

Mayor Donchez: “Bethlehem will remain the jewel of the Lehigh Valley”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Uncategorized January 6, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on City Government 

Gadfly thinks plenty to smile about here . . .

Robert Donchez, “Bethlehem’s future ‘is as bright as the star on South Mountain’.” Morning Call, January 3, 2020.

Christmas, in Bethlehem, is a wonderful time to reflect on the past year.

As the lights from the tree reflect on the windows of the library and City Hall, I can’t help but reflect on all we have accomplished together this past year with the support of City Council and the controller’s office. The decisions we make today, or fail to make, will determine the future of our city for generations to come.

I am excited about the incredible development that awaits Bethlehem as we enter a new decade with purpose and optimism.

Through fiscal discipline and hard work on the part of my administration, I am proud to say that the city has an A+ stable credit rating from S&P, and our financial outlook is bright. Because of our improved financial position, we have been able to invest more in our infrastructure and emergency services. In 2019 the city spent \$1 million on street paving, and plans to do the same in 2020.

In addition, my administration will continue to focus on public safety, keeping Bethlehem one of the safest cities of its size in the commonwealth. All police vehicles in 2019 were fully equipped with dash cams, and police officers with body cams. The city purchased a new

emergency medical services vehicle, a new aerial and a pumper for the fire department.

The city's strong financial position has also allowed us to focus on some long-deferred recreation projects, such as Memorial Pool, the municipal golf course and Friendship Park. With the benefit of state funding, Memorial Pool is being rebuilt and is scheduled to open this summer. The golf course is being returned to profitability. Renovations include a new irrigation system and improved bunkers. In addition, Friendship Park saw the installation of new playground equipment as part of the Northside 2027 Initiative.

In 2019, we saw the completion of many new projects on the South Side including: Gateway at Greenway Commons, a 600-car garage on New Street, the redevelopment of the former Ice House at Fourth and Adams streets, the construction of Lehigh University's SouthSide Commons, and the first new market-rate apartments on East Third Street with street level retail. In 2020 we anticipate the construction of a second apartment complex with retail and an additional garage next to Northampton Community College.

Wind Creek Casino is proposing a new hotel and the possibility of a water and adventure park in the former Machine Shop Number 2 Building. As the year progresses, we look forward to seeing plans for the former sites of the Steel General Office Building and Martin Tower.

Technology has touched every aspect of our day-to-day lives. The city revamped its website, making it more user friendly and informative. The new site allows for real-time updates by various departments to provide current and relevant information. City Council meetings are now live-streamed on our website and the city's YouTube channel. To assist residents and visitors who want to report nonemergency issues, the city created the new Bethlehem Service Center. In order to report nonemergency issues call 610-865-7000, email

bethlehemservicecenter@bethlehem-pa.gov, or download the new BSC App.

With the start of the new decade comes new obligations. As the year begins, we will tackle the 2020 Census and continue implementing our Climate Action Plan. It's very important for residents to participate in the 2020 census because it will determine how much money the city receives from the federal government over the next 10 years. Through the Climate Action Plan, the city will look for ways to further reduce our carbon footprint, increase sustainability and become more energy efficient.

One of the most exciting new developments planned for 2020/2021 revitalizes a piece of Bethlehem's past forged over 100 years ago — the Bethlehem Steel Turn and Grind Shop — a building formerly used to improve the steel-making process. A \$1.5 million contribution by Air Products to ArtsQuest will breathe new life into this historic building, transforming it into a 26,000-square-foot contemporary arts facility that will complement SteelStacks.

With new developments continuing throughout the city, the next decade is destined to be exciting for our residents. As we move forward, the future is as bright as the star on South Mountain, and Bethlehem will remain the jewel of the Lehigh Valley.