



# STATE OF THE CITY WITH MAYOR DENNY MAGRUDER

JANUARY 28, 2025

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## SCHEDULE

*All times are approximate.*

**12:05 p.m.**

- Presentation of colors by Wheeling Police and Fire Honor Guard
- Invocation by Bishop Darrell W. Cummings, Bethlehem Apostolic Temple
- Welcome by Vice Mayor Jerry Sklavounakis

**12:15 p.m.**

- Mayor Magruder's State of the City Address

**1 p.m.**

- Photos with honorees

Good afternoon and welcome to all. It is an honor and a privilege to stand before you here today at the Wheeling Island Casino and present the 15<sup>th</sup> annual State of the City Address. It is my first opportunity to speak to you as Mayor for this event.

Let me begin by thanking the people who made this event possible.

Thank you to the City of Wheeling Police and Fire Honor Guard for presenting our National, State and City flags today.

Thank you, Bishop Darrell Cummings, for providing today's invocation and for your great humanitarian efforts in our City.

Thank you to Vice Mayor Jerry Sklavounakis and my fellow members of Wheeling City Council: Tony Assaro, Ben Seidler, Connie Cain, Ty Thorngate, and Dave Palmer. It is a privilege for me to be a member of this team. Over the last six months, I have witnessed their great passion and love for our City. It is truly an honor for me to serve the citizens of Wheeling with each of them.

Thank you as well to our City Manager, Robert Herron. We are the beneficiaries of his knowledge, dedication, and service to our City. I also want to thank the following department heads who keep our City running each and every day:

- Assistant City Manager/Public Works Director Bill Lanham
- Police Chief Shawn Schwertfeger
- Fire Chief Jim Blazier
- City Clerk Jessica Zalenski
- Community Development Director Nancy Prager
- City Solicitor Rose Humway-Warmuth
- Human Resource Director Kayla Graham
- Building & Planning Director BJ Delbert
- Parks & Recreation Director Rochelle Barry
- Information Technology Director Mike Lloyd
- Acting Finance Director John Carlier

And all other City staff members who are here today, especially Michele Rejonis, our Marketing and Community Relations Specialist, for her assistance with this presentation.

Also, a special thank you to Kim Florence and her team here at the casino for the great job of hosting this event for the past nine years.

I welcome other elected officials here with us today. We recognize and appreciate your dedication to our City, County and State.

On a personal note, I want to thank my family, especially my wife Barb, for her support throughout my endeavors. That continuing support enables me to be your mayor.

In the past year, Wheeling has continued its trajectory of growth and transformation. Our City has seen advancements in economic development, infrastructure, and community engagement. Downtown revitalization projects are breathing new life into historic spaces, and our neighborhoods are becoming more vibrant and connected. These achievements are the result of collaboration, hard work, and the unyielding spirit of our most valuable asset, OUR PEOPLE.

Today, we will celebrate some of our accomplishments, recognize some outstanding individuals who have contributed to our City's resilience and growth, assess our strengths, examine our challenges (opportunities), and look ahead to a future brimming with promise.

But first, let us pause to remember and honor two former City Council members, Barry Crow and Babe Schmitt, who passed away within the last year. Their commitment to serving our community, their leadership, and the impact they had on our City will never be forgotten. Each dedicated countless hours to making our community a better place, and their legacies will continue to inspire us as we move forward. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families, and we express our deepest gratitude for their service.

It is my privilege today to present the City of Wheeling's eighth Gateway Award and to honor a man who has dedicated his life to public service, leadership, and the betterment of our community---Andy McKenzie.

Andy's journey of service began in 1996 when, at just 26 years of age, he was elected to the West Virginia Legislature. For 12 years, he represented his constituents with distinction, advocating for policies that would improve the lives of those he served. But that was only the beginning of his lifelong commitment to making this region a better place.

As Mayor of Wheeling, Andy's leadership was transformative. He championed key projects that have left a lasting impact on our City. Under his guidance, the Downtown Streetscape Project was conceived and is revitalizing our downtown, creating a more vibrant and accessible environment for residents and visitors alike. His efforts in the purchase of the Capitol Theatre preserved an important piece of our community's history, while the expansion and renovation of WesBanco Arena opened new doors for sports and entertainment in Wheeling. His work on the Wheeling Water Plant brought our infrastructure into the modern era, and he was instrumental in securing the funding to preserve the iconic Wheeling Suspension Bridge – an effort that will continue to connect our past with our future for generations to come.

