

# **CITY OF BOWIE**

## **STATE OF THE CITY REPORT**



**MAYOR G. FREDERICK ROBINSON**

Presented to the Greater Bowie Chamber of Commerce  
February 22, 2019

Good morning. I would like to thank the Greater Bowie Chamber of Commerce for the opportunity to present the 2019 State of the City. It is always a pleasure to be with you. I thank you for being here today and for your efforts to make Bowie a great place to live and work.

Thanks too, to the Senior Center staff for providing the space for our meeting this morning. It is always great to visit this beautiful facility.

The Senior Center is a lot of things to a lot of people – but one of the important things for me is that it is a gathering place for many of the folks that helped make Bowie the wonderful place it is – it is often where we encounter those that helped convert a development into a welcoming community.

Bowie has a great history, a vibrant present and a future limited only by our imagination and our willingness to continue building on our great history – on that note - let me say clearly, the state of the city is strong!

We remain the strongest, most diverse, most family-friendly community in the region. We are a vibrant multi-generational community that cares about our city and about our neighbors. A once small railroad community is now one of the largest and most welcoming cities in the state and our growth, progress and prosperity continues. In brief summary:

- In 1960, our population was 1,000.
- In 1990, our population was 37,000.
- In 2000, our population reached 50,000
- By the 2010 Census, our population exceeded 55,000 residents
- And our latest estimated City population numbers 58,290.

Earlier this month *USA Today* named Bowie as the best city in which to live in the state of Maryland. Safe streets, a strong economy, affordability and entertainment options were some of the factors considered. Bowie's proximity to Washington, DC and its well-educated residents with household incomes higher than the state median contributed to its designation as best city in the state. We certainly agree with the folks at *USA Today* and thank them for this recognition.

No doubt our diverse City recreational offerings contribute to our favorable quality of life as well. Offerings range from active parks, trails, athletic fields and playgrounds, to the popular Ice Arena and the City Gymnasium, to quiet parks that offer a pleasant place to relax or simply enjoy a good book.

Last year, these areas hosted 330 group picnics, 16 special events, 19,500 Ice Arena admissions, 315,400 Gym patrons and thousands of matches on 130 acres of athletic turf, among many other recreational endeavors. Our facilities are the envy of the region.

Our dynamic senior population enlivens our city and is served by this facility, the only nationally accredited senior center in Maryland. Last year, the Center hosted 10,700 adult learners in 623 classes, 7,000 travelers on 200 trips and special events, and safely transported more than 33,000 bus passengers over 80,000 miles to events, doctors' appointments and shopping.

Our museums offer a glimpse back at colonial American estate life and a storied Thoroughbred racing history, at historic railroad operations, at radio and television history, and we even offer a genealogy library, if you want to explore your personal history. Last year, our historic properties welcomed 13,200 visitors.

We are home to some very talented performers that animate our social life with music, drama and comedy. Our 153-seat Playhouse offered 89 theatrical performances last year.

We are blessed to be the home of a large number of military veterans and veteran's organizations. We are thankful for their service to our nation and we are proud to call them "neighbor".

In the area of core services, we maintain our streets and sidewalks very well. We plow our streets quickly and effectively. We efficiently collect refuse and recycling and the City Police Department effectively patrols the City's neighborhoods and business areas.

Our goal is to create and maintain an environment that is safe and inviting for our residents and one that encourages businesses to grow and prosper, and to that end I believe we have been very successful.

A true sense of service is very important to us, as it is to you and your business. Our goal is simple, to provide reliable, courteous service to all who live or work here, and I am incredibly proud of the outstanding City staff that delivers such great service to our community.

Sometimes extraordinary examples of service are rendered in a most unexpected situation ...

On March 13, 2018 the City's solid waste crew of Jonathan Johnson, Kevin Ray and Sedrick Cox were collecting refuse when they came upon a 93-year-old resident lying near the curb in a Pointer Ridge neighborhood. Mr. Ray removed his jacket and covered the woman to keep her warm. Mr. Johnson also removed his jacket and outer shirt to cover her and prop her head. The crew called 911 and Mr. Ray and Mr. Cox administered first aid as directed by the 911 operator.

