

GROWTH UNITY  
PROGRESS



STATE OF THE CITY

BOWIE  
MARYLAND  
2023

PRESENTED BY  
MAYOR TIMOTHY J. ADAMS  
FEBRUARY 27, 2023

**2023 STATE OF THE CITY REPORT**  
**PRESENTED TO THE**  
**GREATER BOWIE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**  
**FEBRUARY 27, 2023**

Good morning. I am honored to be with you here today to deliver this report on the State of the City of Bowie in 2023. Thank you to the Greater Bowie Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event and to you our business leaders, for taking time out of your busy day to be here.

As the Chamber prepares to commemorate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I want to congratulate the Board and members for their dedication to promoting and fostering Bowie's thriving business community. Thank you for the many ways you supported each other during the challenging days of the pandemic. You turned difficult times into an opportunity to shine.

One of the things I like best about doing the State of the City is the opportunity it provides to reflect on the year that has passed, and to give thanks to the many people that have helped us and supported us along the way. After a pause imposed by the pandemic, it's great to be gathering together once again and offering these reflections in person.

We've all felt the effects of these long three years. Just as I'm sure many of you made changes to the way you served your customers during the pandemic, so too has the city government adapted. We had to pivot quickly and make adjustments to how we conducted business with our public, how we hosted events, and how we communicated with each other.

Despite the countless challenges posed by this monumental health crisis, I am proud to report that we are coming out of it more resilient, more flexible, and more focused than ever on serving our constituents.

The City of Bowie remains one of the jewels of our region. We are making consistent and notable strides in addressing a range of issues that are crucial to our city's well-being – from maintaining a AAA bond rating, to supporting and creating new opportunities for local businesses, to increasing the availability of affordable housing, to fighting crime and enhancing public safety, to strengthening our neighborhoods and improving our overall quality of life, and expanding opportunities for our children, youth, seniors, and families.

I know that we did not do it all alone. It is thanks to everyone here today, to the resiliency of businesses, to the caring and supportive community that is Bowie, and to

our hardworking staff, that I can appear here today and say—the state of the City is strong!

We're strong because we are on very sound financial footing.

As a business person like you, I'm a bottom line kind of person, so here are the facts—this is what Bowie looks like by the numbers.

- We have an annual budget of \$77.4 million.
- We have a tax rate that has been static for 14 years.
- We spend 16.7% of our budget on Public Safety
- Another 18.6% goes to providing core services like trash collection and street maintenance
- And we spend 2.9% of the budget on social services, on things like services to seniors, family counseling, etc.
- We also spend 8.6% on parks and recreational facilities and community events.

It is these things that set us apart from other collections of neighborhoods and make us a community that works together, has fun together, and watches out for each other.

- The City has been recognized annually for its excellence in budget preparation and our annual audits are consistently without findings.
- The City continues to have a AAA rating from Moody's, and AAA rating from Standard and Poor's and Fitch Ratings.

Like any other city, Bowie faces the usual financial challenges of managing growth, providing core services, maintaining aging infrastructure, offering recreation facilities and amenities and meeting the growing and diverse needs of the community – responsibly and without creating an unreasonable burden for taxpayers.

Proximity to the Baltimore/Washington area, a large and diverse tax base, strong wealth and income levels, strong reserves, and low debt burden are all factors contributing to the City's stable outlook.

But there are large, necessary capital projects on the horizon, including:

- the Bowie Golf Course
- the for Chesapeake Bay stormwater improvements
- for Allen Pond Park, and other recreational facilities
- for Facilities Maintenance
- And for replacement of the aging water system pipes

To accomplish all of these projects, new funding sources, will need to be identified.

While our finances remain stable, Bowie is changing in many ways. According to the latest American Community Survey, Bowie's population has become more diverse.

- The percentage of people identifying as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and also two or more races continues to increase and
- The percentage of people who speak a language other than English at home is also increasing, with 14.5% speaking a language other than English at home.
- The median resident age is also increasing.

These demographic shifts are reminders that we must constantly evaluate programs and services to make sure they're meeting the needs of all residents – young and old, the newcomers and those that have been here for generations, and those wishing to raise their families here.