While Andy's professional accomplishments are truly remarkable, they are only part of the story. He is a devoted husband to his wife, Carrie Ann, and a proud father to three sons – Austin, Levi, and Quinn. His deep sense of family and commitment to his loved ones is just as evident as his service to this community. He has been a steady and reliable presence not only in public office but also as a partner in life, someone who values integrity, hard work, and care for others.

Beyond his work as Mayor, Andy continues to serve on the Executive Boards of the Wheeling Chamber of Commerce and the Regional Economic Development Partnership, where his insight and leadership continue to shape our region's future. He is also the Managing Partner of McKenzie Riedel Wealth Management, where he applies the same dedication and expertise he brought to his public service to help individuals and businesses thrive.

Andy McKenzie's legacy is one of service, progress, and dedication. His tireless efforts have touched every corner of our City and state, and his influence will be felt for many years to come. It's an honor to stand before you today to celebrate his life of public service and his unwavering commitment to making Wheeling and West Virginia a better place.

Andy, thank you for everything you have done – and continue to do – for our community. You are a true leader, and we are grateful for your service.

Please join me in honoring Andy McKenzie as this year's Gateway Award Winner.

Municipal government is expected to provide certain services in developing and maintaining a vibrant and progressive community. Among them are the following:

- Public Safety
- Transportation Infrastructure
- Social & Human Services
- Development
- Quality of Life Components
- Collaboration with All Sectors

Please allow me to share some insight regarding each of those elements.

The number one want in today's society is to feel safe and secure. The men and women who comprise our police and fire departments are well trained and equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and technology.

According to former Senator Joe Manchin, our new police headquarters is the very best he has seen. It provides all the amenities necessary to combat modern day crime. In fact, in recently released data, the City's serious crimes (felonies) in 2024 dropped 11% from the previous year and less serious crimes dropped 7%. Drug overdoses fell by 37% and overdose deaths decreased by 46%.

Our new fire headquarters, expected to open soon, is an ultra-modern facility. It includes space for additional trucks, training facilities, command staff offices and spacious bunk rooms for firefighters. The department responded to 7,768 incidents in 2024. That is an average of 21-plus calls per day, the vast majority being EMS calls.

While we are not All State, we are certainly in "good hands."

In our continued efforts to enhance the City's transportation infrastructure, we are making significant strides to improve mobility and accessibility for all residents and visitors. The massive Downtown Streetscape project, slated for completion later this year, will transform the heart of our City with upgraded roadways, pedestrian-friendly features, and improved public spaces. Alongside this is the new 290-space Market Street Parking Structure which will provide additional parking on the north end of town, complementing ongoing improvements to the existing downtown parking facilities. Our commitment to maintaining and upgrading local streets is evident in the continued municipal paving program, which addresses both streets and alleys to ensure smoother travel throughout the City. Additionally, the recently completed I-70 highway project has bolstered connectivity, further easing transportation across our region. Looking ahead, we are focused on the upcoming replacement of the Washington Avenue, Schilling, and Baker Street bridges, which will improve safety and access for our residents. These projects reflect our dedication to building a stronger, better-connected City for all.

In our City, the delivery of social and human services is a cornerstone of support for individuals and families facing challenges. These services, provided by numerous organizations, are designed to empower, uplift, and provide assistance, ensuring that everyone, regardless of background or circumstances, has access to the resources they need. From healthcare and housing to mental health services and educational support, our commitment is to promote well-being and self-sufficiency. We strive to create a safety net that fosters dignity and opportunity, offering personalized services that address the unique needs of our diverse population. Through collaboration with local organizations, government agencies, and dedicated professionals, we are building a stronger, more resilient community, where everyone can thrive. Together, we are making a tangible difference in the lives of those who need it most.

Today, I would like to recognize Karen Gordon-Young, a woman whose dedication to our community has touched countless lives. With over 49 years of service as an educational paraprofessional, Karen's work with children with special needs, particularly those with autism, was guided by a simple but profound goal: to ensure they not only survived but thrived.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Karen has been an active leader in our community. She proudly served as Chairperson of the Freedom Fund Banquet for several years, was a dedicated member of the NAACP, and supported the Ohio County Democratic Women's Club. Her involvement in the Eastern Star further exemplifies her commitment to service.