When a rescue squad was slow in arriving, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Cox went to the nearest fire house to seek assistance. The two then returned to the scene to assist in caring for the injured woman. The crew stayed with her until a rescue squad arrived and transported her to the hospital.

Later, the City crew learned the woman had suffered a broken shoulder, wrist and nose, among other injuries, after falling in the street earlier. Without the exemplary actions of these City employees, the outcome could have been tragic.

We are grateful to Jonathan Johnson, Kevin Ray and Sedrick Cox for their extraordinary deeds. And we would like to recognize them for their outstanding, perhaps lifesaving, action. I would like to ask them to stand so we can publically recognize these outstanding City employees.

In an effort to enhance and support an environment that is safe and inviting, the City adopted the Bowie Sustainability Plan in 2016. It builds upon the City's Climate Action Plan and all the other green-minded work that has come before it. This plan addresses our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet future needs.

In further support of the Sustainability Plan, the City has seen an increase in the number of green businesses and public options such as compost bins and solar panels and recycling. The number of residents participating in the Food Waste Collection Programs are at an all-time high, as is the number of subscribers to all City social media.

As a result of these efforts, the City was recognized in 2018 with the prestigious Leadership Award from the Maryland Green Registry in acknowledgement of our progress on the Sustainability Plan and Climate Action Plan. Thanks again to an outstanding professional City staff for this accomplishment.

All this is not only good for the environment it is good for our budget. Last year's savings from recycling rather than landfilling was almost \$300,000.

Bowie is strong not only because we prepare solid plans and are guided by sound fiscal policies, but because we take that planning responsibility seriously. We plan, we look forward and we do all we can to anticipate what's coming so we will be ready - but we always save and plan too, for the unexpected.

Bowie is strong because we work with the local economy in positive ways through policies and tax rates; by creating a business friendly atmosphere and by providing a positive environment for you to run your business. We remain convinced the residential and business communities are bonded together to progress together and to prosper together.

Twelve years after the first City officers began patrols in Bowie, the Police Department has become a model for the region with a sworn strength of 60 officers and four currently in the academy. The Department's newest addition is Copper, a Bloodhound. He is our second K-9. His duties will involve helping to find lost or injured citizens and his handler is Officer Ryan Shifflett. I am pleased to note that while soliciting names for Copper from the public – the Police Chief wisely rejected a recommendation to name the dog G. Fred.

Our Police Department has built a strong relationship with residents, business groups, community groups, and its partners in the Prince George's County Police Department. Our officers constantly work to strengthen ties with these groups through education and community programs such as the Bowie Explorers, the Citizens' Academy, Shop With a Cop and Cop for a Day, to name just a few.

This success is a reflection of strong leadership that is innovative and accessible and by an operation that is transparent. Our officers reflect their community in every aspect. They are invested in Bowie and they take crimes that threaten Bowie seriously. We are incredibly proud of the men and women of the Bowie Police Department. The men and women of the Bowie Police Department have achieved incredible public support in the old-fashioned way – they earned it!

Although the City does not have land use decision making authority, we work with stakeholders, business folks, developers and the County to achieve the best future for our city. To that end:

**Bowie Marketplace** is thriving. The nearly 132,000 square foot retail center is over 94 percent occupied with just three spaces remaining for new tenants. A detailed site plan for a multi-family building containing 225 apartments was approved in 2017.

**Melford** is moving forward. As of December 31, 2018, more than 1 million square feet and a 137-room **Courtyard Hotel** completed construction. A four-story, 140-unit assisted living facility, **Thrive**, and a 35,000 sq.ft. flex building are also under construction. The Thrive assisted living facility will open this spring. Encompass Health Corporation is moving on a new 60-bed rehabilitation hospital on a site on Howerton Way. We offer our congratulations to St. John Properties on their outstanding efforts to bring Melford to this point.

These new businesses join over 100 other business at Melford including four of the City's biggest employers, employing well over 1500 employees. These businesses are the Prince George's County Emergency Call Center, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Institute for Defense Analysis and FTI Consulting.

