

MAYOR GLENN ELLIOTT PRESENTS:

State of the City 2017



**TUESDAY,
FEBRUARY 28
12:00 P.M.**

**WHEELING ISLAND
HOTEL-CASINO-RACETRACK
2ND FLOOR SHOWROOM**

SCHEDULE

12:15 p.m.

- Welcome by Vice Mayor Chad Thalman
- Invocation by Fr. William George of Wheeling Jesuit University
- Presentation of colors by Wheeling Police and Fire Honor Guard

12:25 p.m. (approx.)

- Mayor Elliott's State of the City Address

1:10 p.m. (approx.)

- Presentation of plaques and photos with honorees

Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here. It is my honor to serve as Mayor of Wheeling and my special privilege to deliver my first State of the City address.

Before I recognize today's honorees and share my vision for Wheeling's future, I want to express my appreciation to the people who made this event possible.

Thank you to the City of Wheeling Police and Fire Honor Guard for presenting our national and state flags.

Thank you, Father George, for leading today's invocation.

To my fellow City Council members: Chad Thalman, Ken Imer, who can't be with us today, Brian Wilson, Wendy Scatterday, Ty Thorngate, and Dave Palmer – it is an honor to serve the citizens of Wheeling with you.

I want to recognize City Manager Robert Herron, who celebrates 15 years with the City of Wheeling this month.

I'd also like to recognize City Clerk Janice Jones; City Solicitor Rose Humway-Warmuth; Finance Director Seth McIntyre; Economic Development Director Nancy Prager; Public Works Director Rusty Jebbia; Police Chief Shawn Schwertfeger; Fire Chief Larry Helms; Human Resources Director Teresa Hudrlik; Marketing Specialist Allison Skibo, and all the city staff members who are here today.

Finally, to the elected officials in attendance, thank you for your dedication to our City, County, State, and region.

Throughout Wheeling's rich and dynamic history, there have been pioneers who have shaped our city's foundation and helped define its character. Some have contributed through public office; others have served the community in their own ways. But together, they helped make Wheeling what it is today. As we gather to take stock in where we are as a city, we necessarily stand on the shoulders of those leaders who came before us. To continue their work is our shared aspiration, and our collective responsibility.

But as we embark on this effort together, let us acknowledge the economic challenges many of our predecessors faced in bringing us to this point. Many in this room are old enough to remember Wheeling of the mid-1900s—with its teeming industries, thriving population, and bustling Downtown. But those under 40 are more familiar with a Wheeling engulfed in regional economic decline, a nagging population loss, and an exodus of retail away from our prized Downtown. What happened? Did Wheeling lose its leaders during the past four decades? Some say "yes." I say they are wrong. No city in the Upper Ohio Valley has weathered the economic storm of recent decades better than Wheeling. Period. And we are in the auspicious place we are today not by chance but because of leadership shown in Wheeling during its leanest years.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my special honor and privilege to recognize one of the leaders who helped steer our city through tough times as a member of City Council and as Mayor. His name is Jack Lipphardt, and he is with us today as the first recipient of the City's Gateway Award.

Jack served the people of Wheeling for more than two decades. He was first elected Mayor by City Council, but following the 1991 Charter review, he became the first mayor elected city-wide in 60 years. As Mayor, Jack pushed for a more ambitious governmental role in economic development and stronger community partnerships. This led to the purchase of the old Wheeling Stamping Building, now occupied by hundreds of Orrick employees, and the development of the Wheeling Artisan Center.

And let's not forget about Heritage Port and our network of bike trails. We celebrate these features today, but they very well might not be here were it not for Jack's leadership. It is hard to believe now, but the decision to tear down the Wharf parking garage in order to make room for Heritage Port was controversial. Would anyone trade these amenities today?

In short, Jack led Wheeling through some tough times, and he did so with creativity, a forward-thinking mindset, and, perhaps most importantly, with faith in our City. Jack's colleague, Hyde Friend, recalls him as a "light in the darkness." He helped pave the way for where we now stand. And for that, I ask that Mayor Lipphardt please stand to be recognized as the first Gateway Award recipient. Thank you for your service to Wheeling.