Karen, your tireless contributions have made an enduring impact on our community.

I would also like to recognize Kathie Brown, the dedicated director of Health Right, a vital agency providing medical services to those in need. With a BS in Nursing, Kathie's passion for healthcare and advocacy has positively impacted countless lives in our community. Her tireless work ensures that the uninsured receive the care they deserve, and she is a strong advocate for accessible healthcare for all. Kathie's leadership extends beyond her role at Health Right, as she actively participates in fundraising activities to sustain these critical services. Her

remarkable contributions have earned her numerous accolades, including the WV State Journal's "Healthcare Heroes Award." Kathie's compassion, commitment, and unwavering dedication make her an invaluable asset to our community. She continues to make a profound difference in the lives of so many.

Downtown development plays a vital role in shaping the identity and future of a City. By revitalizing urban spaces, we create vibrant hubs that attract businesses, residents, and visitors alike. New developments often blend historical architecture with innovative designs, preserving the past while paving the way for the future. This growth stimulates economic activity, providing jobs and improving infrastructure. Moreover, a thriving downtown fosters community connections, offering a place for cultural events, dining, and entertainment. With a focus on sustainability and inclusivity, downtown development prioritizes both environmental and social wellbeing. As we continue to invest in these dynamic areas, we ensure Wheeling remains not only livable but also future-ready, catering to the needs of an evolving population while celebrating the unique character of downtown Wheeling.

Please take a walk down Main Street with me as we recognize many of our Main Street heroes. We begin with what is currently the most dynamic intersection in our downtown.

Thanks to the Carl Family for their extraordinary contribution to our community. In 2016, they took a bold step by purchasing the historic Bridge Tavern, investing millions to restore and transform the space into a vibrant four-story landmark. Their vision and dedication not only preserved a piece of our history, but also sparked the revitalization of the entire intersection, bringing new energy and optimism to downtown. The Bridge Tavern has become an iconic destination, offering an exceptional food and drink menu, entertainment, and an event space for all to enjoy. As long-time members of the community, the Carl Family's passion and love for our downtown are evident in every aspect of their work. We owe them a deep debt of gratitude for leading the way with this remarkable transformation.

Thanks to Pastor Chris Figaretti, a dedicated servant leader and Wheeling native who has served the Newbridge Church, formerly the Vineyard Church, since 1999. In 2010, he became the lead pastor, and under his visionary leadership, the church has flourished, impacting not just the congregation, but the entire community. Chris has been instrumental in the rehabilitation of a historical downtown building, transforming it into a state-of-the-art day care center, serving as a beacon of hope for families in need. This multi-million-dollar project is a testament to his unwavering commitment to both revitalizing the area and providing a much-needed service to the community. Pastor Chris's leadership continues to inspire, and his dedication to faith, service, and progress has left an indelible mark on all of us. We are truly grateful for his ministry and the positive difference he makes each and every day.

Thanks to an extraordinary individual whose legacy has shaped the heart of Wheeling. Toni DiCarlo, owner of DiCarlo's Pizza, has been a cornerstone of this community since 1985, following in the footsteps of her father, who founded the business in 1949. Toni has not only

kept the beloved tradition of DiCarlo's Pizza alive, but she has also taken bold steps to help transform our downtown. Last June, she broke ground on a stunning new building overlooking the Ohio River – a project that will house seven luxury condominiums, with five already sold. Toni's vision and determination continue to inspire us all. Her unwavering commitment to the success of Wheeling makes her not just a business owner, but a true leader. She is an amazing lady whose impact will be felt for generations to come.

Though not Wheeling natives, Robert and Libby Strong's contributions to our community have been nothing short of extraordinary. Since 1995, the Strongs have nurtured a love for science and discovery through the SMART Center, an interactive treasure that has sparked curiosity in people of all ages. From fossils and telescopes to minerals and ice cream, their vision blends learning with fun. In addition to running this beloved establishment, they are revitalizing a historic building that once housed the Goodwin Drug Company for nearly a century. As educators at heart, Robert and Libby collaborate with local organizations to provide enriching camps, workshops, and educational programs. And let's not forget the iconic dinosaur hanging out of their window – a testament to their creativity and commitment to making learning exciting. Thank you, Robert and Libby, for your lasting impact on our City.

