



2018 State of the Town Address

Mayor

Brian L. Jones

Vice Mayor

Rosalie Kuechler

Council members

Tim Edwards

Beth Andrews

Brian Nesspor

Introduction:

The State of the Town is an overview of our Town's accomplishments in 2017 and the beginning of 2018. I want to take the time to recap the progress we have made and address projects and initiatives that the Mayor and Council will focus on this year and beyond.

First, I would like to say that it continues to be a privilege and honor to be your Mayor and I look forward to continuing to serve you and leading my hometown, the Town of Rock Hall.

At this time, I would like to acknowledge the Vice Mayor and fellow Councilmembers. Vice Mayor Rosalie Kuechler, Councilmember Brian Nesspor, Councilmember Tim Edwards and Councilmember Beth Andrews. These individuals have helped mold the town into the outstanding community that we are.

To every man and woman who is proudly serving in our armed forces, and to every veteran who has served, I thank you for your dedication and commitment to protecting our nation.

I would like to now take a moment to recognize and thank our entire staff – Administration, Streets Department, Water and Sewer Departments, the Police Department, Maintenance Staff and Grant Writer. These individuals are the backbone of the town and are essential to ensuring the town runs smoothly on a day to day basis.

Community Spirit:

The Mayor and Council established the Rock Hall Community Spirit Award in 2015.

The Community Spirit Award is awarded each month at the regular Mayor and Council meeting which is held every 2nd Thursday of each month.

The Rock Hall Community Spirit Award is a brilliant way of saying thanks – thanks to those people who go that extra mile to make everyone's lives better; thanks to those people who put themselves at risk to protect us; and thanks to those people who do everything in their power to make Rock Hall, Maryland such a great place to live.

These amazing citizens come from all walks of life from schoolchildren to senior citizens and from the public/uniform services to volunteers but they all have one thing in common. That is their incredible selflessness.

So it is only right that the Mayor and Council, Town Staff, along with our citizens, reward these outstanding individuals and groups who show outstanding commitment and dedication to community service.

We would like to congratulate all the Spirit Award recipients for the past year. They include:

June 2017 - Kent County Learning Center

July 2017 - Rock Hall Mariners

August 2017 - Kent County Watermen's Association & Peggy States

October 2017 - Pirates & Wenches Committee

November 2017 - Townsend Medical Clinic

March 2018 - Retired Past Police Chief Steve Moore

April 2018 - Ryan Glenn

A full list of the Spirit Award Recipients can be found on the Town's website.

In the summer of 2017, the Town of Rock Hall community and visitors rallied together to vote for the Reader's Digest "Nicest Place in America" contest. Rock Hall was a finalist in the contest and came in 3rd place with a record number of votes. This was a nationwide contest to find places in america where people are kind, where neighbors are friends and strangers are welcomed.

Rock Hall's story focused on "Holly" the Chesapeake Bay retriever and her owner who tragically passed away in a trucking accident in 2013 in Dallas, TX. Holly was with her

owner at the time of the accident and survived. When the Rock Hall community heard the news, they rallied to bring Holly home and was successful. Holly returned home with a celebration and was featured in the 2017 4th of July parade!

Rock Hall is proud to have had the opportunity to participate in the "Nicest Place in America" contest.

Financial Status:

"The Town of Rock Hall's overall financial situation is challenged. The Town has a lower unrestricted reserve compared to prior years as well as an increasing amount of debt. The Town's property tax rate is one of the lowest in the state. The size of the municipal staff is significantly smaller than other municipalities of comparable population, in part due to the Town's extensive use of private contractors.

The most significant financial challenge in FY 2017 was cash flow. This was primarily due to timing of intergovernmental payments received for the General Fund and reimbursement timeframes for Grant related project expenses. This last matter has placed a strain of the Town's finances. Going forward, a more manageable process will need to be put in place to alleviate the impact on the Town's cash position.

The Town enjoys an experienced, well-trained and stable workforce. The current financial environment is very challenging. The Town needs to be cautious with expenditures and continue to work towards rebuilding reserves."

(Report quoted from Town Audit)

Infrastructure/Town Operations:

A project started in mid 2016 is nearing completion. This project also called “the Catholic Ave” project has an estimated cost of 1.1 million dollars. It involves the replacement of the water main on Catholic Ave along with the demo of the old water clarifier. It will also include all new sidewalks on both sides of the street, all new water meters and a total overlay of blacktop on the street itself. The most important part of this project is also the addition of a new well which is capable of supplying the entire town with drinking water during the Town’s peak season.

