, they have also been hearing from residents at a series of town hall meetings.

On December 11, 2017, the Bowie Police Department began to self-dispatch on their own channel. This means that when a resident calls the Bowie Police non-emergency number, their call is handled from start to finish by a Bowie employee. This also represents another step towards updating and improving communications and operability for all of the City's field services.

The final step of this project in FY19 will allow direct radio communication between the Call Center and Animal Control, Code Enforcement, Park Rangers, and Public Works. The Police Department is also going through the rigorous process of becoming nationally accredited.

As in your business, customer service drives everything we do. From reliable, efficient trash and recycling services, to inviting parks and other recreational facilities, and a host of popular community events, we are always looking to do better, to be more efficient, and to be innovators when we can.

You can see our folks out there in all kinds of weather, patrolling the neighborhoods, plowing the roads, and keeping Bowie looking beautiful. They take pride in their work and in serving our residents. They are a treasure.

I would like to tell you about two of them.

**Missy Marlette** has been with the City since 1995. She works in the Public Works Department, where the Streets and the Utilities Divisions rely on her outstanding skills to manage service requests, prepare and track budgets, manage assets, and purchase supplies and equipment. She took the initiative to convert what had been essentially been a paper-based record keeping system into a modern GIS-based asset tracking system, that allows us to manage many Public Works operations more efficiently.

And --when there is a major snowstorm, Missy is an essential part of the operation, keeping track of the many plowing contractors, and keeping meticulous records. Because of her attention to detail, Missy has played an important role in every FEMA reimbursement claim the City has ever made, including one that netted the city \$283,000 a few years ago.

She is a great example of a great group of city employees. I would like to ask Ms. Marlette to stand for a moment so we can acknowledge her outstanding service.

The other employee I would like to highlight today is Bowie Police Officer, **Private First Class Tyler Zittle**. Last year, on two different occasions, he was instrumental in saving lives. In the first instance, a young girl had wandered off from her home on a freezing cold day. There were grave concerns for her safety, because of a ravine and very marshy conditions nearby, especially when a lone shoe was found in the mud. PFC Zittle waded through knee-deep mud, to find and ultimately rescue the child, barefoot, cold and frightened, but uninjured, and returned her to a very grateful mother.

On another occasion, he saved the life of a driver involved in a motor vehicle accident. When Officer Zittle came upon the accident scene, he found one of the victims slumped over the steering wheel, blue in the face, and with only a faint pulse. He immediately administered CPR until EMTs could arrive. The victim regained consciousness and was breathing normally by the time he was transported by ambulance. We are proud to say, that if not for the quick actions of PFC Zittle in both of these instances, the outcomes could have been tragic.

Officer Zittle is just one of many who work to ensure that the state of our city is not only strong, but also a safe one as well. I would like to ask Tyler Zittle to stand for a moment so we can acknowledge his service.

Officer Zittle and the dedicated men and women of our Police Department and the career and Volunteer Firefighters/EMS workers are keeping us safe and are building bridges in our community through programs such as:

- Special Olympics
- Shop with a Cop
- Self-defense, CPR, and fire extinguisher training
- And perhaps, most importantly, by ensuring safe passage of Santa through our neighborhoods on the back of a firetruck each holiday season!

Our city continues to be a leader in encouraging a sustainable lifestyle and work environment.

- We have initiated a Green Citizen award.
- We now certify businesses as being green.
- There is a food waste collection program up and running in seven (7) neighborhoods. So far, we have diverted 18,000 pounds of food waste from the landfill.
- We have installed solar-powered trash and recycling compactors near the high school.
- A solar array on the Entzian property will be operational soon and will increase our renewable energy generation by 61% and decrease our carbon footprint.
- We have been awarded a grant that will help us to increase the tree canopy.
- We are promoting Community Sourced Agriculture.
- And, when Bowie celebrates Earth Day, it is an all-month affair – with a Green Expo, film screenings, training sessions, and more!

These are all things that contribute to the fine quality of life that we enjoy in Bowie. But, it is the shared experiences and shared commitments to improving life for others that bind us to each other and that keep us engaged. It is what makes a collection of streets into a neighborhood and a development into a community.

It is the thousands of Bowie residents who volunteer their time helping children, the disabled, the less fortunate, our veterans, and our seniors. They are PTA leaders, coaches, mentors, and scout leaders. They are the people you see involved at their houses of worship -- collecting food for the hungry, visiting shut-ins, or teaching CCD.

They serve at the Bowie Pantry. They host temporary homeless shelters through the Warm Nights Program. They are members of the Lions Club who sponsor programs for the sight impaired and a host of other things. They are the brave men and women of the Bowie Volunteer Fire Department and they are the seasoned veterans working to show young veterans how to get the services they need.

They are also the more than 100 men and women who regularly give their time to serve on 16 City committees. They help run our elections, promote the arts, review development proposals, and guide our government in a variety of ways. They are an incredibly talented, enthusiastic, and dedicated group of men and women, and the City is fortunate to have them.

Harlan Tucker was one of these volunteers. He served from 1978 to 2017 on the City's Recreation Committee. He cared deeply about Bowie and how it grew and prospered. He recognized that recreation strengthened the body and the mind and he worked to make sure that Bowie's offerings were varied and accessible to all.

He was also a consensus builder, a planner, an Army colonel, and a true gentleman. He nudged us always to do more for our residents and to do it better. He passed away last year at age 94 and we miss him. He was a true reflection of all that is good in Bowie.