And now we veer off Main Street!

Today, we thank Dan Milleson for his remarkable vision and dedication to preserving Wheeling's rich history while bringing new life to our waterfront. As the owner of Waterfront Hall, Dan has re-imagined and renovated a historic building built in 1873, transforming it into a vibrant destination on the Ohio River. This once-forgotten landmark is now a beloved food, beverage, and entertainment venue, bringing joy to locals and visitors alike. Dan's commitment to revitalizing the Wheeling waterfront is truly inspiring. Beyond this, Dan is also the fourth-generation operator of his family's insurance business, a testament to his deep roots and loyal dedication. Dan is making Wheeling a better place to live, work, and play.

I want to recognize Earl Brown, a man whose vision and dedication have preserved a vital piece of our history. In 1995, Earl purchased the historic Victoria Theater, which was built in 1904, and undertook an extraordinary renovation to restore its grandeur. Under his care, the theater has continued to thrive as a beloved performance hall, hosting the renowned Victoria Jamboree Show and other cultural events. Earl's efforts have not only preserved a landmark but have also enriched our community's cultural fabric. His contributions have earned him the "Distinguished Mountaineer Award" from Governor Tomblin, a well-deserved recognition for his unwavering commitment to revitalizing our City. Earl's work ensures that the Victoria Theater will continue to inspire and entertain for generations to come. Thank you, Earl, for your vision, passion, dedication and for keeping the spirit of Elvis alive.

As we celebrate the ongoing rebirth of downtown, it is exciting to see the progress of key projects across our City, but the future holds even more promise. In the near future, WVU Medicine will break ground on a new regional cancer center, a critical step forward in advancing

healthcare in our region. This facility will provide not only world-class care for patients but will provide an economic spark for the Center Market neighborhood.

It is very fitting that this new structure will stand on the very ground of the iconic OVMC, where many of us in this room were born. I would like to recognize Mary McKinley and Betty Jo Sproull for their labor of love to preserve the history and legacy of the Ohio Valley Medical Center. Both of these remarkable women served as nurses at the hospital, which stood as a cornerstone of our community for more than a century. Their tireless efforts have ensured that invaluable historical documents and items are safeguarded, including the retrieval of time capsules from 1912 and 1980. Most notably, their campaign to save the iconic OVMC letters from the smokestack has preserved a symbol of shared heritage. In addition, they are working diligently with the OVMC History Group to raise funds for a documentary that will celebrate the rich history of OVMC and its impact on our community. Mary and Betty Jo, your actions show not only your love for this hospital but also your deep respect for the people who made it a cherished part of our lives. The OVMC legacy will be remembered for generations to come.

Our City thrives because we understand the profound value of “quality of life.” We are not just a place to live; we are a community where culture, recreation, and opportunity intersect to create a vibrant, dynamic environment for all. Our first-class park system offers green spaces for relaxation and recreation, while our theaters bring world-class entertainment right to our doorstep. With an exceptional symphony orchestra, professional hockey, and a multi-use arena, there’s always something to enjoy, whether you’re a sports enthusiast or a lover of the arts.

Our thriving arts programs and dance studios provide creative outlets, and our active waterfront is a gathering place for relaxation, exploration, and connection. We are proud of our strong educational system, both public and private, which empowers the next generation of leaders and innovators.

These assets, along with countless others, contribute to the high quality of life that makes our City a desirable and fulfilling place to call home. It’s this dedication to enriching the human experience that sets us apart --- creating not just a City, but a vibrant community that celebrates all that life has to offer.

For the last twelve years, the Mayor has presented a very special award, called the “Community Spirit Award” to someone in our community for his or her particular efforts to make Wheeling a better place to live.

I am proud now to honor a man whose contributions to our community are immeasurable – Mr. Randy Worls. It is my privilege to present him with this year’s Community Spirit Award, an accolade that reflects his enduring dedication to our City and our way of life.