**South Lake** (formerly Karington), is a 381-acre mixed-use property recently annexed into the City. In completing this project, the Council voted to join with Prince George's County to pledge a portion of future tax revenues for Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to help with construction of the development's infrastructure and a stormwater management lake. The 3 million square foot mixed-use development includes a grocery anchored retail center (250,000 square feet), retail/restaurant space (130,000 square feet), office space (220,000 square feet) and a 390-room hotel. In addition, residential development includes a total of 1,360 dwelling units including single-family, townhouse and multi-family units.

Importantly, the City established a limit on the total number of dwelling units at South Lake by executing a covenant agreement with the developer.

I would like to personally congratulate City staff for all the work that went into this project, and to thank Council for their thoughtful and strong effort in this matter. I would like to particularly recognize City Councilman Issac Trough for his outstanding effort in working with his community and all the stakeholders to get this done. Sometimes the job is not easy but thankfully leadership found a solution and I want to thank Issac Trough for his leadership.



**Sears at Bowie Town Center** is being replaced by a mixed-use project proposed to replace the existing building that is scheduled for demolition. We are awaiting a plan that we expect to include multi-family residential, a small amount of street level retail square footage, a small office building and possibly a small hotel on approximately 11 acres. The first Stakeholders Meeting for this proposal was held on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. While no plans are currently available to illustrate the redevelopment, amendments to the Bowie Town Center Basic Plan, Comprehensive Design Plan and Specific Design Plan will be required. We will provide updates when those plans are filed.

**Jesuit Property (Bowie Whitemarsh)** – The proposed 440 residential unit development that is outside the City and presented by Elm Street Development requires a zoning map amendment which has not as yet been approved – the application for RS (Residential Suburban) zoning was submitted in 2017. However, there is no recent activity on this project or on this site.

In the area of transportation, several years ago the City approved a curbed four-lane roadway expansion of **MD Route 197** featuring sidewalks and street trees from Kenhill Drive to MD Route 450. This is a critical roadway for us and it is our number one priority.

Currently, no right-of-way or construction funds are included in the State Consolidated Transportation Program for this project but we acknowledge and appreciate the work of our State delegation in their efforts to move this project and we continue to encourage action on this critical roadway.

The City continues to support and encourage advancement of an improved **MD Route 450**. This project consists of design and engineering to upgrade MD Route 450 as a multi-lane divided roadway from Stonybrook Drive to MD Route 3. Planning studies were completed for this segment back in 1988 however, no right-of-way or construction funds are programmed in the State Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP). Engineering is 95% complete, but the project is on hold. We continue to encourage completion of this project.

We continue to work with County and State officials for enhanced priority and funding for **Route 301** improvements. This roadway is long overdue for serious improvement. Unfortunately, the project is currently on hold.

Another vital roadway slated for improvement is **Race Track Road**, which is a County road. This major project involves roadway reconstruction and the design of pedestrian improvements on Race Track Road, from Clearfield Drive to Marquette Lane to upgrade safety and operations. The current schedule includes advertisement of the project by late 2020, construction starting in mid-2021 and completion by late 2022.

This brings us to the all-important numbers.

Bowie is a strong, growing, well-educated community of over 58,000 residents. The median household income is about \$106,000. The median value of a house in the Bowie is \$316,000.

In terms of the City's finances, our budget is balanced, our bills are paid, and we maintain a strong reserve! We are currently in the ninth consecutive year of operating within a balanced budget that has not included a tax rate increase in those nine consecutive years.

We are about to begin preparations on the FY2020 budget and I will be reminding Council that nine consecutive years without a tax rate increase is great but ten years in a row would be better!

Our revenue comes from residential property taxes, shared income taxes, business taxes, licenses, fees, and grants from other levels of government. We are proud of our commitment to fiscal responsibility and to the retention of our prestigious AAA bond rating, one of only two municipalities in Maryland to have earned this status.

For Fiscal Year 2020 we expect our budget to be close to what it has been for the last couple of years with a general fund budget of around \$58 million dollars. Our primary focus will continue to be on core City services and public safety. The City will strive to maintain a high reliance on pay-as-you-go financing for its capital improvements.

The demonstration of that past success is noted in a perhaps, too subtle observation, that the City's financial platform shows \$14 of current assets to every \$1 of debt and \$5 of current assets to every \$1 of total liabilities.

