

# Mayor Martin Delivers 2019 State of the City Address

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**Citizens of Havre de Grace and Honorable Members of the City Council,**

I would first like to note that all of the successes I am about to discuss could not have been possible without the continued support and involvement of the Havre de Grace City Council. I have indeed been fortunate to have a Council that not only shares my vision of Havre de Grace as a central hub of social interaction and family development in Harford County, but also debates planned efforts in a supportive and respectful manner and contributes valuable new ideas to make us an ever greater community. They are truly partners in all our endeavors and show that government can and should work well together.

Herein is a report on the State of the City of Havre de Grace and our accomplishments from 2018 and the plans and challenges that lie ahead of us in 2019.

## **Havre de Grace Accomplishments**

FY 2018 was a great year in the City of Havre de Grace. We completed many projects, maintained a balanced budget, and improved quality of life for our citizens. The City received a very positive financial audit from the independent auditing firm Zelenkofske Axelrod LLC.

Construction of the long anticipated new Havre de Grace High School/Middle School began in the Spring of 2018. The citizens and elected officials worked for many years to make this a reality and it was indeed gratifying to see our vision finally become a reality.

This fiscal year to date finds all City funds operating in accordance with our budget projections. The City continues to meet its financial obligations for capital projects, employment, and debt service. We have also been able to commit funds to a variety of initiatives and projects.

We have already spent almost \$450,000 in paving projects to ensure safe, effective access throughout the City with an additional \$250,000 to continue paving projects through the end of FY19. We have spent almost \$100,000 in City Park Upgrades, including the new pickleball court, pavilion and additional lighting at Tydings Park; upgrades to the Bradford Green basketball court; the completion of the ADA Ramp and installation of new picnic tables, grills and pet waste stations; completion of floating piers with kayak access at Hutchins Park and Concord Point Park; and upgrades to the Moore House property (new fencing, benches and signage)

Our efforts this year to upgrade our water and sewer systems have been substantial. We have contracted over \$2,000,000 to rehabilitate the Water Treatment Plant. With the exception of the recent roof replacement, the City water plant has not seen any major rehabilitation in nearly 25 years. I am committed to making the necessary investment in our facilities to ensure current and future generations have safe and reliable drinking water at an affordable price.

We have committed over \$700,000 for water distribution and wastewater collection rehabilitation. I consider this the initial phase of a multi-year effort to replace pipes that are reaching the end of their useful life.

We have also completed over \$625,000 in stormwater management remediation in the Critical Area to properly protect the Chesapeake Bay. The Department of Public Works oversaw the Concord Point Stormwater Management and Wetland Enhancement Project. This project was a huge success, constructing a regenerative stormwater conveyance (RSC) for water quality improvements. This is a great example of a successful partnership with regulatory agencies and neighbors in the museum cultural district, which includes the Concord Point Lighthouse and Keeper's House, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, and the Maritime Museum. And best of all, we now have our own beach!

The Marina maintenance dredging project is underway and will be completed this Spring. We have successfully obtained over \$750,000 in State funding to complete this project. In addition, we have secured \$35,000 in State grant funding to continue the pier re-decking project, which will also be completed this Spring.

In the area of Public Safety, the City of Havre de Grace has seen a consistent reduction in crime over the last 5 years with a 3% reduction in 2018, from 2017. Over the past two years, the City of Havre de Grace has been identified as one of the safest cities in the State of Maryland. And in June of 2018, SafeWise, home security experts, recognized Havre de Grace as the 4th Safest City in the Nation to raise children.

Your City government remains the only area in Harford County to staff and fund a School Resource Officer in each of its four schools.

The Drug Take Back program (with a Drug Drop Box located at the entrance to the Police Department) continues to be a great success. Last year, our department helped take well over 1,000 lbs. of prescription medicine off the streets.

And for the first time, the Havre de Grace Police Department formed a Police Explorer Program. This program is designed to encourage teenagers and young adults to become involved with public safety concentrating on law enforcement.