We also lost another Bowie icon this past year, Howard "Dusty" Shrodes. Dusty was the managing partner of the Bowie Golf Course and I can personally attest to his patience whenever he played golf with me. Dusty was one of the finest men I have ever known – a combat marine in the Korean War, a smart businessman, and a great friend to the City of Bowie. We miss him as well.

As your business is constantly evolving and adapting to meet new challenges, so too must our city keep moving forward. That does not mean we lose our identity or forget what got us here, but it means that we responsibly mix the old and the new to keep our city vibrant and a desirable place to live and work. We cannot view all development as bad, nor can we declare opposition to all building in Bowie.

Instead, we must continue to manage growth carefully and responsibly and balance the rights of all property owners when new development is proposed. Our goal is to seek balance in a multigenerational community where residential Bowie and business Bowie prosper together.

Remember, Bowie does not control its own destiny when it comes to development. Those decisions lie ultimately with Prince George's County. We can oppose all expansion and building, but we will not prevail. So, we try to influence development outcomes that will best match our needs.

That is why we insist on quality designs, attractive recreational amenities, a percentage of housing for seniors, and why we push to limit density when we can. Development decisions are never easy ones, nor are they always popular, but I assure you they are made with the best intentions for Bowie's present and future.

We are fortunate that our region has rebounded from the Great Recession. In 2017, unemployment averaged under 3.5% here, which is under the national average of 4.1%. We have seen some incredible sales numbers. The median sales price of a Bowie house was \$347,000 in 2017. At present, the average length of time on the market here is 39 days, which is better than Crofton, Anne Arundel County and Prince George's County.

Not only is residential real estate doing well, but some projects that were dormant during the recession are now coming to fruition.

One of the places you can see much activity is at Melford.

- In 2017, we celebrated the opening of the Conservation and Research Center for the Smithsonian's Holocaust Museum.
- Site work is underway for the 140-unit Thrive Assisted Living Facility.
- A Courtyard by Marriott hotel with 137 rooms is under construction near the entrance to Melford, and
- Just last month Council approved the Detailed Site Plan for the 389-unit Aspen Apartments at Melford Village.

Each of these is a quality project that will strengthen our local economy by providing new residential opportunities, new employment opportunities, and new amenities. They will also diversify our tax base and further reduce our dependence on residential property taxes.



Inovalon Corporation is the city's largest private employer. We are delighted they have signed a new 10-year lease to keep their corporate headquarters and their 750 employees here. They are a valued and important part of our city and we are pleased with their decision to stay.

Other local retail properties continue to be desirable assets. For example, The Shoppes at Bowie Town Center, behind the mall, is 98% leased, and recently sold to JAR New York RLT for \$21 million. Hilltop Plaza also has a new owner and is 86% leased.

The bottom line is that Bowie remains an attractive place to locate your business.

But, Bowie is not immune to national trends or outside forces. Shoppers are spending more of their money online and making fewer visits to brick and mortar stores. Some chains that have been around for decades are waning, and new ones are taking their place and being very successful.

Thankfully, we have active retail property owners who work hard to market their centers, recruit new tenants and repurpose space when necessary. A perfect example of this is the new BJ's Brew Pub at the Town Center, that now welcomes patrons to a location once occupied by Sears Auto Center.

We have some exciting new public projects coming up in the next few years as well, including a new, two-ice rink facility on Church Road, renovations to White Marsh Park, to the amphitheater at Allen Pond Park, and a new Heritage Trail in Old Town Bowie.

Our region is, in some way, a victim of its own success. As our City has grown, traffic has increased. We continue to work with our state partners to secure funding to widen 197, to improve 450, and to make traffic flow better on Routes 3 and 301. We are also working to implement traffic calming measures on Belair Drive to mitigate the impact of Melford traffic coming through the residential neighborhood.

We have good news on the status of a newly renovated Tulip Grove Elementary School. Finally, we can see real progress and we are hopeful that the school will open later this year. We must continue to advocate for renovations at the other public schools that were built in the 1960s and for a long overdue, second high school for Bowie.

One of the benefits of local government is that we are never at a loss to know what people think. We are close to those we represent. The people that we sit with in church, or see at the grocery store, or on the ballfield are our constituents and they are not bashful in letting us know what they like and do not like, or what they want or need from their city government.

My colleagues and I listen. We work with staff to plan and implement, and then we evaluate and we refine and hopefully we are always moving forward to produce a better product, a better outcome, or a better service for our residents.

Our City motto is "Growth, Unity and Progress". It was adopted in the 1960s when Bowie was changing from a small railroad village to a growing city. It perfectly encapsulated the importance

of change. I think the motto is as relevant today as it was then. With unity, growth becomes progress.

In summary, I am still proud to call Bowie my hometown. It is a fact, not a boast that Bowie is the strongest most diverse, most family friendly city in the region. We have a great history and our future is limited only by our imagination and our willingness to work together.

We are committed to being worthy successors to those that came before us. We are committed to the proposition that in all things, in all questions, and in all opportunities, the fundamental focus must be on Bowie and on our future.

As I bid you good day, I ask that as you leave today and enjoy your great business environment here, that you take a brief moment think about the outstanding Americans serving around the world in our military services – particularly those serving in harm's way.

Thank you all for coming. Thank you for all you do our community.