

I first want to thank the folks at the Chamber of Commerce for this event that brings us together and the opportunity to share what's going on in our Communities.

Thanks to Senator Creigh Deeds, and Delegate Ben Cline for being here to share the happenings and expectations from the State Capitol.

County Board Chairman John Higgins, and the County Board of Supervisors; Frank Friedman in his new position as the Mayor of the City of Lexington and Lexington City Council for their continued efforts to work side by side with us for best interest of our region and communities. Thank You.

I especially offer my Thanks to Mimi Elrod for offering her professionalism, talents and time serving the citizens of Lexington and the region and I wish her much happiness going forward.

I also would like to recognize those in attendance representing the City of Buena Vista's Leadership Team and City Council of Buena Vista.

As I stood here before you 1 year ago as a newly elected Mayor I shared with you my thoughts about our responsibilities toward our region as citizens and elected representatives. Here are a couple excerpts from what I said.

"I am proud to say that each of us have our own identities. This would be a boring place if we all looked like, talked alike, and think alike. Just as we each have our own identity each of our localities has its' identity. But, I believe that our differences should be our strength. Just as our Country was built on a diverse population we need to capitalize on the identity of each of our localities."

I also said:

"Businesses don't have boundaries, we must work together to make sure each of us are strong and can provide the best opportunities for all our communities to grow."

I don't think I have seen anything happen in the last year that changes my mind about my belief.

Before we reflect back to the year past I want to look forward to 2017 for Buena Vista.

2017 marks the 125th anniversary of our City. We have a Council committee formed that is planning just how this milestone will be celebrated.

We will be continuing infrastructure projects such as paving, sidewalk replacement, and streetscape design along Magnolia Ave. and 20th and 21st streets. A second paving project is in the works for Rt. 501 South. This project will begin in the vicinity of 2nd street and extend to the City Limits at Hall's Spring.

We are anxious to see how the Golf Cart ordinance that was adopted to create access to local businesses for those camping or attending events at Glen Maury Park and our citizens will be accepted and utilized.

We will continue our focus and attention on the recently updated Nuisance Ordinance by introducing new community clean-up events. We often find ourselves limited by State and Federal codes, in how far we can go to clean up blighted areas that have an adverse affect on property values. As we continue to move forward we may find it necessary seek assistance from our representatives we send to Richmond.

Revitalization of our business district is expected to see a direct benefit as we are successful in getting more property owners investing and bringing their buildings back to useable condition.

We will be entering a new era for Glen Maury Park as new leadership will be introduced to begin leading the park to refocus its' purpose for the future.

Continued emphasis on financial stability will remain at the forefront of everything we do. We have come a long way in the last few years but challenges still remain and we must be prepared to meet those challenges responsibly. We realize, and I know this Council has the Knowledge and "Intestinal Fortitude" to make decisions that will not jeopardize but improve our financial position. Some of these decisions may not be popular with everyone but are necessary to continue the process of moving the City to a solid and sustainable financial future.

Economic development and Workforce development must go hand in hand as a substantial part of our economy depends on our industrial citizens. In order for industry to meet the needs of their customers and invest in any community, an available trained workforce is a must. We must work together to make top notched Advanced Workforce Training a reality in our region.

During the first quarter of 2017 we should introduce the new City website. Mariner Media was contracted to develop a new website that is to be user friendly and offer many services for our citizens that are not currently available.

2017 is an Election year with 3 council seats and Mayor up for re-election. Much has been accomplished in the last 5 years to bring stability to our city by implementing sound management and financial principles and practices. My hope is that whoever is elected to fill those seats continue to follow sound management and financial principles and practices that keep Buena Vista moving in a positive direction.

WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED IN 2016?

Work began on the City's efforts to improve infrastructure and develop a more pedestrian friendly community. New sidewalks were installed along Routes 60 and 501, 10th Street and Magnolia and Ridge Avenues within the city. The Installation of Sidewalk and curb ramps enhance pedestrian and handicapped access throughout the main corridors of the City.

These projects were made possible by transportation enhancement funds from the Federal Highway Administration. The project also allowed us to begin opening a connection between the Chessie Trail and the City's River Walk with the addition of the sidewalk along Rt 60 to the Robey Bridge. The connection of the Chessie Trail to the River Walk will extend the total length of the trail network to over 10 miles.

The decision was made to remove the street trees from the downtown area. The trees, though beautiful, had damaged the sidewalks at every tree location and they had also reached their projected life expectancy. A consultant has been hired to work with City Staff and volunteers to design new sidewalks and to select the most appropriate trees to be replanted in the area. Construction of the new streetscape design for the Magnolia business area should begin in the Spring.