The Department of Public Works has also been very busy. In 2018, DPW logged over 2,277 work orders in just our Streets, Parks, Water & Sewer Distribution Group.

The following are just a few of the service calls and duties performed over the last year:

- 1,250 customer water specific calls by our water distribution team.
- 108 potholes and road repairs

- 55 water main break repairs
- 33 sidewalks repaired / replaced
- 37 storm drain issues resolved
- 26 sinkhole repairs
- Treated and plowed 47 miles of streets during 7 snow event.
- Assisted with 55 special events around the City

In addition to calls for service, the Department of Public Works also:

- Planted 100 trees at Seneca Avenue Park
- Replaced approximately 2300' of water lines at Lafayette and Alliance Streets
- Continued with an aggressive annual upgrade and replacement plan for fire hydrants
- Oversaw resurfacing projects at Bayview and Grace Harbour, Opera House parking lot, Community Center parking lot, Lafayette Street, Market Street, and Revolution Street (in partnership with BGE), and multiple blocks of lanes downtown
- Expanded Winter Wonderland Christmas decorations to include David Craig Park and Hutchins Park
- Poured concrete pad and installed Gold Star Memorial at Concord Point Park
- Collected 2,038 bulk items from residential addresses

DPW's other environmental partnerships include:

- The Victory Garden created by the Havre de Grace Green Team
- The pollinator garden, signage and rain barrel with the Harford County Watershed Stewards
- Stream and trash clean-up by the dedicated volunteers with Citizens Against Trash (C.A.T.)

The Planning Department is proud to report that we improved our CRS Rating from Class 8 to Class 7, which will help our citizens save on flood insurance rates.

The Havre de Grace Tourism Department was also very busy this past year, planning and supporting multiple events for citizens and visitors to our City. Highlights include: our monthly First Friday events, an expanded Farmers Market, the annual Independence Day Celebration, Havre de Grace Food Truck Festival, Oktoberfest, Havre de Grace Oyster Feast, Holly Jolly First Friday and Holiday Parade and Mardi Gras Parade.

The Havre de Grace Arts Collective responsible for managing the Cultural Center at the Opera House has realized great success and has received over 20,000 attendees during its first 18 months of operation.

Many of these events in our City have led to an economic stimulus for our local businesses. Our Department of Economic Development is pleased to report that we have a near “zero vacancy rate” in our downtown business district for the first time in recent history.

Administratively, we’ve worked tirelessly to retain a skilled and dedicated workforce, while at the same time, analyzing ways to improve efficiencies in our workforce. To this end, we have:

- Conducted a comprehensive restructuring of our Employee Wages and Benefit Programs; enhanced healthcare insurance coverage options, all of which has saved taxpayers thousands of dollars
- Reduced 12 positions City-wide since 2015, identifying opportunities for streamlining operational efficiencies and job sharing

Havre de Grace City Council legislative actions include:

- Formal recognition of the City’s Historic District
- Establishment of John O’Neill Day (our first municipal holiday)
- Creation of the Havre de Grace Youth Commission
- Passage of the Disabled Veterans Tax Credit
- Increased in-kind and financial support of our volunteer organizations

As you can see, everyone in the City of Havre de Grace Government has been extremely busy over the past year. Our goal is to make our City, not only a destination for visitors by adding tourism events to an already robust events schedule, but to attract new residents to relocate here, by continuing to make significant investments in our community and our infrastructure.

## **Outlook for 2019**

While we know that we have successfully addressed many of the challenges of the past, we also know that there will be more challenges that lie ahead of us. Please know that your government and this administration are prepared to meet those challenges. Together, there is nothing we cannot accomplish. I truly believe that the next decade will be the most important decade in the history of our City. The accomplishments and investments we make today will prepare us to meet the future.

To aid in Economic Development, I have budgeted \$75,000 for a downtown trolley system. The Council and I are working with the State Legislature to allow an electric trolley system limited access to downtown roadways. My vision is for a thoroughly enjoyable addition to the downtown experience and a way to improve access for our visitors.