- Bowie residents are well educated.
- The median household income is \$127,029.
- The unemployment rate for Bowie was 3.2% in December.
- But we also know that 3% of our folks live below the poverty line.

The City's population has remained relatively steady over the past few years at about 58,000. Housing sales in Bowie remain robust despite an overall shortage of housing options to buy or rent.

This has led to a wide range of sale prices for homes. The lowest priced sale was \$170,000 and the highest was \$1,390,000 and yes, that high-sale really was in the City of Bowie. The average single-family detached home sale was \$516,354; the average townhouse sale was \$363,534; and the average residential condo sale was \$253,203. We are the fastest selling new home community in the state, and we're the sixth fastest selling community in the nation.

Home construction is underway now in Melford Village and at South Lake, which will eventually give buyers and renters alike more housing options. We firmly believe that new housing opportunities like these help retain homegrown talent and attract new residents.

Growth has not been limited to the residential housing sector. The City of Bowie has proven to be an exceptional opportunity for anybody looking to invest. As of January 1, 2023 there are 3.245 million square feet of retail space in Bowie. Less than 6% of that total retail space is vacant, and that small percentage is quickly filling up with new tenants like Bob's Furniture coming to Free State Shopping Center and all but one space at Bowie Town Center now under lease.

Over the past year, we have embarked on a branding process to develop a new look and feel for City marketing and communications. As part of that process, we received a great deal of input from residents, businesses, leaders, and other local groups about how they viewed Bowie and what they valued about their city.

They told us they wanted Bowie to be viewed as a place:

- Where families can plant roots for tomorrow
- Where they can build a community of neighbors who support each other, and
- Where growing businesses can locate and thrive.

These are the components-- the brand pillars, that describe today's Bowie. From these pillars we have developed a new Bowie story that will be used by our Economic Development team, our Communications Division, and others to market Bowie to potential residents, visitors, and to businesses looking to locate here.

This Bowie story is a powerful one, one that will garner interest and hopefully generate investment in our city. Good things are happening here every day and we want to make sure that others are noticing. This Bowie story is an evolving one that continues to grow in new and exciting ways.

The state of our economy and the local job market also show we are making remarkable strides ensuring economic growth over the past few years. We are always looking to bring in new businesses, support existing businesses, and make Bowie an attractive destination for businesses, shoppers, and for those seeking to put down roots in a new place. Through carefully planned expansion, we can grow, we can diversify the tax base, and we can attract the next generation of folks that will be the leaders of tomorrow's Bowie.

To that end, the City of Bowie is working hard to support our resident entrepreneurs as they work to pursue their dreams of starting their own businesses or scaling existing ones with

- Business loans
- Sustainability grants for businesses
- Customized business support and professional counseling from the Bowie Business Innovation Center
- Grants for small restaurant businesses to establish and operate outdoor dining.
- Small business training, counseling, and assistance programs, through the Small Business Development Center, the Maryland Women's Business Center, the Maryland Apex Accelerator for defense supply-chain contractor, and grants to the Bowie BIC and the Greater Bowie Chamber of Commerce.

With this support, we hope these programs will attract more companies to relocate and expand here; however, we recognize that a business cannot thrive without more customers, more potential employees.

That's why we're excited about new projects, like South Lake, coming to Bowie. South Lake, formerly known as Karington, is a mixed-use community on 381 acres southwest of the Crain Highway/Central Avenue intersection. Construction is underway on multiple

housing units and an apartment complex. The commercial retail portion that will follow will be anchored by a Giant grocery store. Leasing is now underway, with a construction start expected later this year.

When finalized, the project will comprise:

- 380,000 square feet of retail
- 220,000 square feet of office space
- two hotels
- 1,360 dwelling units, including
  - 325 apartments
  - 126 condominiums
  - 567 townhouses, and
  - 342 single-family homes

Meanwhile, Melford is also proving to be a thriving employment center with existing office space, a supercomputing research center, a Census Bureau facility, a Courtyard hotel, the International Masonry Institute Training Center and dormitory, the County 911 Call Center, an assisted living facility, and a host of small and medium businesses. A 60-bed state-of-the-art physical rehabilitation facility is under construction and nearing completion.

The Melford Village mixed-use community has an approved subdivision plan for

- 1,793 dwelling units and
- over 528,500 square feet of commercial and office space.