The Public Works Department is implementing a less visible but equally important project to install a new asset management and work management system that will streamline project management and help analyze infrastructure assets. The department has received a grant for water system analysis. This will help formulate a plan for future development, help maintain our water delivery infrastructure, and assist us to be better stewards of our water resources. The City is blessed with a more than adequate water supply that meets current and foreseeable water needs.

Community Development and Public Works Departments are working with the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission to develop parcel mapping to improve the City's GIS capabilities. This will provide city staff with information necessary for long range planning and grant management.

Downtown Businesses and Building owners are investing in their properties. Two properties have completed projects using the façade grant program, resulting in significant aesthetic improvements. Other property owners have invested in new roofs and have started interior renovations. There are currently five projects underway in our business corridors.

The first phase of the Rt. 501 paving project is mostly completed. The contractor requested and received an extension from VDOT for completion of the project between 21st and 22nd Streets as significant storm drain repair is necessary and it is not the best time of the year for paving. The project bid came in around \$200K less than the \$1,000,000 available from the Virginia Department of Transportation. City Mgr. Scudder and Public Works Director Cahill are working closely with VDOT to effectively use the leftover money. State regulations stipulate specifics as to how this money can be used.

Buena Vista is now a golf cart friendly community, making it easier to tie our business community to Glen Maury Park. I want to Thank Chief Hartman for taking on the Golf Cart project and his efforts getting it up and running. I also feel that I need to advise those travelling along 10th Street to be alert as a Speed Limit reduction was required in that area from 30 MPH to 25 MPH. Golf carts are not allowed on roads with a maximum speed limit of more than 25 MPH.

Southern Virginia University continues to be a cultural and economic contributor, as well as a source for multitudes of volunteers for our community. 2016 saw the opening of a new dormitory and construction starting on a new tennis facility and Athletic Stadium. Enrollment and employment numbers for the University continue to climb. We appreciate what they are doing and look forward to working with them as they continue to grow.

2016 wasn't all positive. HDT announced it would cease production at the end of the year. Support personnel will remain until spring implementing the shutdown process. Work has already begun with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership and Shenandoah Valley Partnership to search out another business for the facility.

On the positive, Munters announced they have a significant number of job openings because of their success in the Data Center market. The other industries within the City are operating well and also have job openings available.

Tony and Sharon Fox opened Foxtrot a new apparel and boot store in the Green Forest Center,

Lew Hamilton brought his catering operation to JJs Meat Shak and will soon open JJs Seafood Shak.

Devon Hewitt opened JamRock Island Grille.

Two stores, Bald Bear Outdoors and The Habitat Restore relocated to the Silk Mill building that is being repurposed by Paul Palma.

The City continues to work to develop our outdoor assets. Two trails have been reclaimed at Glen Maury Park; and work has been completed, clearing a path under the Rt. 60 Bridge to connect the Chessie Trail to the new sidewalk system and ultimately to the River Walk. Additional trails have been mapped in Glen Maury Park and work continues to develop stronger trail maps in the National Forest.

Private stocking of trout in the Maury parallel to Glen Maury Park has been received well and resulted in the introduction of a new event at the Park.

We are working with Rockbridge Regional Tourism, Rockbridge County, Lexington and many partnering organizations on the Braiding the Way outdoor recreation initiative and other Tourism opportunities. I want to thank Jean Clark and her staff for working with us to grow Tourism for our area.

New faces are filling vacancies on City Manager Jay Scudder's Leadership team. Thomas Roberts has filled the position as City Planner. We are excited with the professionalism and experience Thomas brings to our Planning Department. Edie Krechsch has been hired as the New Director for Glen Maury Park. Edie's background experience in very similar settings makes her uniquely qualified to assist in developing a new vision for Glen Maury Park as we approach the park's 50th anniversary.

It is customary to make resolutions or set new goals as we begin a New Year. I borrowed this from my Pastor's Sermon this past Sunday; He titled his sermon "O Little Town of Buena Vista". Before he began he quickly clarified that:

1. He knows that Buena Vista is a City. and
2. He expanded the area beyond the City Limits to include Lexington and all of Rockbridge County because we have Members and attendees from Lexington and Rockbridge.

Byron asked from a Spiritual position these two questions:

Were you satisfied with your Spiritual Life in 2016 to the Point that your Goal for 2017 is to remain the same.

Why not set your Goal to Excel?

That is my challenge to each of you this morning.

Set your Goal for 2017 to Excel not only spiritually but to Excel above all that was accomplished in 2016.