The current budget includes:

- General Fund \$57.8 million
- Equipment Acquisition and Replacement Fund \$3.5 million
- Capital Projects Fund \$29.8 million
- Water and Sewer Fund \$7.4 million

The City's Water and Sewer Infrastructure is nearing sixty years of age and in need of improvements. In December 2016, Council approved a plan to begin replacing water lines in the system to improve water distribution. A surcharge has been levied on the City water customers to fund this improvement. This project will continue for at least the next decade. We are working with State and Federal partners to achieve help in this regard from currently funded Federal programs.

Now let me pose a question - is the business community important to us? In a word, yes! yes! yes! Perhaps one not-often noted number is that the men and women of this Chamber currently employ over 6,000 people in Bowie.

The largest private employer in Bowie is Inovalon Corporation. They are an important member of the community and we are pleased that they chose to maintain their headquarters here. Other top City employers include the Prince George's County School System, the County 911 Center, the U.S. Census Bureau, the City and retailers Giant, Target, Macy's and Walmart.

Party HQ, an 18,000 square foot family-friendly entertainment concept is being planned for the Bowie Town Center. It will replace the current food court. Party HQ plans to offer entertainment options including bowling, laser tag, arcade games, climbing walls and virtual reality experiences. In addition, it will offer a full-service restaurant and lounge area. It expects to open this summer.

Mezeh Mediterranean Grill is now open for business and is providing continued diversity of restaurant options.

On top of all that we are fortunate to have a major state university as our neighbor. Bowie State University brings distinction to our City and offers expertise in many areas. And it is home to the Bowie Business Incubator, another one of our collaborative projects. This joint program between Bowie, Prince George's County, Bowie State University and the Greater Bowie Chamber of Commerce offers a great incentive for new entrepreneurs. In 2018, BIC provided young businesses with mentoring, training, office space and money for start-ups. And those new businesses generated more than 200 jobs and \$10 million in revenue.

Bowie State University President Aminta Breaux hopes to expand the University's partnership with the BIC to provide more students the opportunity to develop an entrepreneurial mindset. In connection with that, the University is currently studying the feasibility of opening a 450-bed living-learning community on campus that would include an entrepreneurship center and a new retail space to draw people onto the Bowie State campus.

All this reinforces our belief the City is strong and we are ready to embrace the future but there are significant forces outside the City everyone in this room understands and recognizes that we must monitor closely. We are very attentive toward:

- Both our national economy and our local economy. We are not anxious but are paying attention to trends and likely outcomes.
- We are concerned that as unemployment numbers go down (a great thing) competition and cost for hiring/retaining will go up.

- We recognize that public transportation projects like METRO and MARC are important elements in our future success and we are following those debates.
- We are monitoring changes at Bowie Town Center – redesign generally and especially redesign of Sears.
- Our FY2019 taxable property assessments are projected to increase by 4.5%, and FY2020 by 5%, but we will move cautiously.
- Highway user revenue estimates for FY2019 and FY2020 are \$1.96 million and \$2.41 million, respectively, as compared to \$3.1 million in FY2007. We continue to make progress on this important matter but we strongly believe our share of this valuable State source should continue to rise.
- We are closely following potential federal and state cutbacks, which could impact income taxes and grant support.
- We are continuing to monitor activity with the State, the Maryland Jockey Club and other horse racing interests as those discussions about the future of Pimlico and Laurel will likely impact the Bowie site.

So, all things said and done, Bowie remains a great place to live, to work, to raise a family and to operate a business.

I would like to thank you for being here today and for supporting Bowie and our many programs. I cannot tell you how vital we see your role is in the City's operation and in our future. We truly appreciate all you do to make Bowie a great place. As I said at the opening, the state of the City of Bowie is strong. We are excited about the present and we are eager to embrace the future. You and your hard work have been key to that success.

We believe our future belongs to those that embrace the fundamental goodness of our city and are prepared to work together to achieve success. Our city is great not because of where we are, but because of who we are. Growth, unity and progress – more than a motto – a way of life!

We will always embrace our future with enthusiasm and with optimism. In the words of Winston Churchill, “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; and optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

Thank you for this great day. As we depart I would like to leave my usual reminder: I ask that you keep in your thoughts all of the young men and women serving in the US military forces around the world and particularly those serving in harm’s way. May they return home quickly and safely.

Thanks all here. Have a great Bowie day!