The grading and site work for the development's new Lake Melford Boulevard and Retail Village East are already underway, and a new apartment building is currently under construction.

In addition to South Lake and Melford, two other developments are in Bowie's future. The first is a mixed-use development proposed in the old Sears space at Bowie Town Center. It is approved for up to 450 apartments and 150 townhouses. The other development coming is Mill Branch Crossing, which will include 408 apartments and 190 townhouses, and a commercial component.

Over the next ten years, these four projects will increase the city's housing stock by about 4,100 units and will provide a variety of new housing options for buyers and renters. They will also eventually increase the tax base, but they will also create more demands for services. I assure you that our departments are already talking and planning for how to meet these new challenges.

Now, I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about our Police Department.

Under the leadership of Chief Nesky and Deputy Chief Preston, the department is responsive, effective, and well respected. It is committed to engaging in meaningful and honest discussions surrounding, not only racial inequalities, but all facets of policing and continuing to build strong ties with the community.

The hallmark of our police department has always been community policing and at every level, our officers are seeking out avenues to connect with the community. The Citizen's Academy, Coffee with a Cop, the monthly Chief Chats, the Dispatch newsletter, National Night Out Against Crime, and RAD self-defense classes are only a few examples of the outreach work they are doing.

Their latest effort is a partnership with the Bowie Town Center to create a Bowie Police Department Information Center in the former Kay Jewelers space across from Barnes & Noble. This "community corner" will be occupied by sworn officers as well as volunteer ambassadors for the Bowie Police Department.

The center will be accessible to all and will provide information on general department information, hiring processes, crime prevention awareness, and can serve as a dedicated space to host community service events and functions. The grand opening for the space will hopefully be in March.

Unfortunately, Bowie is not immune to some of the latest crime trends. Our officers hear from criminals that Bowie is an attractive target because there is a lot of money here and people don't always lock up. Thefts from autos and auto thefts are up, fueled in part by a TikTok challenge that demonstrates how to steal certain brands of vehicles.

These are not the only challenges faced by our Police Department as staffing and recruiting have become difficult, both locally and nationally. It is increasingly difficult to attract and retain good people to serve our community. To make sure we remain competitive to attract officers and retain them, the Department is offering sign-on bonuses of up to \$9,000 and referral bonuses of up to \$1,000.

The Department will be participating in a city-sponsored job fair for young adults, ages 15 to 25, on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. If you're in the market for new employees, we invite you to be part of this free event as well.

While on the topic of public safety, I also want to personally thank our dedicated Emergency Management team. The Office of Emergency Management has, not only been tasked with leading our response to the COVID-19 pandemic for the last few years, but they also contended with several emergency incidents during the summer of 2022.

In June, a gas explosion at Larkin Chase Nursing Center caused damage to the building and prompted the evacuation and relocation of 112 elderly residents to other long-term care facilities in the area.

Two weeks later, an EF1 tornado cut a swath through portions of Bowie, resulting in many downed trees, blocked roads and power outages. Then, the following Tuesday, the City was again hit by severe weather, with a microburst storm causing even more damage from downed trees, to road closures, and extended power outages that lasted for over a week for some of our residents.

The City was fortunate that no one was injured in these three events. If not for the assistance of our partner agencies in the County, State, City of Laurel, and more, these disasters would have been so much worse and of longer duration.

These disasters highlighted some of our strengths:

- Our well trained and skilled staff
- Our ability to adapt to a crisis
- Our ability to communicate with residents and other stakeholders, and
- Our strong working relationship with outside partners

However, these real-world emergencies also emphasized the need for improvement. We need more training, more drills, more collaboration with regional partners, and improved communications with utility companies.

The City of Bowie's Continuity of Operations Plan (Integrated Preparedness Plan) is our commitment to increase the resiliency of the entire city in the event of natural, human-caused or technological emergency. Ultimately, this means being proactive rather than reactive.

By investing time and resources in training, exercises, and equipment, individuals, organizations, and communities can be better prepared to handle emergencies when they arise, which can help to minimize the impact of these events and save lives.

During the pandemic public health crisis Bowie established it's own Public Health Officer.