I have contracted almost \$230,000 to construct an elevated walkway at the Joe K. Trail, completing the next phase of this long-term project and enhancing the area around the trail.

We have entered into an MOU with MDTA, whereby they will be funding over a half million dollar restoration and improvements to Lilly Run.

We will begin to design and implement plans for the development of the Water Street coastline for public use.

I am also looking to complete agreements with both Aberdeen and Harford County to provide water to their residents and businesses. If successful, this effort would provide additional funding for planned infrastructure replacement, without causing undue pressure to raise the cost of service to our residents.

The Planning Department, along with the Economic Development Advisory Board, will continue the work it has already started on refining and updating the MOE (Mixed Office Employment) district to provide a functional and aesthetically pleasing new gateway to our City.

The Planning Department will also continue working on a zone district overlay, redevelopment area or some combination of methods to provide a path to the best result for our community in the redevelopment of the Harford Memorial Hospital site.

We will continue to assist the County in construction of the new High School/Middle School, with a projected opening of Fall 2020.

The 2019 outlook is strong for the Havre de Grace Police Department. This department will be the first law enforcement agency in Harford County to have an Explorer Program, Cadet Program, and an Auxiliary Police Program, encouraging more citizens to be involved in public safety service, with a possible future career in law enforcement. The Police Department also hopes to install solar traffic systems to replace battery operated systems, expand and improve the Youth Summer Safety Camps, and increase the number of free home and business security surveys we offer, all while still patrolling the streets and keeping Havre de Grace a safe place to live and work.

In addition to our excellent Police Department, Havre de Grace is also home to the Susquehanna Hose Company and Havre de Grace Ambulance Corps, two first class volunteer organizations. This administration will continue to provide the financial and in-kind support needed for these organizations to continue their service to the citizens of Havre de Grace.

We will also continue to work with our elected state officials to find solutions to the Route 40 / Otsego Street / Ohio Street intersection. The State of Maryland has recognized the traffic congestion in this area, and placed this intersection on a priority improvement list in 2018. We are still awaiting a timeframe for project design and improvement implementation from State Highway Administration.

In Tourism, in addition to our list of already established events, there are some new events to look forward to in 2019. Many of these events provide economic stimulus to our downtown businesses and non-profit organizations. New events this year include:

- John O'Neill Day Celebration – May 4-5, 2019
- Jazz and Blues Fest – June 7-9, 2019
- Waterfront Festival – August 2019

We also look forward to the creation of a new City website, to debut in March 2019. This website will increase our City's visibility, as well as enhance services to citizens and prospective businesses.

## **Challenges Ahead**

Enterprise Fund (FUND 9) – The Water Sewer Report tonight spoke to the increasing financial demand to address the aging distribution and collection system that has not been fully addressed for generations, as well as meeting the debt service incurred from mandated improvements at the WasteWater Treatment Plant. The debt service coupled with the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) financial demands will prove to be very challenging in the next budget year. This is demonstrated by the CIP requirements over the next 10 years. This administration is fully dedicated to addressing this issue, not just for today, but moving towards the future. This will require finding creative ways to generate revenue, which should not solely be a burden funded by our citizens.

Triennial tax assessments have recently projected almost no increase in tax revenue for our City. This becomes a challenge for 2019 with rising healthcare costs for City employees. We must find ways to balance our wages and benefits to continue to make the City attractive in its recruitment and retention of skilled employees, while also addressing these rising costs of doing business.

Finally, our greatest challenge is and always will be to continue providing quality services to our citizens, within the confines of our revenues and available resources. But we will do as we have always done. This is what makes Havre de Grace great. Our ability to face challenges as a community and to celebrate our successes with one another. In 2019, I know our successes will outnumber our challenges. I look forward to all this year has to offer our City and our citizens.

The State of our City is strong.

Thank you.

William T. Martin

Mayor

City of Havre de Grace

Comments are closed.