

# City of Wilmington



**MICHAEL S. PURZYCKI**  
Mayor

Wilmington Mayor Michael Purzycki  
Inaugural Address  
Tuesday, January 3, 2017

Madam President, members of council, Judge Street, Elected officials, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I want to sincerely congratulate all members of council for your successful campaigns and for your dedication to our city. I look forward to working together in pursuit of the same goal of improving Wilmington. We don't always have to agree on how we govern as long as we never forget why.

I want to recognize our former Mayor Dennis Williams for his dedication to our city and his efforts on its behalf. Many good things occurred over the past four years and I intend to build on them.

I want to first recognize my family. Anyone who knows anything about politics will tell you that without a supportive spouse this job would be impossibility. My family is the foundation on which I have built my life. And no one has been a greater part of that foundation and a greater supporter than my wife Bette. Thank you, Bette. Adriane is here. Mick is in London and for Gage it is a school night.

I am deeply honored to have been entrusted by the citizens of Wilmington with the responsibility of leading our city- especially during these challenging times.

Tonight I want to share my administration's approach to governing. I want to describe the lens through which I view our city's challenges and the way I propose to deal with them. First, I would like to ask my senior staff and directors to stand and be recognized.

In spite of our difficulties, we should never lose sight of the fact that we live in a wonderful city. We have beautiful and diverse neighborhoods, outstanding parks

and public places and magnificent arts organizations. We are the strategic center of Delaware, we are home to 50% of the nation's publicly traded corporations, a national center for the credit card industry; we are home to a vibrant port and the eleventh busiest train station in the country; fifty thousand people work here each day. The billion dollar Riverfront story continues to unfold and the resurgent downtown is showing promise as never before. These are advantages most cities can only wish for.

But like many cities, we have problems. Many of our neighborhoods are struggling. We have failed to control senseless violence. Too many of our children are being raised in poverty, and joblessness and incarceration in our poorest neighborhoods has been normalized. In addition to the human toll, these deficits have hurt our reputation nationally and have impeded economic growth.

We have structural limitations that have historically constrained us. We must ask the General Assembly to approve changes to our residency laws and again to raise any tax but the property tax which is fast becoming uncompetitive. We have no control over the schools that educate our children and we have no power of annexation. Wilmington needs a long-term funding formula that is sustainable without our having to go to Dover every other year begging for help. This is beneath the dignity of a proud and independent city.

We have allowed Wilmington to be defined by the worst of us and not by the best of who we are. We have performed not to our potential but to our perceived limits, forgetting that each time we acquiesce to these limits our ability to grow and improve is further limited.

We pay too many of our employees less than the market demands. The consequences are poor morale, police officers who leave at the first opportunity, difficulty in attracting high quality management personnel, and a workforce that spends too much time thinking of how to get even with the system rather than being motivated by a shared vision of success.

But this is not who we have to be. We can set ambitious goals that will inspire us. We can imagine the city as we want it to be and not as it is. We can envision a beautiful, a well maintained and safe city, committed to the rebuilding of neighborhoods, employment for the jobless, an energetic downtown populated

by young entrepreneurs, all driven by an economic development machine that is surely part of our DNA.

We will build our budgets to that vision. Our objective is growth- more jobs, more residents and more construction.

It has been said that the greatest danger is not in aiming too high and missing the mark but in aiming too low and hitting it. Rest assured we will never aim too low.

In order to reduce joblessness among our residents I have asked special assistant Lossie Freeman to develop an employment infrastructure for the recruitment, training and placement of our unemployed citizens. This is among our administration's highest priorities.

To ensure that we operate at the highest level of efficiency in our government I have asked David Curtis to head up the office of Best Practices and Innovation. David's first task will be the implementation of a 311 information system- called Wilstat- insuring a government that is transparent and responsive to its citizens.

In some ways we will go back to basics. We are going to clean our city of the trash that infects our neighborhoods and lines the streets that are our city's gateways.

Everyone is concerned with crime so let me say something about public safety. I remain unalterably committed to community policing strategies and deploying as many officers onto our streets and our downtown as possible.

We have some of the finest police officers in the state of Delaware and they do the toughest kind of police work, but they cannot reduce the underlying causes of crime all by themselves. We must help our officers reduce crime by stabilizing neighborhoods, by strengthening families and by keeping our kids in school. We need healthy community centers for children and programs that keep them engaged. I will encourage our state officials to fully engage with our education community to allow for a new educational vision for our state with an adequately funded weighted system to help our children get the education they need and deserve. This vision should include a Wilmington High School.

As has been reported I have employed a national search firm to help us review all candidates for police chief- both internal and external. We owe it to ourselves to get professionals to evaluate department leadership and recommend best

practices and innovations in policing. During this time, Police Chief Cummings has agreed to stay on and assist “in any way” as he describes it “that helps my city”. That helps “my city” he said. If citizens are looking for an example of what is good about Wilmington they need look no further than the example set by the Chief. Thank you, Bobby.

One of our most important tasks will be to improve morale among our employees, identified in our transition reports as a widespread problem. Beyond simply showing people the respect that everyone deserves we must embrace the idea that we are all in this together- each and every city department. If we want to have pride in our work and in each other then we have to think of ourselves as family. We will learn to succeed or fail not as individuals but together. If one of us fails, then we all fail. But when one of us behaves heroically as in the case of our courageous and fallen firefighters, then we should all be able to bask in the reflected glory of that heroism. Why? Because we are all part of a family with pride in one another, each one of us an essential part of the whole.

If there is one theme that will transcend every operation in our city, every project, every daily duty of every employee it would be the pursuit of excellence in everything we do. My belief is that if we cannot do something well then we will not do it at all. If we cannot maintain a park well then we will not pretend to do so. All of our buildings, our firehouses and Hicks Anderson Community Center for example, will be maintained to high standards. Currently they are not- and yes that means the city county building as well. I intend to remind all of our employees as they enter our building each day, that Excellence Lives Here.

But the pursuit of excellence does not end with City Hall. We must all rededicate ourselves, each and every citizen to answer the call for a new birth of optimism in the city of Wilmington. For Wilmington to prosper, this culture must be shared by all our citizens. From Southbridge to Northeast, from Cool Spring to the Triangle, from the Highlands to St. E’s and back to East side, we must remember that we are all in this together- black, white, Hispanic, gay and straight, rich and poor- all are included in the dreams, hopes and aspirations of the city in which we live.

Let us then aspire to excellence in the way we maintain our neighborhoods, in the way we work with our police officers, in the way we care for our children and support one another. Our success will depend on what Teddy Roosevelt long ago

called the 'Good Citizen" being involved in the future vision of our city. Our mission to achieve a resurgent Wilmington- proud, confident and prosperous- will not be easy -but I am confident with motivated and proud city employees, our business leaders, the clergy, dedicated elected officials and the commitment of the indispensable "good citizen" that our mission will be accomplished.

For my part I can only promise you my very best for the next four years.

Thank you

