



FEBRUARY 25, 2019

# 2019 STATE OF THE CITY

PRESENTED BY MAYOR JOE WELLMAN

**2019 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**  
**Presented by Mayor Joe Wellman**  
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Allow me to start by saying that the State of our City is in excellent condition. With our conservative approach to fiscal management, and everyone's cooperation, the City's finances are in very good shape. But more important than the money is what we've accomplished to improve things across the City and in working on some things that have needed attention for a long, long time.

I want to discuss some of last year's accomplishments and then briefly highlight some things we will work on this year.

Two weeks ago I gave all of the Council copies of the annual reports generated by each Department Head. As one of the Council members pointed out 2 weeks ago after reviewing those reports – I believe it was you, David - it was an extremely busy year. At that meeting, along with copies of those annual reports, I gave a high-level summation of some of the key items in those reports. Along with a copy of this presentation, I am again giving you a copy of that summation. Allow me touch on just one or two accomplishments for each department:

- The Street Department upgraded some badly needed and worn-out equipment, expanded the areas they mow & clean-up, and re-painted the city's B & O parade train.
- The Fire Department responded to more than 1,000 calls including Emergency Management Assistance calls.
- Our Police Department handled 13,210 calls, upgraded equipment, organized Safety Night Out and hired 3 new officers.
- We processed almost 800 animals through our animal shelter, including about 400 for residents outside city limits, and added a roof over the outside kennels.
- In our Building Commission & Code Enforcement Office, we processed 387 permits and 39 cases with the Plan Commission & Board of Zoning Appeals, issued over 1400 code violations and worked to complete 17 sidewalk projects through our Sidewalk Cost-Share program with property owners.
- Our City Engineer prepared plans for drainage improvement in the Morningside, Terrace Park and 12<sup>th</sup> Street neighborhoods, and approved drainage plans for 7 businesses.

- Our electric department made several upgrades to their system and upgraded trucks and limb chipper equipment.
- The Wastewater Department treated 1.3 million gallons of sewage, worked with 11 construction and upgrade projects, handled 204 loads of street sweeping and got rid of more than 24 tons of HHW recycled material.
- The Water Department replaced the filter media in the treatment plant, started drilling a new well, replaced the ladders on well platforms and repaired 27 large water breaks around the city.
- The employees of the Utility Office processed some 96,000 bills, filed 130 cases in Small Claims Court & assisted with the complete re-structure of our stormwater system to spread the cost of storm drainage more fairly across our customer base.
- Working with Information Technology vendors, last year we debuted a new city website with a fresh, more user-friendly interface & new links & video.
- And our Parks & Recreation Department remodeled the building the City now owns that is popularly known as the Kiwanis Building next to the 4-H fairgrounds so it is more modern & desirable for the public, improved the filter system at WaterWorld of Washington, installed exercise stations around Longfellow Park and organized no less than eight events in Eastside Park.

And these are merely some of the highlights; there are other one-time improvements, and then add all this to the regular, normal things the employees do, and yes, you would have to agree it's been a busy year throughout city departments.

Two large projects that garnered much of MY personal attention last year were the 15<sup>th</sup> Street railroad overpass bridge and Business 50, both projects that have been cussed and discussed for many years, even decades, by this Council and administration and several previous Councils and administrations.

When I gave my State of the City address one year ago, I told you that work on the bridge was going to start last March. It did, and as you know, we dedicated and opened the bridge this past December 6<sup>th</sup>. All will agree that it is a safer & more functional structure, one that now has higher clearance for railroad train cars under the bridge, higher load limit over the bridge, a lower arch for improved line of sight, and a pedestrian lane to separate walkers & bicyclists from vehicular traffic. It also has sound side railings that are no longer rotting away, and is infinitely more eye-appealing.

Besides the bridge, the street approach was re-surfaced as part of the project, followed then by our Street Department re-paving the remainder of 15<sup>th</sup> Street between National Highway and Grand Avenue. Hazel Street that adjoins 15<sup>th</sup> Street will be re-surfaced this summer.

I want to take this opportunity to again publicly and officially thank Daviess County officials and the Daviess County Economic Development Foundation for cooperating on this project. It became a true example of what can happen when various entities work together. And as far as the City goes, we must thank the Indiana Department of Transportation for matching about 40 or 45% of the City's cost as a result of them approving our application to make this a Community Crossings project. Between those funds and using money from the special Local Option Income Tax distribution that the City received in 2017, we were able to pay our portion of the cost of this bridge without taking any money away from other street paving budgets nor from other local taxes.

Business 50 -- or maybe we should start calling it by its other name -- National Highway -- is the other long-maligned project for the City. After long, and at times intense negotiations, we have a plan that will result in a complete conversion of that roadway from a deteriorated and unsafe road into a street that will be something to be proud of. While the State of Indiana has proven over the past 2 decades that this road is a low-priority and low-maintenance road for them, it remains a major artery for our city residents, county residents who do business in the City, and for out-of-area visitors coming into town from I-69. It has become obvious that the State of Indiana will do only the minimum necessary. I've watched the road continually deteriorate every year.

The beauty of this project is the amount of money the State is putting in. While the State generally will require local matches for road projects of 20 or 30% of the cost, our negotiations have resulted in them putting up approximately 87% of the money. And that includes 87% of the cost for new curbs and sidewalks, which the State generally does not participate in.

The local match for this project will be around \$3 million toward the full cost. The project as planned will improve this road from city limit to city limit, from the roundabout to the west limit at American Table Restaurant. The road will be completely resurfaced including full-depth reconstruction where needed, new sidewalks plus multi-purpose trailway in a portion of it, new curbs and sewer inlets,

ADA access ramps and new driveway approaches for the more-than-eighty businesses and more-than-one-hundred homes along Business 50.