From the moment we were sworn in on July 1, this City Council has been committed to inclusion, engagement, transparency, and a new way of thinking. The event itself at the Capitol Theatre demonstrated that commitment. And we continued these themes in the months that followed.

During our first regular meeting, we announced the creation of four ad hoc committees to focus on retention, industrial development, workforce housing, and volunteerism. Dozens of community members have given their time and talents to these topics. By the end of March, the work of three of the committees will be complete as they provide City Council with their recommendations.

Shortly after being elected, we were urged by the City's Human Rights Commission to review the City's ordinance on human rights and discrimination and expand its scope to include sexual orientation and gender identity. We conducted two public work sessions with Commission members, and we held a separate public hearing solely to hear from members of the community. Our final version of the ordinance included several changes requested by community members. I am proud to say that all seven members of City Council voted in favor of this ordinance.

We were also urged by local restaurant owners to approve the brunch bill for Wheeling to permit allow alcohol sales on Sunday mornings. We utilized Home Rule to make this change, and now Sunday brunch is an option at several Wheeling restaurants. We have listened, and we will continue to listen. Along with various Council members, I have had countless meetings with business leaders, developers, investors, financial institutions, and city partners in which I have asked a simple question: What can we do to stimulate investment?

And we have even looked outside Wheeling for guidance. In November, along with City Manager Herron and several city partners, I attended a two-day workshop sponsored by the Kresge Foundation. Entitled "Strengthening Community Investment Systems," this workshop focused on harnessing investment to achieve our community's economic, social, and environmental priorities. I also visited Greenville, South Carolina, for a day of meetings with the City's mayor and economic development staff to discuss parallels between Greenville of two decades ago and Wheeling of today. These trips have proven invaluable, and it is my hope to make it to Huntington, West Virginia, and Louisville, Kentucky, to meet with mayors who have tackled challenges similar to our own. As I have said before, there is no copyright on smart municipal policy.

At no point in history have elected officials had more means of communicating with residents, and we have worked with City staff to navigate these additional channels. Each City ward now has a public Facebook group where users can interact with their Council representatives as well as their neighbors. Since last summer, City officials have issued eight online surveys seeking input from the community. This year, City Council is holding six of its regular meetings at schools in all six wards. Going forward, as directed by City Council, every regular meeting is being filmed by West Liberty University Television and aired on Channel 14. And most recently, City Council authorized work to begin on a new city website, which will create a level of engagement and access to information that our community needs and deserves.

Wheeling is fortunate to have civic leaders who were involved long before this Council took office and who have demonstrated the importance of citizen engagement. Today, I want to honor several of these leaders. They are neighborhood champions; preservationists; change-makers; ambassadors for our city; and the heart and soul of our community.

Our unique neighborhoods benefit from the time and talents of dedicated residents like Tom and Peggy Dailer of Warwood. Last fall, Tom chaired the Warwood Neighborhood Working Group for the city and coordinated the first neighborhood survey. Tom also serves as President of the Warwood Lions Club, while Peggy has dedicated 25 years to directing the Loran Mercer tennis tournament. They volunteer for the United Way of the Upper Ohio Valley and are very active members of Corpus Christi Church. Although I know you do not serve for the recognition, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the role you play in this city, particularly in Warwood.

Two of South Wheeling's strongest neighborhood champions are here with us today – Ginger Kabala and Brother John Byrd, who co-founded the South Wheeling Preservation Alliance 10 years ago. The Alliance is dedicated to restoring South Wheeling's charm and reinvigorating positive activism in the neighborhood. Ginger and Brother John have spearheaded cleanups and community gardens. They have also created a center for South Wheeling history and an industrial history walking tour, and hosted the City's monthly crime watch meetings. Equally important is the intangible contribution of their positivity and pride in their neighborhood. Thank you both for hard work and dedication.