This project was completed as a result of strong collaboration and teamwork from the elected officials, town manager, staff, contractors, and engineers. We wish to thank everyone for their involvement.

An upgrade to the electric service at the Rock Hall Civic Center was completed.

In coordination with the Kent County Government, and third party contractors, fiber optic network was installed throughout the town with installation completed at the Municipal Building, Kent County Learning Center and various locations. This county initiative will assist

improving network connectivity to government agencies and other organizations and will ultimately improve emergency preparedness, and create opportunities.

The town placed into service a 12 passenger van which has been designated as the "Rock Hall Shuttle". This is currently being used to transport people during special events and when weather does not allow the trams to operate. In addition, we also purchased a new truck and placed into service a new snowplow.

In coordination with Kent County we recently completed road repairs and paving on several streets including, Caroline Ave, Sharp Street, and portions of the end of Rock Hall Ave.

The Town installed new benches and trash receptacles on Main Street and at the beach.

The parking lot at the Water Plant was covered with 4" of milling and the parking apron in front of the building was black-topped.

We also continue to replace existing street signs in accordance with the new federal guidelines.

Lastly, our town staff takes great pride in making our town look good for our residents and visitors. On top of helping with all the projects listed above, they maintain a very large amount of landscaping and greenscaping throughout the town. They are always prepared for any upcoming events.

We are very proud the progress we have made over the past year in regards to infrastructure improvements.

Communication:

The Town of Rock Hall launched its newly redesigned website in March of 2015. The visitors page (rockhallmd.com) contains everything a tourist to the town would need, such as a business directory, upcoming events, how to navigate the town, the history of Rock Hall and links to a webcam showing Rock Hall Harbor.

The government page (rockhallmd.gov) was designed with the citizens in mind. The site contains features such as email alerts for meeting dates, a listing of the municipal staff and a calendar that lists not only town activities, but also when town services like trash pickup will occur and when bills are due.

Our website remains very intuitive and provides anyone coming here with all the information they need to really take advantage of all aspects of Rock Hall.

From the period of July 1st, 2017 to May 10, 2018, the town website received 190,817 pageviews, 69,905 sessions with 82.7% being new visitors and 17.3% being returning visitors. Overall 49,189 users initiated at least one session during the date range. 26,868 users which is 54.62% of the 49,189 users utilized a mobile device to

access the website. These stats are encouraging and reflect that the use of mobile devices are increasing and it is important for Rock Hall to establish a mobile app for the town.

In addition to the website, the Town continues to have a strong presence on Social Media such as Facebook, twitter and instagram. These advertising and marketing tools are key for the promotion of the town.

Following the devastating tornado that hit Kent Island, MD during the summer of 2017, the Town of Rock Hall implemented a severe weather notification service through the existing CodeRed community notification system which alerts citizens within town limits of severe weather when warnings are issued.

In the spring of 2018, the Mayor and Council voted to purchase and install 20 town wide surveillance cameras throughout the town. These cameras will be placed in areas surrounding the commercial district and high traffic areas. The Rock Hall Police Department will monitor and maintain the cameras, this project will overall assist with the safety and well-being of our residents and visitors.

The Town of Rock Hall continues to provide a cost effective way to provide online streaming of Town Utilities Board, Workshop and Regular Mayor and Council Meetings. This allows our citizens that can't make the meetings remain engaged in the town government as well as the many part time residents this gives them the ability to keep up with the latest happenings in the town.

Finally, the town staff implemented MyCommittee software which is an agenda/minutes program that provides a flexible and intuitive way to plan, discuss, share and keep track of meetings of the Mayor and Council as well as other boards.

We have made remarkable progress over the past year with advancing the Town's technology infrastructure and overall interaction with the Town Government and its citizens. I am very pleased with the progress we have made.

In the future, we hope to expand our website further and give the residents the availability to pay their bills online through the government page.

Public Safety:

The Mayor and Town Council remain committed to fighting the ongoing drug problem and continued to fund the Anti-Drug program (RHAD) here in the town.

