

For more than half-dozen years now, I have had the privilege to sit here and provide an annual report on the city, and it's something I look forward to more and more with each passing year. That's because this speech is a true pivot point on what we have done and what we plan to do. It's a time to grade ourselves and then give ourselves assignments for the 12 months ahead.

There is a saying that the further back in the past you look the further into the future you can see. By that standard, I can truly say that the city I grew up in, the city my wife and I are raising our son in, and the city I will never leave is strong and is getting stronger. To paraphrase Coach Cal, I like my city.

I am proud of what we have accomplished since my last state of the city speech a year ago. We've made ourselves more inviting to those who may be visiting or looking for a new home or a place to work, and we've strengthened ties with Midway and the county. There is always room to improve, but there is no doubt we made major strides over the last year.

Before I get into the details about the city's work, I want to note that this and all other city council meetings are now being recorded and readily available. This is bringing us a new level of accountability and transparency, and the cost was low, too, especially when compared to what we gain. Those who may not be able to make these meetings now have a way to stay better informed and engaged.

With greater public awareness of work in mind, we have also continued updating our ordinance books by simplifying them and removing outdated laws. We also added a significant new law, of course, when we joined a growing list of communities by passing a fairness ordinance. This measure shined a positive light on Versailles, and businesses and young families considering relocation here will now look more favorably on this act of inclusiveness. I want to take a moment to praise the way you handled this, because it was debated with respect by the Council and public alike and should be the model we follow in the years ahead whenever there are proposed ordinances generating the interest this one did.

Also in our work to be more inclusive, the city has filled the minority empowerment liaison position and confirmed diverse board appointments throughout the year. I'm extremely pleased that our growing number of community events were once again on point, and that the Council adopted and the state licensed an entertainment destination center downtown. Tied to that is a revision of our event permit ordinance, which will ensure that public gatherings are safe and orderly.

The Administrative & Legal Committee, Code Enforcement Board, police department, City Attorney and I have worked to strengthen our nuisance ordinances and explore the possibility of hiring a code enforcement officer to focus on these types of violations along with other breaches of our ordinances. Both of those actions should get underway later tonight. This past year we also completely overhauled our peddlers and solicitors ordinance to better protect our residents.

The Impact Fee program is still generating revenue from builders and developers for capital improvements to our sanitary sewer system, offsetting what would have to be paid by current

customers. To that end, our wastewater treatment plant upgrades should be online early this year.

Another ongoing project I am really excited about is the addition of Metronet to our community. The company has started putting fiber in the ground and is optimistic it will be providing service to the entire urban service area within the next 12 months. That adds an extra layer of competition for our current internet and cable providers and allows us to boast to technology-driven companies that we are a gigabit city.

In another business venture, the city is partners in a grant application to remake the existing Community Trust Bank building into a boutique hotel, micro distillery and restaurant. This unique project will make productive use of a building that, if left empty, would not be easy to fill. It will also create about 15 jobs and provide a neat place for locals and visitors to gather. In addition, it will add room tax revenue for our tourist commission, which has had a very successful 2019 thanks to the injection of funds from the Holiday Inn Express and a partnership with local horse farms for yet another beautiful tourism-themed downtown mural.

There are a couple of other economic development matters I want to discuss. First, the departure of Ledvance has created both a challenge and an opportunity. We are probably the only locality in Kentucky with a building of that size available to potential employers. It is being acquired by a highly motivated investment group, and we look forward to working with them to market that property and our community to others.

While we are doing this, we are also hopeful something can be worked out with the building currently owned by UHaul. We should not be asked to make decisions while being held hostage by an out-of-state outfit that was foolish enough not to read the zoning ordinances before buying a property with the intention of converting its use.

As we look ahead to the rest of 2020, there are several things I hope will be completed. For example, we are taking a multi-dimensional approach when it comes to deciding what to do with our current police station. We are exploring public-private-partnership opportunities, other potential partnerships, and seeing what cash we could get from a flat-out sale. Our police will be moving into their beautiful new building in a matter of weeks, so these opportunities are finally upon us.

The committee looking at wayfinding signage has made great progress and is working with the Transportation Cabinet on details of a proposal that can be presented to this body for consideration. A new maintenance garage, meanwhile, will give us a better location to maintain our equipment.

On the mobility front, I'm hopeful this Council will see the benefit of continuing the momentum of the Old Dry Ridge and Huntertown Road sidewalk projects and complete the High Street sidewalk build out to connect to Falling Springs Boulevard. This will provide a safe route for students to walk to the middle school. We will try and acquire grant funding for this project, but we need to decide if we can afford this and move forward even if there is no outside funding.

I am pleased that we have landed a grant for the trail on the old railroad bed on the U.S. 60 bypass. Construction there will begin soon, and it will not be long before our citizens have a new location to exercise and a safe place for pedestrian movement.