Among its many positive attributes, Wheeling is known for its benevolence. Twelve years ago, Dan and Debbie Joseph turned their passion for vintage raceboats into a way to give back to their community. Under the direction of the Joseph family, the Vintage Raceboat Regatta raises thousands of dollars each year for the Easter Seals Rehabilitation Center in Wheeling. Dan and Debbie's generosity extends beyond the riverfront as contributing sponsors for Show of Hands. Their enthusiasm over this event has been steady from the beginning, rallying friends and donors alike around the spirit of entrepreneurship and citizen engagement. Dan could not join us today, but please join me in thanking Debbie and their daughter, Kristen, for their efforts.

I know firsthand how challenging and rewarding it can be to invest in Downtown Wheeling's historic architecture. Kevin Duffin made such an investment several years ago when he purchased the 120-year-old Flatiron Building on Main Street. He spent a decade pursuing the previous owners because he was so passionate about the building's potential. That kind of passion and dedication is to be commended. And while his financial investment is significant, the message that it sends to residents and other developers is invaluable. It says, "I have faith in Downtown Wheeling," which is not a statement people were willing to make for many years. Kevin, thank you for your important role in revitalizing our downtown. We wish you nothing but success.

Wheeling Island is represented well by my next honoree, Lori Jones. Although she has moved away from her childhood neighborhood, her important work with the YWCA brings her back to Wheeling each day. Under Lori's direction, the YWCA strives to eliminate racism and empower women in our community. The YWCA is also invested in our younger population—a demographic that we are committed to reaching and retaining in Wheeling. Lori and her staff spent this past weekend hosting the Youth Leadership Lock-in, where young women learned skills for becoming change-makers and dealing with social issues. Lori, thank you for all the work you do to improve our community.

By the way, several of the young ladies from the Leadership Lock-in are here today with Councilwoman Wendy Scatterday. Thank you for joining us.

Wheeling is fortunate to have many ambassadors who shine Wheeling's light for others to see. One name that quickly comes to mind is Ann Thomas. Ann grew up in East Wheeling during an era of racial segregation. Both Ann and her late husband, Clyde,

made their mark with “firsts” for African Americans—she as the first to graduate from the Ohio Valley General Hospital nursing program and work as a nurse for Ohio County Schools, and he as the first to serve on Wheeling City Council. Ann has since served on various boards and proudly represents her East Wheeling neighborhood and her city wherever she goes. Ann, I know you share the hope and excitement that City Council and I have for Wheeling’s future. We truly appreciate your support and your role as a civic leader.

In my first address as Mayor of Wheeling I charged each and everyone in this community to Engage. The 2017 Community Spirit Award goes to a person who did just that. Bill O’Leary embodied the idea of engaging in the betterment of our community. Bill paid attention to details. When he grabbed hold of a detail he rarely let go of it until the broader community was also paying attention. Plain-spoken and always polite Bill, joined by his wife of 50 years, Sharon, became a fixture at City Council meetings, addressing issues of public safety and forever advocating for the advancement of his Elm Grove neighborhood. He started the Elm Grove Neighborhood Watch and was instrumental in Wheeling hosting National Night Out to promote police/community partnerships. He was very proud to be appointed as a member of the Wheeling Traffic Commission, and he fought tirelessly to secure the turning lane on Kruger Street by McDonald’s. Seeing the project finally completed last year was one of his proudest moments.

Mr. O’Leary exemplified community spirit and engagement, and he is truly missed. I would like to thank Bill’s son, Craig O’Leary, for accepting the 2017 Community Spirit Award on his father’s behalf.

So far in today’s remarks, I have looked backwards, both to provide a recap of this City Council’s first eight months on the job, but also to put where we are today in historical context.

In the time we have remaining, I want us to look forward. Together. Because where we go from here can make all the difference between a vibrant, thriving Wheeling and one that slips back into economic stagnation. The stakes are high, and we must bring our “A game” collectively if we want to get this right.

