

2018 was a banner year for me both personally & professionally. Not only did my son Liam come into our lives, putting my own life and this job into greater perspective, but I was fortunate enough to earn the trust of Versailles residents to serve four more years as Mayor.

2018 was an equally successful year for city government, and the state of the City is strong. This past year, for example, we began building our long overdue police station, moved forward with significant improvements to our sewer system, and celebrated the opening of the first hotel in Versailles in generations, giving us added credibility as a tourist destination.

We also began an Angel Program that is connecting those facing a drug addiction with treatment centers, and that includes removing many barriers that had limited access to these proven programs. We assisted 10 individuals while the program was being set up and three since formal inception of the program, which is appropriately titled Operation Lifesaver. We will also continue partnering with RAW and others who have experience with these matters and can persuade more folks to seek help through these formal channels.

July 20th brought us an unexpected windstorm that wreaked havoc on our community. The response by all personnel involved was tremendous and the preparations that took place when the sun is shining proved helpful when the storms came. There were a few issues related to our warning system that will be tackled in the near future, but the response by public safety personnel, public works, and neighbors helping neighbors was inspirational. That storm also proved why it is beneficial to keep an adequate financial reserve in place. After accounting for overtime and related costs, citywide cleanup, and damage to our assets, this storm cost us into the six-figures.

Our fire department, in 2018, added a new ladder truck to further protect our residential and business facilities. Speaking of the business community, we once again saw marked improvements and continued investment in our downtown district. I'm very proud of the changes we're seeing.

In other city business, we finally passed long overdue ordinances regulating urban poultry, animal welfare, and the littering of our community with unsolicited materials.

I cannot mention the city's success without taking a moment to praise our employees, who did more than their part to make 2018 a great year. What they do 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is as impressive as it is important to our goal of becoming a city truly envied by our peers.

Looking beyond city government, I am encouraged by the new spirit of cooperation that exists within and between our different local governments in Woodford County. Working together, we can make great progress on Big Spring Park improvements, streamlining our business licensing process, sharing resources among our street and road crews, pursuing a sidewalk along High Street leading to the Middle School, and conducting a thorough review of our transportation challenges.

All of these are examples of good news. But as I say every year, resting on our laurels is not what we were elected to do. We have several large challenges this year that MUST be dealt with.

The most pressing issue that faces us right now is stabilizing our 911 funding. We have been blessed to be one of just a handful of counties that has been able to finance 911 operations without tapping into general fund dollars. We were able to do that because our service was funded by proceeds from the local fee assessed on landlines and our share of the fees assessed to wireless customers. When needed, we also dipped into a trust account of surpluses from those accounts that had accumulated over the years.

That well has run dry, however, and we are left with a gaping hole when it comes to both operations and capital spending. Under our existing interlocal agreement, the City of Versailles and Woodford Fiscal Court are now responsible to pay some of these costs from our general funds.

To continue the level of investment we must have in 911 technology, and to best serve ALL of the citizens of Woodford County while guaranteeing cost fairness, I believe we must negotiate a new interlocal agreement that includes the City of Midway and more clearly reflects how we handle capital improvements. It is time to be creative and collectively seek a solution that provides stability and an adequate funding level.

Another pressing issue is preparing for the closure of the Ledvance facility. The city must be ready to do all it can to help those directly affected while being prepared for an expected tax shortfall. Fortunately, the seeds we have planted economically in recent years are blossoming, and I remain confident that we can manage our way through this.

At the same time, we must never stop looking for ways to make our employment base even stronger, so that we are even better prepared for the difficulties that invariably arise. I'm grateful our Economic Development Authority and John Soper are working tirelessly to make sure Versailles is poised to capitalize on our strengths.

On a related note, these changing economic times mean we must also ramp up our efforts to attract one or more high-tech, high paying employers that will be as versatile as they are cutting edge.

To spur that along, we must move quickly to lock in MetroNet as a provider of reliable, affordable, and fast internet as well as an alternative source of cable television. Only when we take our fiber infrastructure seriously will these industries of the future take us seriously.

