

FROM THE MAYOR'S OFFICE

Mayor Purzycki shares current challenges and triumphs of the City of Wilmington

AS WE MOVE THROUGH the second year of a new City Administration, the state of our city is good and getting better. There's much to be optimistic about. Our economy is solid. There are 1,000 rental units under construction and three hotels that are getting started. While some traditional employers are contracting in size, smaller ones are growing and see Wilmington as a place to build their businesses. We are becoming more of a financial and technical hub for entrepreneurs. More restaurants are opening downtown and enthusiasm there is high. The Riverfront also continues to thrive.

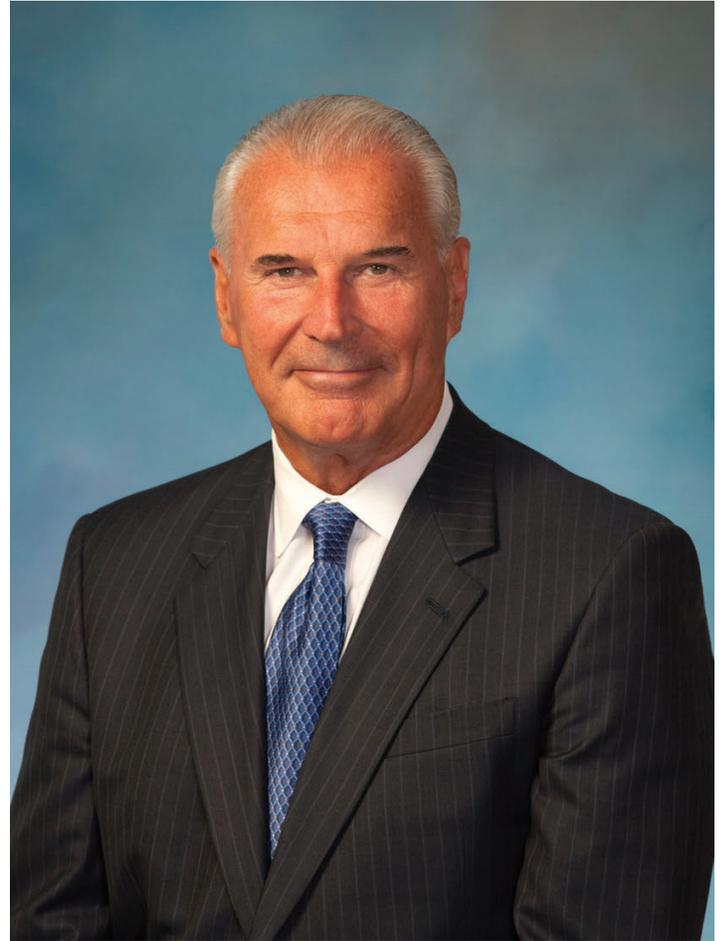
City government still faces budget deficit challenges. Structural financial constraints impede our ability to adequately fund needed capital projects and services. Aged infrastructure drains our resources. Too many neighborhoods are beset by poverty and crime. And too many citizens live in sub-standard rental housing.

When elected, my first job was to reduce crime and improve public safety. So I hired Robert Tracy as the first police chief to come from outside the department in the city's history. Chief Tracy has brought data-driven policing to Wilmington, improved deployment, and created a culture that's led to strong relationships with our neighborhoods. We have more police officers on the street than ever before. And with two new long-term union agreements, our police officers are compensated fairly while more efficient police deployment resulted in the lowest overtime usage in over five years.

After 2017 saw record levels of violent crime, the trends now are encouraging and results matter. Violent crime is below where it was last year at this time, with shooting incidents alone down 57%. It's too early to declare victory, but I feel very good about the direction of our police department.

Our most pressing goal is improving neighborhoods. Last May, I announced our first Neighborhood Stabilization Project in West Center City—a pilot project for the redevelopment of other city neighborhoods. The overall results in West Center City have been encouraging, with community members reporting increased satisfaction with our efforts.

We have about 17,000 rental units. Many landlords are responsible. Too many though are unlicensed and take advantage of residents by charging high rents and not maintaining their properties. Children are raised too often in homes unfit for human habitation, negatively affecting their physical and emotional well-being. Poorly maintained rental units



ruin neighborhoods. We have resumed pre-rental inspections for the first time in ten years, and we are working with City Council to approve our amended Anti-Crime and Blight legislation. We need more tools to deal with irresponsible commercial property owners while protecting responsible homeowners. We are also formulating a plan to offer more affordable homeownership opportunities to qualified renters.

We have a number of internal initiatives to bring our city up to acceptable standards and practices. L&I is launching a digital plans submission and review system to shorten the period of time for plan approval. We are testing a 311 call center to better receive and resolve complaints and requests for information. We also plan to implement an Open Government information sharing platform to make government more transparent.

We are working non-stop to put our city on the right path -- a path to better housing, better and cleaner neighborhoods, better technology, more beautiful public spaces, and a safer city. It is a path to attracting business, jobs and vital tax revenues. It is a path, above all, of inclusion and shared prosperity. None of this is easy. Still, changing history's legacy is our chosen responsibility and our highest calling. ■