



State of the City of West Lafayette 2017

It is easy to live in a place like West Lafayette. With its great trails and parks system, award-winning schools, diverse population that rivals some larger towns or cities, and a reputation for being safe, we're lucky to call this place home. With that, it's sometimes easy to forget that we're not perfect—it's easy to think that our work is done. However, actions both inside our community and around the country too-often remind me that that the ugly is alive and well. This makes me spiritually armor up every day, and stay in prayer lest I become angry and hateful towards innocent people who could pay the cost for the behavior of others. We are challenged to remember that though we must speak up when we see wrong deeds committed or the innocent injured, we must not carry anger and sadness and allow it to turn to bitterness. Some days can prove harder to get up, dress up and show up than others. Some days you just want to drop down to their level and fight ugly with ugly. Other days you just want to give up....but not today! Today I needed to say that these ugly actions are more than morally wrong, legally wrong, or humanly wrong...it is generationally wrong...a taught hatred. Someone taught the hidden faces how to hate, and unfortunately, the need to share that hate remains an opportunistic moment. Therefore, while it's easy to live in a place like West Lafayette, we're not perfect—our work is not done.

Our first grandson, Jonathan, was born in July of 2016. Last year in the State of the City Address, I mused on July of 2066, when Jonathan will be 50-years-old and perhaps himself a grandfather. What sort of city would he and his grandchildren inherit? What sort of world would we leave behind? What did we need to start in 2017 to get the city where we wanted it to be for Jonathan's 50th?

This is something I thought about with every decision I made as mayor in 2017 and will continue to think about as long as I am lucky enough to be entrusted with this office.

Let there be no doubt. The events of late last month cast a shadow on our City. The words of hate strewn on a house of worship made me fear we had taken a step backward, or worse: that we had never actually progressed. That West Lafayette,

(like most of America at the turn of the last century), shunned and prohibited those that looked or acted different. However, I need not worry. From that disgusting event, a light was focused on our hometown. As word of the incident at the UU Church traveled across the country from the Washington Post, to ABC News, and The New York Times to websites like LGBTQ Nation and Pink News that focus on information for the LGBTQ community, I quickly realized that the real West Lafayette was evident to readers. These articles quoted West Lafayette residents like Rev. Charlie Davis, Police Chief Jason Dombkowski and others who were quick to stand up and let our brothers and sisters know that we are united against hate, whether explicit or in the undercurrents of our City. We will not let the acts of a lone coward or small set of bullies define our community.

After the service at the UU Church, my daughter waited for me at the entrance, we embraced and I thought again about my grandson, her son, who she and her husband are raising in our hometown. I took comfort in knowing that our hometown is a wonderfully complex, diverse and historic city with all its associated challenges. It overflows with youthful talent, professional skills, and a great sense of optimism (including some healthy cynicism) that sets us apart from the rest, and positions us well for the next half century. That leaves me optimistic that Jonathan will be just fine. However, we must continue to embrace, educate about, and promote inclusivity for this to happen.

Fifty years ago, our country experienced a sociological tug of war reminiscent of what we are witnessing today. Many of these experiences have been difficult to observe and to even understand. Nevertheless, like most difficult times, they can lead to positive and lasting change if addressed openly, patiently and constructively. In communities around our country, there is concern about our future. During times like this, it is important to remind OUR community of our long-standing philosophy based on acceptance, understanding and love.

It is with this understanding that I repeat what most of us are keenly aware of: As a city, West Lafayette is filled with people from all over the world, who are curious and engaged in learning about the multitude of cultures that come together to live and learn here. Examples such as Globalfest (which will be greatly expanded this year), our Naturalization Ceremony, the Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony, Outfest and the countless other events that are held specifically to celebrate our uniqueness and diversity prove that point: EVERY. SINGLE. DAY. They shout out to people from all over the world that we are a place that is open and welcoming.

Our friends choose to live here knowing that they do not have to surrender their culture or their lifestyle as part of being included in the choir of strong, unique, united voices that is West Lafayette.

This means that West Lafayette is not only a leader in smart and sustainable growth and development, we're also leading the way in the human element. We value all of our

citizens, student residents and visitors. For our children, we are fortunate to have two of the best school systems in the country.

Now back to my grandson. Should Jonathan choose to remain in West Lafayette, it is my hope that the pathways that this administration and several past administrations have established and sustained, will make him and his family as proud of this city as I have been. And that with great courage, integrity and love, the City of West Lafayette will continue to embrace our responsibility to co-create a community where each of us, our citizens, our student residents, and our planet can flourish. As I mentioned earlier, our work is not done. This means that community members must speak out at wrongdoings and stand up for each other—and that we must *listen* to each other. And, that I, as a community-leader, must work to create an environment where citizens *can* stand up and speak out and, importantly, be heard.

2017 saw more of the foundation for the West Lafayette of 2066 being built. The first major phase of the State Street Redevelopment was completed. Now our main route through the urban core and campus is a 21st century corridor, a “complete street” with bike lanes and welcoming pedestrian areas. Development has flocked to the area as a result. You all are aware of the projects that have been approved, but what you may NOT know is that we have repeatedly passed on potential investments for not fitting the community-feel of West Lafayette. The exciting news is that more developments with options for our WHOLE community are on the horizon.

We have taken the first steps for a new Indoor Recreation and Aquatics Center to be located at Cumberland Park. Additionally, a new City Hall that will serve the West Lafayette of the next half-century-plus is in the works. I look forward to working more on these great additions to our city in 2018.

Therefore, the foundation for our growth into 2066 is already strong. Our city is in excellent shape. Financially, operationally and physically, our citizens are provided services that focus on their wellbeing with the intention of providing a quality of life that promotes public safety, education, recreation and diversity. Like most cities, we share concerns about the impact that things largely out of our control, such as national and state priorities, will have on our city. However, we will do everything in our power to continuing building upon our strong foundation allowing us to maintain and promote the quality of life we’ve established.

As I do every year, I must commend the work of this Council, our City Clerk and our City employees, the women and men in charge of delivering city services with efficiency and integrity, representing a commitment that runs through this Administration. Our shared belief that public service is a noble calling helps make West Lafayette special. We help our neighbors live a better, more comfortable and more productive life. The services our department heads and their staff provide every single day throughout West Lafayette have made us the safest and strongest large college community in Indiana, and you deserve our deep gratitude and respect.

I am very proud of your hard work and shared commitment to our community. Moreover, this City is what it is because our citizens are who THEY are. I am grateful for the ideas, energy and participation of all West Lafayette residents who have made us a top city in the nation to live, learn, work and play.

Thank you.

Mayor John Dennis