In other transportation-related news, I am going to convene some community meetings to determine how we can make our city safer for our citizens. That includes plotting traffic accident information and investing in data gathering devices to get traffic counts and speed averages on our city streets, and listening to the concerns of residents about problems they have observed.

Our police department will continue monitoring intersections with a high incidence of red-light runners and stretches of roadway where speeding is a serious issue. With that in mind, we have seen success by reducing the speed limit on Lexington Street.

Improved safety and access are the main reasons I will continue to push to give two major city road projects the attention they deserve. Those are a reconfiguration of the stretch of road between the Lexington Street/ Bypass intersection and Marsailles Drive, and the connector road that would reroute thru traffic off Main Street. I believe our community would be better off if both projects were completed.

In the near term, there are a handful of other big projects that I hope to see take off this calendar year. First, I believe we need to revisit the way we generate revenue from businesses. I am more convinced than ever that the way we currently do it is unfair to small firms and benefits only large out-of-state entities. I have looked at the ordinances of more than 200 other cities and counties in Kentucky, and will work with the Finance Committee to see what we can do to improve this situation.

Secondly, Bart, Paul and I have been gathering data on the types and prices of the almost 700 KU-owned street lights in Versailles and the cost to convert these to LED. Unfortunately, the current tariff structure allows KU to collect an additional fee for five years to cover the loss of their under-depreciated current fixtures. After that five year period, the energy usage savings are realized and the bills would drop below their current level. What I am going to propose is that we convert all of the lights in one area, just so we can see what kind of product the LED light is. If it is a far more superior light quality – as I anticipate it will be – we will methodically order the conversion and keep our fingers crossed that the rate structures catches up with technology and the prices drop.

I would also like to explore a citywide cleanup day to provide free curbside pickup of items to allow our residents the opportunity to get rid of some things without paying extra or worrying about calling our hauler. Many other local governments have implemented a program like this and report great success in cleaning up their cities and how satisfied their residents are. There are a lot of details and costs to examine, but I believe the sooner we do this, the better.

There are two in-house projects I would like to see move forward. One is to design and adopt a new logo for the City of Versailles, because the one we currently use on letterhead and lapel pins no longer captures who we are. Councilman Kerkhoff has volunteered to put his marketing skills, organizational abilities and experience with the Uniquely Woodford project to work and get this process started.

I'd also like to update our investment policy to provide us the opportunity to maximize return on our investment while protecting our assets from potential loss. There are areas where I believe we can and should do better.

One public project I am really excited about is the work being done to make our inaugural Hometown Heroes banner a reality. This will allow friends and family members to recognize veterans and active duty service members who have donned a uniform in defense of this great nation. Not only does it provide a way to showcase our bravest and most noble citizens, it will inspire a sense of public service in younger generations. The amount of interest shown has been phenomenal, and I am grateful to the American Legion Post 67 Ladies Auxiliary and the City of Midway for the partnership as we move ahead with accepting applications.

This state of the city address wouldn't be complete without mentioning the reality being faced by Versailles and Woodford County and almost every other community in the state. I'm talking about the decreasing level of 911 funding. For the past 17 years, our 911 capital and operations have been funded by a landline fee and our portion of the cell phone fee that comes from the state. As everyone knows, the number of landlines has been dropping significantly each year, and this current fiscal year is going to see Versailles and Woodford County dipping into their general fund revenue to pay for some 911 operations. That figure is projected to grow even more next year.

Until now, this critical emergency service has funded itself. Indeed, our predecessors were wise enough to set a then high \$3.50 monthly rate on our landlines, which allowed us to build up a reserve. As we deal with a decline in the fund's main revenue source, however, I believe it is time we drop this fee on landline bills and shift the revenue collection to an alternate source. At our next Council meeting, the first responder agencies working on this issue will present this Council with some potential funding options.

As the years I spend in this job progress, I realize that the most important aspect of being Mayor is not what you read about in the Woodford Sun or gets mentioned on social media. As the head of city government, the Mayor is responsible for almost 100 employees and more than \$15 million in spending. The efficient administration of government is paramount to getting anything else done. We will continue to see budgetary pressure coming from the increase in our required contributions to the retirement system, among other things.

With those growing costs in mind, I intend to conduct a sweeping audit of our operations to find places where we can do things better and for less cost. We will challenge every employee to think outside the box and determine how we can best serve our customers – the residents and employees in our city – even better. I will invite each member of the Council to participate in any of these reviews of departments or operations they feel especially passionate about. I believe

we are doing things pretty well now, but we can always find ways to improve how we do our job.

While we will be looking for ways to do more with less, I also want to take a moment to respond to those who complain about the money our local governments need to operate. That perennial complaint led me to review where, exactly, we stand among communities like ours. I reviewed the tax and utility rates of most other central Kentucky cities and counties and compiled the information.