Downtown Wheeling: Developing an Economic Driver and a Destination

Let me begin with our central business district: Downtown Wheeling. Like it or not, how our Downtown looks and feels is a direct reflection on our City at large. It belongs to all of us, and it can be our greatest asset. Or it can become a liability. The choice is easy.

Downtown Wheeling used to be an end in and of itself. There was always something to do; an experience to be had. That is not the perception today. Even though there are more people working in Downtown Wheeling now than at any point in our City’s history, there are missing ingredients that need to be added to our Downtown experience.

The Stone Center Lofts and Boury Lofts are providing much-needed housing options for those seeking urban living. More people living in Downtown with disposable income means more demand for dining and entertainment options. Barely a week goes by that I am not contacted by an entrepreneur exploring options to harness this demand.

And let us not forget the economic and psychological impact of the ongoing construction of the The Health Plan headquarters at 11th and Main Streets. You've all heard it said before, but it bears repeating: This emerging structure represents the first privately constructed new building in Downtown Wheeling in more than three decades. The towering crane above its construction site sends the unmistakable message that Downtown Wheeling is coming back.

As these developments increase density and stimulate additional investment, this City Council is focused on improving the pedestrian experience in our Downtown. Working together with State officials, we will be paving streets and replacing sidewalks to provide a more progressive, aesthetic streetscape that is ADA-compatible and pedestrian friendly. We want to make walking in Downtown Wheeling safer, more comfortable, and more interesting.

Making Wheeling a more walkable community will also help to solve one of the long-simmering complaints about Downtown: Parking. There it is, I said it. The dreaded "P" word. Despite having several parking garages that are never at capacity, we have all heard that there is nowhere to park in Downtown Wheeling. Now, to be sure, part of the problem stems from the City not having a parking policy to deter employees from using the meters all day. Street parking spaces are and always have been about facilitating commerce, not convenience for nearby employees. This City Council is committed to revising our parking policies accordingly. A smart parking policy coupled with a more walkable Downtown is good news for local business.

With all this current and anticipated economic activity, it is long past time for City Council to consider strategic Downtown design standards and guidelines. Not having such policies in place when no new buildings were being erected is one thing. But failing to do so before a possible building boom could be detrimental to future economic performance. Why? For starters, prior demolition has left our Downtown with empty lots that feel like missing teeth. Smart cities use design standards to ensure that what replaces missing buildings complements the existing architecture. But more importantly, meaningful design standards also help establish a climate for investment by providing businesses and property owners assurances that nearby construction will not unfairly diminish their property values. The bottom line is this: Great downtowns do not happen by accident. They happen by design.

Along the same lines, we need to stimulate investment by existing owners of Downtown properties. This City Council recently enacted a Façade Improvement Program designed to do just that. By providing a matching grant of up to \$15,000 for qualified façade and roof improvements on Downtown properties, we are hoping to leverage

public investment with private investment and improve the overall look and feel of our historic properties.

At the end of the day, the City of Wheeling, like most cities, will always be judged by the health and vibrancy of our Downtown. It was once our community's pride and joy, and this City Council is committed to making it once again a destination in and of itself.

Parks, Recreation, and City Beautification

Having a vibrant central business district can fuel a city's economic engines. But having a comprehensive parks and recreational system, along with a commitment to beautification efforts, can ensure a city's peace of mind. It is precisely because of this that one of this City Council's first actions was creating a new position to help the City think strategically about its recreational assets and various gateways into Wheeling.

We are very pleased to have Jesse Mestrovic on board as the City's new Director of Parks & Strategic Planning. Jesse began in January and has been working diligently on a strategic assessment of our 30-plus neighborhood playgrounds, ball fields, bike trails, and waterways. As I noted during my campaign for this office, many of our playgrounds have fallen into a state of disrepair. Some are downright embarrassing. Our children and our neighborhoods deserve better. To this end, Jesse will be presenting City Council with a prioritized list of action items, and he will be looking to leverage city spending with available grants and private donations. If you want to be part of the solution, please contact Mr. Mestrovic to discuss the playground sponsorship opportunities he's formulating. You can also take a few minutes to fill out the parks and recreation survey that launched last week.