Appointed by the City Council in 2021, the Public Health Officer is responsible for providing recommendations to Council to maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of residents, with a special focus on those at increased risk of disease or public health crises and is a liaison to the county and state Public Health officers.

Fortunately, after three long years, there are many encouraging signs that we are putting the pandemic behind us.



In 2022, we were excited to welcome back residents to in-person events like the Memorial Parade, Bowiefest, National Night Out Against Crime, summer concerts, the Veterans Day 5K, and our holiday events.

We saw record-breaking attendance at many of these events, as people took every opportunity to get outdoors, gather, and enjoy a variety of entertainment offerings. We also introduced new celebrations for Juneteenth, held a Walk to Stop Domestic Violence, and we collaborated with residents on planning the “Old Bowie Celebrates Festival”. In 2023, we look forward to more exciting opportunities to come together. And we will keep our fingers crossed that there are no rainouts for any of our big events.

Allen Pond Park is one of Bowie’s favorite gathering places. We’re very proud of this large park and the many other beautiful parks around Bowie. We are also proud of the excellent recreational amenities, classes, and entertainment that we offer at this nationally recognized Senior Center, at our City Gymnasium next door, at our historic properties, and at the Bowie Ice Arena. The rink has returned to pre-COVID use levels, and some programs at our historic properties are bringing in sizeable crowds, but we’re still working hard to get attendance at the City Gym and Senior Center back to pre-COVID levels.

We are also working with new operators of the city-owned Bowie Golf Course to improve the experience for golfers. We saw a significant jump in rounds of golf played this past year and will be installing a new irrigation system there this spring.

Despite all of the examples I mentioned about how life has returned to normal in Bowie, there are those who are still struggling to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We see it at the Bowie Interfaith Food Pantry where they provide food and support each week to dozens of area residents. The Pantry operates with the help of an amazing cadre of volunteers and a very generous community. The City supports the Pantry by collecting food at various events and city facilities and through financial contributions to their Emergency Fund and Community-Based Social Programs.

We also know that some financially strapped seniors and disabled residents need help. Throughout the pandemic, there was an astounding outpouring of support via our Neighbors Helping Neighbors volunteer program, with more than 150 Neighbors Helping Neighbors volunteers assisting our most vulnerable residents with grocery deliveries, outdoor minor home repair and yard work at no cost to the resident. Likewise, more than 50 Teen Job Bank students support residents via paid or student service learning opportunities ranging from snow removal to office assistance.

The City provided over \$150,000 in CARES Act emergency rental assistance and food during the pandemic, and federal dollars have helped pay for solar panel installation on city buildings, water and sewer system upgrades, and improvements to public spaces. The City has also received ongoing grants for the police department, planning and

sustainability, and community services, and improvements to critical infrastructure, and the City has invested millions of additional dollars in our aging water system.

The City offers several ongoing housing assistance programs:

- a **Homebuyers' Assistance Program**, provides a down payment and closing cost assistance to teachers, public safety personnel, and persons with disabilities buying a home in the city.
- a **Homeowner Rehab Program**, helps medium-to low-income families and seniors to replace roofs, windows, and HVAC systems and install energy-efferent appliances.
- an **Emergency Assistance Fund** provides aid to persons experiencing homelessness and other emergencies.
- a **Workforce Housing Program** at Melford will set aside 5% of its new rental housing units for persons earning 80-100% of the Area Median Income, enabling us to attract young, professional workers to the City and increase local spending power. The City is currently negotiating with the owners of Mill Branch Crossing for a similar opportunity.

The City invests in residents through workforce training programs, free educational certificate programs, and scholarships. Several of our outstanding committees also award grants supporting the arts experience, social services, and various literacy, art, STEM and social and emotional readiness programs in our schools.

Like much of the country, Bowie is experiencing a youth mental health crisis. The pandemic's unfathomable number of deaths, pervasive sense of fear, economic instability, and forced physical distancing from loved ones, friends, and communities have exacerbated the unprecedented stresses young people already faced. This crisis led the US Surgeon General to issue a public advisory urging American to make protecting youth mental health a national priority.

Here at home, Bowie Youth & Family Services has also been helping families in crisis. These crisis incidents have been increasing in severity and frequency and are more likely to involve life-threatening situations or serious and complex mental health issues than was seen in prior years.

