

CITY OF MARTINSBURG

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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Good afternoon friends, colleagues, residents and to our business community.

As your mayor, it is both an honor and a privilege to stand before you today to deliver the 1st State of the City Address for 2024. This annual tradition moving forward will provide us with an opportunity to reflect on our achievements, acknowledge our challenges, and chart a course for the future of our beloved city. Thanks to the efforts and collaboration of our staff, our residents, our businesses and our non-profit community, the state of our City is strong, vibrant and full of promise.

Just this week, we had the opportunity to once again exercise our right to vote and select who we want to represent and speak for us in our Constitutional republic – a right we now take for granted that our forefathers fought to obtain almost 250 years ago and that many generations thereafter have fought to protect. While much attention was placed on national and state races, there is no government closer to the people and can impact the everyday lives of citizens more than local government. And, while much vitriol, venom and bitterness (and many mailers) may have surrounded this past election cycle focusing on divisive wedge issues, it remains our laser focus to provide essential governmental services that directly impacts our citizens daily and creating place that people are proud to call home. Hence, City Council has placed a focus this year on investing in our People, Infrastructure and Place - three components the complete the portrait of what helps shape the City of Martinsburg.

The 2024/2025 budget invests in people – including our employees and our citizens; invests in infrastructure; and makes investments in creating and maintaining a sense of place. Martinsburg's first priority is to provide quality, efficient and effective services and deliver such basic life amenity services as clean water, sanitation, safe streets, fire, police, and citizen protection. Providing quality services requires people. So, continued investments in our people are necessary so that our employees can continue providing essential services to our residents, businesses and constituents. Effectively providing and delivering services requires adequate and quality infrastructure, including necessary modern equipment and technology. And, finally, investments are necessary to create and maintain a sense of place for not only our residents, but our visitors.

So, how do we plan to accomplish the goals of investing in people, infrastructure and place over the next year?

We will invest in our people by ensuring that we recruit and retain a quality workforce by providing competitive wages and benefits; properly equipping our 21st century workforce and providing the tools our first responders need to keep our community safe. I am also proud that the City will

restructure its current police and fire pension funds to ensure that our current employees and retirees' pensions are secure in the future while ensuring Martinsburg's financial security for the decades to come. While this initiative may not be flashy, it honors our commitment to our first responders and is one of the City's top priorities.

We will continue investing in our infrastructure by funding \$1 million in street paving; completing renovations at City Hall, Caperton Train Station and our Public Works Facility; repairing sidewalks in the downtown urban core on King and Queen Steets; completing a major stormwater management project on Porter, King and Valley with new sidewalk, curb and streetscape in coordination with a private sector developer and fully funding our Public Works Department.

We will continue creating and maintaining our sense of place by investing almost \$1 million in Parks and Recreation and open spaces by funding general operations plus funds for bathhouse renovations at City pools; funding of a new roof at the Berkeley 2000 Center; constructing 8 new pickleball courts; and ensuring the operation of Lambert Pool for the upcoming year. Furthermore, the City's budget continues aggressive community and economic development programs to attract quality economic development and job growth; funds an Affordable Housing Strategy study; funds CDBG/HOME to help tackle affordable housing, low income needs and youth programs; provides resources for City to apply for and obtain matching grant funds for infrastructure, parks, planning and economic development; and funds Mainstreet Martinsburg and the Martinsburg Berkeley County CVB to support and enhance downtown economic development – including a new downtown comprehensive sound system. Aside from CDBG funding, the Council has set aside an additional \$100,000 to create a micro grant fund for our non-profit sector.

Martinsburg's continued investments in our people, infrastructure and place is paying off with continued steady economic growth. Year over year, business registrations in the City of Martinsburg has experienced a 16% growth rate according to the West Virginia Secretary of State and now ranks only behind Morgantown and Charleston with the most businesses in the State. With the transitioning economy coming out of COVID, the gig economy, home-based and internet businesses, the Secretary of State reports a 95% increase in business registrations in Martinsburg since 2020! We've seen new investments in our downtown area, with vibrant shops and restaurants enriching our community life contributing to the overall prosperity of Martinsburg.

And, we are starting to see this momentum with the opening of the Garage on King downtown, the impending opening of the Monument Apartment Project a block away which has transformed a dilapidated idled Brownfield of 50 years into a revived center of urban living and activity; the transformation of the Shenandoah into luxury downtown apartments, the conversion of many downtown upstairs underutilized units into livable residences and Airbnb's and the transition of vacant store fronts. People are moving back into to the urban core – and more importantly – want to move into the urban core to take advantage of the many cultural events, restaurants, retailers and opportunities downtown has to offer.