In the coming months, we will be looking to Jesse to present us with a plan for beautifying our gateways into Wheeling. Gateways are the first thing that visitors see when entering Wheeling through its Warwood, Elm Grove, South Wheeling, Downtown, or Wheeling Island neighborhoods. You know the saying: You only get one chance to make a first impression. We know that we can do better.

Public Safety as a Priority

With our Downtown and our parks and recreational system, this City Council is focused on areas of actual or perceived weakness. When it comes to public safety, however, our mission is to double-down on the City's strengths. Statistically, Wheeling is a relatively safe American city, and we are fortunate to have professional police and fire departments who keep us safe. But it would be a mistake of the highest magnitude for us to take this safety for granted and let complacency cloud our thinking. Public safety is one of our best selling points. It's one thing we already do well, and we cannot afford to take our eyes off the ball here. Because the perception of safety, once lost, is not easily re-attained.

In this regard, this City Council will be facing some tough budgetary decisions in the upcoming fiscal years. We have to ensure that we're not asking our law enforcement personnel to do more with less; that our first responders are given all the tools to succeed, technologically and otherwise. We have to recognize that while our population has decreased, our City still occupies the same 16 square miles it has for generations—only now with countless more vacant structures creating opportunities for criminal activity. The bottom line here is that our past successes in public safety should not be taken as a given for future performance. We must always strive to improve.

And we must turn our attention to serious problems like the opioid drug epidemic that continues to plague the Upper Ohio Valley. We must work with community partners and State and federal officials in search of more creative approaches to this persistent problem that is ruining too many lives and consuming more and more of our public safety resources.

When it comes to public safety, we must pledge never to let complacency sink in.

21st Century Imaging

And last but not least, we must be ever mindful that we live in the Information Age in which our success will correlate with how we present ourselves to the outside world. Image matters more and more in an era where attention spans grow ever shorter. We must strive to position ourselves online in the most competitive, inviting way possible. Our City website must be a beacon to the world that Wheeling is open for business. Behind me is the initial website concept the developer submitted. The site, which will launch by the end of summer, will increase online citizen self-service while reducing staff workload and thereby produce a strong return on the upfront investment.

We will also be working to create a unified branding approach to our city streetscapes. With the help of Reinvent Wheeling and a generous grant from the Schenk Foundation, the City will soon be installing banners like the ones behind me to line our Downtown streets.

Imaging in the Information Age is not limited to online functionality or branding. Our City's actions on the ground must walk the 21st Century walk. Take an issue like recycling, which is embraced by a sizable majority of Americans. And yet here in Wheeling, our recycling efforts have been modest at best, so much so that they appear nonexistent to many. In the Information Age, this is an unforced error. I have heard all the arguments why recycling has not thrived in Wheeling, and I am aware of the costs associated with running a comprehensive recycling program. But I also know full well the costs of not doing more in this regard. Not only is recycling morally defensible for environmental stewardship; it is critical for meeting the expectations of the younger Americans we are trying to attract and keep in Wheeling.

So are human rights. City Council's decision to amend our human rights ordinance was driven by moral reasons. But it was not lost upon any of us that doing so would also

help improve the way Wheeling markets itself to the rest of the country. Corporate America has long ago resolved this issue in favor of inclusion, and progressive cities across the country as well as our state are following suit.

In short, it is time to bring Wheeling further into the 21st Century. We will not get there overnight, and the journey will take us outside of our comfort zone. But I am confident in the direction we are taking.

There is a growing consensus that economic and population growth awaits us. But there is also a hunger for a fresh approach to our most persistent problems. With new ideas, an emphasis on strategic planning, and a commitment to a more transparent, inclusive city government, we can overcome what has held us back for far too long. I am proud to say that we have already made great strides in this area, and we will continue to push the boundaries that some have set for Wheeling.

Together, we are working toward a Wheeling of 2020 and beyond. Thank you for the honor of serving as your Mayor during what promises to be a transformative time in our city.