In a recent survey of Bowie-area high school aged youth, 98% listed either anxiety or depression as a serious concern. The importance of the work our Youth Services Bureau does cannot be overstated.

When I last delivered a State of the City Address in 2021, albeit virtually, I reiterated the City's commitment to sustaining and promoting equity and inclusion. I am proud to say that we are doing that in a variety of ways. I would like to tell you about a few of them.

In 2021, the Bowie City Council passed a resolution to address the needs and interests of underserved populations in the city through workforce goals in city contracts. The

resolution established a pilot program on street resurfacing and capital improvements to the water distribution system projects, and set goals for providing opportunities for minority, women, disabled, and disadvantaged business owners, and certified MBEs to participate as contractors or suppliers.

We also created a new position of Chief Contracting Officer to oversee the incorporation of workforce requirements in the two capital contracts and to monitor the workforce data on the results by the contractors. The contracts with the workforce provisions have been issued, and the projects will begin this spring.

Our commitment to social justice is also exemplified in the “Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Unity Wall”, a mural commissioned for the external wall of the Bowie Gymnasium. A hybrid of traditional painting and street art technique, this mural promotes social justice, equity and inclusion, and serves as a gathering spot to celebrate inclusion.

I would also like to recognize the City’s Diversity Committee, for the significant role the members are playing in promoting equity and inclusion in the City by celebrating diversity and heritage months. They have also helped plan an annual Juneteenth celebration focused on fighting racism and the harmful effects of inequity on Black people worldwide. The committee plans to host a Community Conversations series, addressing the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A few years ago, the General Assembly passed legislation to ensure that ownership of the former Bowie Race Track property would eventually transfer to the City of Bowie so that the area could be used in the future for recreational purposes benefiting the community and the students, faculty, and staff of Bowie State University.

One of the initiatives I am most proud of is our evolving partnership with Bowie State University. Dr. Aminta Breaux is setting a standard of excellence and collaboration there that is getting noticed and bearing fruit.

Last year, the City Council formed the Bowie Race Track Property Task Force, which is made up of two Councilmembers, a member of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, City residents, and Bowie State University representatives. The Task Force is working to determine future recreational use of the property, a timeline for improvements, and what those improvements might cost.

With the help of consultants, the Task Force conducted a survey and workshop to hear various stakeholders’ visions for the property. Almost 2,700 people offered suggestions and input on future uses of the site. Their responses will help shape the Task Force recommendations that will go to Council this summer.

We have also partnered with Bowie State University to showcase the amazing talents of BSU artists in the art gallery at City Hall. The exhibit features over 40 works of art from students in BSU’s Fine and Performing Arts Department. Their art will be on display

until the end of May. I invite you to stop by City Hall to view the exhibit or if you'd like, please join us for a reception in their honor at City Hall on the evening of March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

It has been an absolute pleasure and an honor to serve as this great City's mayor alongside my colleagues on the City Council -- Michael Esteve, Henri Gardner, Roxy Ndebumadu, the first woman of color to serve as Mayor Pro Tem, Dufour Woolfley, and to have served with Adrian Bofo and Ingrid Harrison Watson until they were elected to other offices.

I am excited to welcome the two newest members of our City Council, who were sworn in less than a week ago - Jarryd Hawkins is now one of our At-Large Councilmembers and Clinton Truesdale, Sr. is our new councilmember for District 3.

I would like to express my gratitude to the City of Bowie employees. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID pandemic, the city workforce has been innovative and dedicated to meeting the changing needs of our community. Although their hard work is not always visible to the general public, they continue to deliver world class services and ensure that our city remains vibrant and a welcoming place to call home. We are truly grateful for their commitment to this city, and we thank them for their service to residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

As I have hopefully demonstrated throughout this speech, Bowie continues to thrive. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergencies, we are moving forward and making positive changes.

There are challenges ahead certainly, but we are exceeding expectations all the time. We've made it through the worst of COVID and Bowie stands taller and better than ever.

I've been to many cities over the course of my life, but I can say with full confidence that Bowie sets a standard that others aspire to achieve.

Thank you all for being here this morning. I hope you have an outstanding day and always remember that no act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted. **We are one City, one Bowie.**