Not only is our portion of the cost less than 15%, but we will do this without raising taxes or taking money away from other street paving projects around the City. This project is a perfect example of wise use of Tax Increment Financing, or TIF. The money going into the city's TIF funds are paid by businesses and industries that have built or expanded and located inside the city's three TIF districts. These are the taxes they already pay as a portion of their property taxes, so the surface road work & the other amenities I've mentioned does not increase property taxes on businesses, industries - or home owners - one cent over what we all now pay. Think of that again. No – additional – taxes – will – be – required in order for us to fix an eyesore.

When finished, there will be no more flooding in front of Washington Nursing Center & Griffith Elementary, no more tripping over uneven sidewalk sections between the west limits and State Street area, better access for physically-challenged walkers, a dedicated pathway for bikers and parents pushing infant strollers in the center business section, new curbs for improved drainage and looks, no busted and bent wheel rims caused by deep potholes, and smooth driving. That's the vision that can become reality.

Our engineers have told us that the need to tear up the roadway and replace water & sewer lines under this road will be necessary in the near future, regardless of who owns the road. So at the advice and prudent judgment of this Council, we are planning on replacing those lines that are 70 or 80 years old with new ones, and where possible to move them under the sidewalk or trail and out from under the roadway. New street lights are part of the project as well as underground electric service in some parts of the project. Also, plans call for installation of conduit to hopefully be leased someday to communications companies to easily pull fiber optic cables for high-speed internet.

The cost of this work – approximately \$8 million - will be paid through utility rates that comparisons show still remain lower than neighboring cities. Again, not through increased property taxes. And because the road is new with a solid base, maintenance will be minimal for many, many years with far fewer incidents of potholes for the city to fill than in other areas with older streets.

While some of these seats up front here will be occupied by new faces when this project is complete, my goal, and the goal of several Council members throughout this process, has been to put a plan into place and have the funding ready to pay for it. I'm not insinuating that executing the plan will be easy nor without disruption – no project of this size ever is – but the planning, design and financing will be in place, ready to be finished.

Couple all that with just the beauty of what it will look like, for our own enjoyment and for visitors coming into town, especially those visitors that just might be an unknown site selector or company executive looking for a place to build. The new road will make a statement that Washington DOES care about our city, our citizens, our infrastructure. According to one 2009 study I've seen, walkability as defined by good sidewalks or trails that connect parts of a community can increase property values anywhere from \$3,000 to \$24,000.

While we worked on that, the Department Heads of the City continued doing their regular good job of running their departments and improving equipment and operations wherever they could, given the money and time they had. Speaking of money, I should note that our collective approach to being fiscally conservative resulted in spending only 88% of budgeted expenses in 2018 in the General Fund and 83 to 91% of most other budgeted funds. That continues a trend of 81 to 90% each year for at least the past 3 years. That means we are better prepared for any unexpected emergency that could come along, and maintains our fund balances at respectable levels.

Another way to look at that is that since 2014, we've returned between \$490,000 and \$900,000 each year to the General Fund that had been previously appropriated. The growth in General Fund expenditures from 2015 through 2018 has averaged just over four-and-a-half percent per year. That includes not just operations and personnel costs but also the cost of many improvements in plant and equipment in those departments making up the General Fund.

The National Highway Improvement project will occupy quite a bit of time during the remainder of 2019. We will also continue to make sure all other areas of the City and utility operations run smoothly. Some other specific areas we will be addressing include:

- transitions in several personnel positions due to announced retirements in four departments, and completing the staffing in our IT function,
- continued diligence over dilapidated properties,
- continued efforts to keep trash, tall grass, and unsightly code violations in check,
- quality of life amenities such as parks, animal care and community events, and
- public safety, as it relates to police and fire department staffing, equipment and dispatch.

So I don't see myself or any of our departments slowing down as we continue in 2019.

Now, why did I ask everyone to bring in a food or pet product this evening? As you leave, take a look at all the items we've gathered. We will share it with Feed My Sheep and our own Animal Shelter as a sign of what can be accomplished by working together. Could one person have gone out and bought all this? Maybe? Would any one person do that? Not likely. But, by combining our individual sacrifices, we have accumulated a pretty good stash of donations and good intentions to make a bit of difference in this corner of the world we call Washington.

It's a small sign of how we've accomplished all the things we have over the last seven years by working together. It's also a statement that we as public servants, which all of us who are either elected or appointed as city officials, serve in many ways, including service to our four-legged friends and to those less fortunate. This Council, our Board of Public Works, our department heads, I think work quite well together to get things done. As I see it, the effectiveness of governing a city and the quality of place it offers is a cooperative effort. The success is assured more by being able to work together than by the talents of any one individual. My thanks to each Council member, to Tim, and to Beth for your help and support. Thank you to each of the Department Heads sitting out here this evening. What you do makes the job of being Mayor a whole lot easier.

I want to publicly thank every city employee who comes to work each day and commits him or herself to doing their job, whatever that job is, to provide city services to our fellow city residents, who in the final analysis pay our salaries!

Thank you to Debbie for helping me in so many ways, especially in keeping my busy calendar in line and many times reminding me where I should be and what I need to do.

I want to thank my family, represented this evening by my \_\_\_\_\_, for understanding and supporting me in so many ways.

Finally, and most importantly, I thank my best friend and wife of what will soon be forty-five years. Elaine is my support and strength, when good things are happening the majority of the time, but also when I come home on those days that are less than ideal or longer than we would like.

And thanks to God for all the blessings of Washington and the people, citizens, businesses, schools and organizations that we work with and make this place HOME for all of us. May He continue to bless us and keep us safe.

Thanks for your attention this evening. Have a great 2019!!

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