If you look at the screen, you will see a comparison of Versailles and Woodford County to other nearby communities. We may not be the lowest, but we are far from the highest. For purposes of making an apples-to-apples comparison, I selected a household with a property tax bill based on \$150,000 assessment, motor vehicles worth \$30,000, a monthly usage of 4,000 gallons of water, and \$2,000 in insurance premiums. I've also left off the state portion of any tax bill since that would be uniform across jurisdictions. I found this information eye-opening and hope you do too. I've disseminated a detailed accounting of this information.

While I am happy with where we stand in this comparison, that doesn't mean our success is uniform. That is why I intend to devote a lot of time and energy to determining the cause and examining potential solutions to our massive income divide. Woodford County is known around the state for being one of Kentucky's wealthier counties, but the truth is that poverty is still very much prevalent within the city limits.

There is an abundance of providers – both public agencies and nonprofits – that fill gaps in the lives of our needy citizens. What we are lacking, however, is a collaborative approach that brings this work together seamlessly to tackle this issue.

Working alongside the school district and County Judge, we are hopefully moving toward a new nonprofit entity that can help coordinate services, acquire foundation funding, and implement any necessary programs to tackle shortcomings in these areas. Making that possible means working closely with leaders of those organizations that are providing these services. We will work tirelessly to thoroughly examine our shortfalls and determine a long-term strategy to lift people up to a dignified standard of living.

To be sure, we should be mindful in every decision we make that there are people struggling who are looking only for a hand up. Our economic development efforts should not only provide opportunities for people at all skill levels, but stress the importance of providing upward mobility for those willing to work at their vocation. Our land use decisions should also keep an eye toward making sure we have an adequate supply of affordable housing that is safe and allows residents to live with dignity. The task of promoting affordable housing has proven to be one of the most challenging across the nation, but that just underscores how important it is here and elsewhere across the country. Too often childcare is unaffordable or unavailable to single parents trying to make their way in the workforce. Transportation is another challenge for people needing that service to get to doctor's appointments, the grocery store, or their jobs.

On a general note, I am renewing my annual plea for civility to govern our political discourse in Versailles. We are fortunate that among this body, everyone acts with a sense of mutual respect, even in times of strong disagreement. That is still not an apt description of some of the activity on social media, however.

Let me use this opportunity in the first month of 2020 to go ahead and state that you will likely have an order messed up by a restaurant. You will see a business locate here that you think makes no sense; you are going to have people who are going to drive like they have the only cars on the road; and, unfortunately, you are going to continue to hear the same divisive message that flows from Washington and Frankfort.

We must remember that we are all Woodford Countians, and we are more than our position on political issues. Locally, I am often frustrated by the level of misinformation that is posted regarding issues relating to city government. Too often I've repeated my belief that you can still be angry when you're informed. At other times, though, you will find that your anger subsides when you get the full story and keep reading past the headline.

To end on a very high note, I couldn't be more encouraged by the spirit of cooperation that exists among the three local governments in Woodford County, which last year had a historic joint meeting. I have a great working relationship with Judge Kay and Mayor Vandegrift, and we are continuously striving to find projects we can work on together and maintain open and frequent communications. Additionally, we need to continue to engage community members to work with us as on projects that advance our community. We are blessed with individuals with a vast array of talent and passion, and we need to capitalize on their willingness to contribute. I am excited about 2020 and all that we are going to accomplish together.

As always, thank you to this Council, our hardworking employees, and the countless citizens who get involved and make a difference. We are certainly at our strongest when we work together, and I think we all recognize that. We might not always agree, but we will remain engaged with one another and work toward solutions that provide the greatest benefit.

One way we can improve society is by starting with the person in the mirror. It wouldn't be a Traugott speech if I didn't reference my favorite columnist Paul Prather. In mid-December, he had a column entitled "12 Tips for Peace on Earth and Goodwill Toward All," which to me are - twin goals that are very connected.

In his article, he wrote about some truths he was trying to learn in 2019, and a few of those spoke to me. First, he reminded us that people already are who they're going to be, for good or bad. While we can't change them, we must accept that they are – like you and me – made in God's image. Another truth is that even the villain thinks he's the good guy. This is why, according to Paul, we must adopt a level of humility...after all, we may not always be the hero we think we are. He also points out that we can't see into someone else's heart, and because of this fact, we must give others the benefit of the doubt.

Prather asks that we substitute listening for lecturing, regard everything as temporary, and trust that God is real, is in control, and is ultimately working for our own good and His glory. To

quote, “God promises it will be OK in the end.” We should believe him. The article points out that we should smile regardless of circumstances. When we are frustrated, angry, or dealing with people we think are ignorant or strangers on the street, we should just smile. In closing, Paul reminds us that we should find something to give praise for every day. His final sentence sums up how we should approach the day – “A soul full of gratitude is difficult to defeat.”

And so, as I conclude this year’s State of the City, I hope you are like me and your soul is full of gratitude. That’s the foundation on which everything else I talked about tonight is built.

Thank you.