Randy’s journey with Oglebay began in 1954, when he first joined as a part-time employee. What started as a humble roll quickly grew into a remarkable career that has touched every corner of this community. Through his visionary leadership, Randy has transformed Oglebay



into one of the best municipal parks in the country, enriching the lives of countless families and visitors. From the Winter Festival of Lights to Oglebayfest, from the Good Zoo to the Benedum Natural Science Theater, Randy has been the driving force behind some of the most cherished landmarks and events in our area. His commitment to enhancing the park system has been nothing short of extraordinary, and his legacy can be seen and felt throughout Oglebay today.

But Randy's influence stretches far beyond the park. His fingerprints are all over the public projects and programs that have helped shape downtown Wheeling into the vibrant, thriving community we know today. He was a founding member of the Convention & Visitors Bureau and a key figure in the creation of Wheeling 2000. He served as Chairman of "Wheeling Works" and as a Board Member of The Wheeling Victorian Society, among many other roles.

Randy's contributions to major public projects are also countless. He played an instrumental role in the development of the Robert C. Byrd Intermodal Transportation Center, the Wheeling Artisan Center, the Wheeling Waterfront Project, and the improvements to the iconic Wheeling Suspension Bridge. His dedication to making our downtown a destination for all who visit and call it home is something we will continue to benefit from for generations.

Throughout his career, Randy has earned numerous awards and recognitions for his service to the community. He is an inductee of the Wheeling Hall of Fame, has been named the Ohio Valley Jaycees' Citizen of the Year, and has received the Light of the Valley Award presented by the YMCA and the Good Samaritan Award from Youth Services System, among many others.

Behind every great leader is a great partner, and for Randy, that is his wife, Betty. Together, they raised twin sons, Brad and Brent, who no doubt share in their parents' love for this community.

Randy, your tireless work, your vision, and your unwavering commitment to Wheeling have left an indelible mark on this City. Your dedication to improving the lives of others, your ability to bring people together, and your deep love for this place we call home are the reasons we honor you today.

Congratulations, Randy, on this well-deserved recognition. Your legacy of community spirit will continue to inspire us all for years to come.

Please join me in honoring Randy Worls as this year's Community Spirit Award recipient.

There is another special person in this room today who has left an incredible legacy. She is a true icon in our community. For more than 40 years, Brenda Danehart has been more than just a news anchor --- she's been a compassionate voice, a trusted friend, and an unwavering presence in our lives. From her start as a reporter to her time as news director, Brenda's dedication to telling the stories that mattered most to us has set a standard of excellence.

Her kindness, empathy, and deep commitment to the people of this community have made her beloved by all. Whether co-hosting the Muscular Dystrophy Telethon for over 25 years or supporting the Easter Seals Rehabilitation Center and its telethon, Brenda's heart has always

been with those in need. Thank you, Brenda, for your kindness and your professionalism. Your legacy will forever be a part of us.

Throughout this message today, I have talked about Wheeling's greatest asset, it's people. There is one final group that deserves our attention today --- our Veterans and our active military. Recently, we announced the launch of the Wheeling Military Banner Program, a heartfelt initiative to honor the brave men and women who have served and are serving our country. Sponsored by the City of Wheeling, American Legion Post 1, VFW Post 4442, and Mimi's Hallmark Card Shop, this program will feature 24"x36" double-sided banners proudly displayed on our streets from Memorial Day through Labor Day each year. With support from the Ohio County Public Library, the Howard Long Wellness Center, and the Fitzsimmons Law Firm, we will pay tribute to our local veterans and active military, celebrating their sacrifices and service. These banners will serve as a lasting reminder of the dedication and courage of our military heroes. We invite each of you to join us in this special initiative, honoring those who have given so much for our freedom.

As we look to the future, let us remember that the power of a City lies not just in its buildings and streets, but in the hearts and minds of its people. Together, we have accomplished so much, but together, we will achieve even more. We are a City of dreamers, innovators, and doers --- each one of us contributing to the vision of a stronger, more prosperous Wheeling.

Let this be the moment where we renew our commitment to progress, where every challenge becomes an opportunity, and every setback fuels our determination. The road ahead may not always be easy, but it is ours to shape together.

So, I ask each of you here today --- what will you do to build Wheeling's tomorrow? How will you leave your mark on this City that we love? Now is the time to rise to the occasion. Together, we will create a future that is not just imagined but realized. Our best days are ahead, and the state of our City has never been stronger.

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