While downtown revitalization remains important and remains a priority - investments, reinvestments and development is occurring throughout the City. Currently, the City has approximately 1,600 new multi-family units going through the planning process and commercial

businesses continue to express interest and open in the City – including the newly opened multi-million-dollar One Life Fitness, Tru Hotel, continued development on the west side of I-81 and continuing investments in our healthcare sector.

Martinsburg has big plans - from the implementation of the new Gateway Plan to the construction of the Martinsburg Greenway Trail System to the execution of the adopted Martinsburg Parks Master Plan and we are seeking resources to fulfill those plans using capital funds, grants and congressional earmarks. Just in the last few weeks, Martinsburg has successfully secured \$1.8 million in congressional directed spending for a new ladder truck for our Fire Department; \$1.6 million in matching funds from West Virginia in partnership with Ascend WV and the Wishneff Group to complete the full renovation of the Market House at the corner of Queen and Burke Streets; \$800,000 to replace street lighting downtown; and, \$1.1 million in Transportation Alternative Grants to help complete the next phase of the Martinsburg Greenway Trail System. In six weeks, the City will learn whether its \$20 million Raise Grant will be awarded. If awarded, these funds will construct the complete Martinsburg Greenway Trail Project which will extend to the Route 9 walking/biking trail through Martinsburg with its ultimate connection to War Memorial Park – all while making spur connections to the City’s major parks. Once completed, this trail will extend from Charles Town/Ranson through Martinsburg. As part of this project, Lake Thomas is proposed to be opened as a safe, passive recreational area providing a critical connection between Oatesdale Park and War Memorial Park. This grant opportunity also has the chance to fund the restoration of the Tuscarora Creek through downtown Martinsburg to its natural state by removing industrial era impediments, removing dilapidated infrastructure and restoring stream banks – thereby creating an asset through downtown while reducing flooding risk from Oatesdale Park to the Adam Stephen House. We are excited about the generational positive impact this project would have on Martinsburg and appreciate the support of so many in this room. If we are not awarded the Raise, we will not give up and we shall piecemeal the project as funds become available.

Martinsburg is a diverse and inclusive community, and we are committed to fostering an environment where everyone feels valued, respected and safe. Through community engagement initiatives and internal training, we have sought to amplify the voices of all residents, ensuring that their concerns are heard and addressed. Our city remains steadfast in its commitment to equity and justice, and we will continue to work tirelessly to promote equality and inclusivity in all aspects of city life. Much of this begins with the Police Department’s daily interactions with the public. I am proud that Martinsburg PD is purposefully attempting to build and maintain a diverse force that can keep our community safe while creating an environment where the public feels safe; is striving to enforce the law respectfully and with dignity and respect, and building meaningful and impactful relationships through substantive community policing. We will continue our efforts to make sure all facets of our City are heard regardless of race, sex, or social economics.

While we have made significant progress, like every other community and city, we face challenges. Some of these challenges such as affordable housing, transportation infrastructure, and workforce development require innovative solutions and collaboration among city stakeholders. As we move forward, I see several key areas for continued collaboration:

- We need to ensure our workforce has the skills and training necessary to meet the demands of the evolving job market through workforce development.
- We must continue to invest in our infrastructure to support future growth and maintain a high quality of life.
- We need to continue to work together to create a vibrant and attractive downtown that fosters economic activity and community engagement. Much progress has been made but there is still much to accomplish.
- We must work together to find creative solutions for affordable housing so our workforce and population have a quality place to live.
- We must continue to address the opioid and fentanyl epidemic.

As Martinsburg continues to improve and become a place where more people choose to live, some of these challenges will increase. The City does not have all the answers nor all the resources to solve these large issues alone. But, we are willing to work with willing and innovative partners, will need those partners to succeed and encourage our partners to submit ideas and plans on how to make our City better. Amidst these challenges, we also see opportunities for growth and improvement. I am confident that by working together, we can overcome any obstacle that stands in our way.

Martinsburg is a place where opportunity abounds, where community spirit thrives, and where the values of hard work, perseverance, and compassion define who we are. Martinsburg is a city with momentum. We boast a rich history, a growing cultural scene, and a strategic location that is making us a hub for commerce and industry – and a place where people want to live. Our residents are diverse, engaged, and committed to building a strong community. As we look to the future, let us continue to build upon our successes, confront our challenges with determination, and strive to make Martinsburg an even better place to live, work, and raise a family.

Thank you, and may God bless the City of Martinsburg and all who call it home.