Negotiations with MetroNet are going well and have gotten into the details of permitting fees and regulations and franchise ordinances, which is a positive sign of their seriousness. The recent announcement of the closing of the local Spectrum office reaffirms that focusing on this endeavor in the latter part of 2018 was the right move.

Another void that needs filled is the retail gap that exists in Versailles after the closing of our local K-Mart store. According to CBRE Research, there is an almost \$200 million retail gap in the five-mile radius surrounding the old K-Mart building. That number takes into account only the expenditures of residents within a 5-mile radius of the former K-Mart that occur outside of that area. That does not take

into account missed retail expenditures from the many out of town customers who visit current businesses but would be willing to shop at another large retailer in Versailles for convenience.

We have the space in that shopping center on Marsailles and are actively working with the property owner for a solution that will satisfy all parties. Whether that works out or not, we must do more to make it easier for our citizens to buy the basic goods and services they need.

There are other items that will be dealt with in 2019. These include updating our Council Chambers and providing technological upgrades that would benefit Council and audience members as well as a reliable video recording of meetings.

We have an initial town hall meeting on Thursday and will continue similar events throughout the year. It is my intent that we organize a series of public meetings to discuss transportation issues for all modes of transportation within Woodford County and get feedback from the residents who traverse this community daily. Work should continue maximizing the potential of our downtown district and highlighting our countywide tourism potential. We need to look at our fire inspection ordinances to make sure our local fire professionals have a chance to confirm the safety of structures. We need to modernize our ordinances regarding door-to-door solicitors and put into place a wayfinding signage program. I want us to explore a gross receipts tax as an alternative to the net profits tax and perhaps further liberalize the alcohol laws in our downtown district to boost further investment. I expect our new police station and wastewater treatment plant to be completed this fall, and I would like to see us do even more to tackle the drug epidemic. We cannot rest until this poison is no longer killing our citizens and ruining families.

More broadly, we must remain united with our city and county peers to preserve local control. There is an effort in Frankfort – sometimes done subtly – to wrestle away some things we take for granted locally. Don't be surprised to see a push to centralize tax collections, which would require us to pay the state to do what cities and counties across the Commonwealth have done successfully for years.

Current retirement system policies, meanwhile, still use local tax dollars to make up for underfunding and poor management of state retirement dollars. I believe we should do whatever it takes to correct that and provide long-term stability for CERS employers. Regardless of your political affiliation, we must guarantee that local governments – the only level of government that currently is responsive, effective, and efficient – maintain the tools necessary to serve our great constituents.

Aristotle once said “To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing.” Doing nothing is not an option, so criticism is inevitable. My request of this Council and administration is to do more than our share to turn back the tide of negativity that exists in today's society.

Many in society seem to be less kind than in years past. That in turn breeds pessimism, which has the potential to become self-fulfilling while stalling progress. We should see all of our challenges as opportunities to come together, to debate what works and what doesn't, and to try and make decisions by consensus when feasible. I would like to see us quick to credit others and slow to cast blame.

What once was idle gossip can now be documented for life in social media. Its speed and anonymity make it so easy to fuel fires that otherwise would not burn.

The recent situation involving students from a Covington high school is a prime example of what I am talking about. If that same situation occurred even just 20 years ago, there would not have been millions of people drawing conclusions before all of the facts were known. No, it would have resolved itself and not a single word would have been written about it. When each side digs in further, common ground becomes even harder to find, and that's not healthy for anyone.

We are judged by our actions online and off, and many potential investors and residents are watching us to gauge if our community is one where they would feel welcomed and comfortable. When we city and civic leaders set a positive tone, it ripples out and makes a difference.

So let us be forthcoming, accurate and truthful, and don't let us shirk our responsibility to speak truth to those who wish to misinform or mistreat. Let us promote a positive image of our community and one where we speak – and type – to each other with kindness and respect.

Thank you for indulging me and allowing me to share my thoughts, and I look forward to working with each and every one of you as we continue building on our previous successes and tackle new opportunities.