In 2017 and earlier this year, the RHAD committee held a series of community safety and drug awareness events and meetings. We listened to citizens concerns and ideas on how to fight this ongoing problem as well as brought in motivational speakers to address audience members.

Our vision for Rock Hall is a healthy, vibrant and substance-abuse free community that supports the positive development of our youth to become strong, engaged and healthy adults.

Our mission is to engage the community in working together to promote a positive, and drug-free lifestyle for our youth and families.

As a team and even a community we need to continue to evaluate and see the RHAD program evolve, develop strategies which should include:

Enhancing awareness

Providing support

Reducing Access

Changing consequences

Modifying/changing policies

The fact of the matter is young lives continue to be lost due to this ongoing problem and until we stand up as a community together, unfortunately, we will not see the results we've hoped for.

In 2017 the Rock Hall Police Department logged 6,575 calls for service. An increase of 1,187 calls for service from 2016. Calls for service increased 22 percent, however, incidents (part 1 and part 2) crimes decreased 18 percent. The Rock Hall Police Department investigated 53 reported incidents in 2017 compared to 65 reported incidents in 2016. Overall, reported incidents have been on the decline since 2015.

44 arrests were made for violation of the Maryland Criminal Law. Those arrests included 19 criminal summons, 4 criminal arrest warrants and 4 juvenile

arrests. In addition, 2 civil citations of marijuana were issued.

364 traffic warnings were issued. 70 of those were issued for moving violations. 52 traffic arrests were made.

The Rock Hall Police Department in conjunction with the Mayor and Council and outside agencies participated in 8 major special events.

A big thank you to our Police Department and all our officers for their dedicated service to the Town of Rock Hall and ensuring our safety on a daily basis.

The Rock Hall Volunteer Fire Company answered 189 fire/rescue calls, and 375 ambulance calls.

For the past 3 years, the town has increased funding to the Rock Hall Volunteer Fire Company as a continuing commitment to public safety, this year, I am proposing to the council the largest donation yet. The Rock Hall Volunteer Fire Company completed a purchase of a new truck which cost over \$400,000 dollars. It will take a community effort to help fund this huge by most needed piece of equipment. In addition, they also placed into service a \$40,000 automatic stryker stretcher for one of

the ambulances which allows the volunteers to place patients in the back of the ambulance without having to lift.

The Town of Rock Hall in conjunction with the Rock Hall Volunteer Fire Company will continue to provide the fireworks show for the annual 4th of July festivities.

A strong fundraising campaign has been initiated for the 2018 show. All donations made to the Rock Hall Fireworks Fund or the Rock Hall Volunteer Fire Company will be tax deductible and the Fireworks Committee will present a full accounting of receipts and disbursements as soon as practical after the conclusion of the 4th of July event to the Town of Rock Hall and the Rock Hall Volunteer Fire Company.

It is anticipated that any surplus from the event will be used by the Rock Hall Volunteer Fire Company to reduce the mortgage debt, to acquire needed new equipment, and to support the normal operating expenses of the Rock Hall Volunteer Fire Company.

The 2018 4th of July Fireworks extravaganza is scheduled for July 3rd, 2018 and will be displayed over the Rock Hall harbor with a scheduled start time of 9:00 PM. For additional information residents and visitors can visit:

<http://www.rockhallfireworks.com> or
<http://www.rockhallvfc.org>.

Economy:

Over the past year the Town closely looked at special events and the impact they have on our town as well as the benefits they bring. Recognizing the importance and the economic impact these have on our community. The Council made significant progress in updating the language in the code regarding how the town handles special events in the future. As per the new regulations, organizers of special events are now required to completed a special events permit and submit to the Town. This will help organize and gather the necessary resources to ensure the safety and well-being of those attending.

Our goal is to be appealing and preserve our small town charm, while making enhancements that will continue to attract visitors and new economic development.

We are very grateful for the many volunteers that come forward to help with these events. Volunteerism is a vitally important part of how Rock Hall is able to operate on a daily basis and ensure these events are successful. The Town is proud to support grassroots efforts.

The Town continues to have a strong working relationship with the Greater Rock Hall Business Association and looks to maintain funding to this organization to assist with marketing and promoting our town.

Within recent months the Town of Rock Hall has issued 4 new business licenses to the following: Wheelhouse Restaurant, Sara's Garden, The Pearl on Main and Eastern Shore Wreath Co.

The Main Street Manager and I have attended 3 ribbon cutting ceremonies to celebrate the reopening of Durdin's Store which is now under new management, Vintage Picnic which expanded to a new Main Street location and The Pearl on Main. 4 additional ribbon cutting ceremonies are planned for the near future.

A majority of the storefronts on Main Street are now occupied and operating successful businesses. In collaboration with the awarding of a Technical Assistance Grant from the State of Maryland, a Main Street Committee comprised of a select group of stakeholders not associated with the town government is working on establishing short and long range goals for main street revitalization.

The Town is committed to working with this newly established committee to be sure their goals will be successful.

Programs:

In 2017 and early 2018, the Town of Rock Hall was awarded a total of \$107,652 dollars in grant funding from various state agencies.

Since the employment of a grant writer and Main Street Manager, the town has been awarded over \$200,000 in grant funding.

A \$25,000 Technical Assistance Grant was awarded by the State Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to fund and expand the Main Street Manager's position.

As the first affiliate Maryland Main Street member, we are currently working on different initiatives in pursuit of a designation as a full-fledged Main Street Maryland member. This designation would enhance and strengthen our revitalization efforts.

A \$3,512 "Keep America Beautiful Grant" by the Maryland Environmental Trust was awarded to help fund repair and replacement of the deteriorating Civic Center pavilion roof. A restored and refurbished pavilion will be appreciated and well-utilized by the many community members who

use the space for picnics and get-togethers with family and friends.

The Town of Rock Hall, in ongoing efforts to comply with and initiate "Sustainable Maryland" practices, obtained funding from the Maryland Energy Administration in the amount of \$4,640 towards replacement of 10 existing municipal streetlights with energy-efficient LED's.

The streetlights targeted are located on Main Street. This conversion will generate a significant annual energy savings, as well as a significant savings to Rock Hall taxpayers, and demonstrates the Town's commitment to low-impact, sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by many municipalities.

Work to replace the lamps has been completed using a local contractor.

Recently we were notified by the Department of Natural Resources Community and Playgrounds Division that the Town of Rock Hall's funding request for \$74,500 for new playground equipment at the ball fields at the Lagoon has been included in the State budget. Official notification will be presented once the budget has passed.

In conclusion, we were also fortunate, during the Washington College spring semester, to have the opportunity to work with three Marketing/Business majors to help the Town of Rock Hall expand its social media presence. The interns not only updated the Town business directory, but also helped to launch a tourism page and conducted other online outreach. In addition, they live-streamed Facebook interviews with numerous Main Street merchants, and other business owners, which have had high visibility and exposure. The interns also helped us to spread awareness among the Washington College community about the attractions and activities Rock Hall has to offer. Thank you to Kerri, Kyle and Brennan for their excellent work in helping to promote our town.

Goals for 2018:

There will be several projects and initiatives that we focus on this year that will have a future impact on Rock Hall.

Complete the Catholic Ave project.

Expand off-street parking for Main Street.

Develop and implement a Rock Hall mobile app.

Provide free and open wifi for Main Street and other parts of the town.

Continue to maintain and replace old equipment ultimately improving the Town's infrastructure.

We will work closely local and state representatives to improve our economy, expand our main street program.

Apply for additional resources such as community legacy funding and strategic demolition funds.

Continue to work towards a drug-free community.

Closing:

As it has been since the beginning, Rock Hall's success as a community continues to rest on the shoulders of each person who calls Rock Hall home.

Today's Rock Hall has been shaped by the intentions of those who came before us, and our destiny will be delivered by those who are involved, invested, and inconsolably positive about what we will accomplish together.

I am grateful every day to play a small role in helping keep Rock Hall great, and I thank all of you for joining me in this calling. Although Rock Hall may experience difficulties and challenges in the coming year, in my opinion we are in a far better position than many of the majority municipalities in our region, state, and nation.

And so in this New Year, I challenge each of you to be intentional about Rock Hall -- about keeping each other happy and safe, about making life easier and better, about sharing our time and our talents, and about enjoying each day with an appreciation for all that we've been given.

In conclusion, I'd like to direct everyone's attention to the monitors for a very short presentation.

I hereby request the Council approve this State of Town Address and ask that this fulfil my obligation set forth by Section 404 of the Charter for the Town of Rock Hall, Maryland.

Thank You