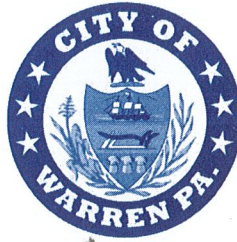


CITY OF WARREN  
318 West Third Avenue  
Warren, PA 16365



Phone: 814-723-6300  
Fax: 814-723-3242  
[www.cityofwarrenpa.gov](http://www.cityofwarrenpa.gov)

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February 16, 2023

My Fellow Citizens of Warren:

With the anticipation of a New Year, I think it is right and prudent to reflect on the accomplishments and challenges of 2022 as we look forward to strengthening our future as citizens of the great City of Warren. Although there are certainly challenges to be faced, we are making significant progress and, with diligence and perseverance, I am confident that we will continue to make great strides in strengthening the City for generations to come.

The role of City government is to provide municipal services and infrastructure development and maintenance that will enable residents and the City as a whole to succeed while consistently looking to the future to ensure that we are investing in the projects necessary for the City's long-term viability. This must be done in a financially responsible manner without overburdening taxpayers and without taking on unsustainable debt and budget deficits. I am proud that the 2023 Municipal budget did not increase taxes and that we had an estimated \$3.9 million Fund Balance at the close of 2022.

The endeavor to strengthen the City for future generations is not the responsibility of City Council, Administration, and Staff alone. In fact, City government's role is to aid in establishing the conditions under which the great work of our businesses, foundations, volunteers, and faith-based and philanthropic organizations can thrive for the betterment of our residents. Some of the most impactful work that happens within this community is done by these organizations.

I would like to take this opportunity to reflect upon some of the work accomplished by the City as well as work and investments by private entities as well.

#### **ECONOMIC REDEVELOPMENT AND DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION:**

Grant funds mentioned below generally require a matching investment.

- **Riverfront Redevelopment Project:** Many entities and levels of government are invested in this project which represents a significant investment in the downtown core along the Allegheny Riverfront. The City has committed \$3.2 million which are comprised of grant funds, contributions, and General Fund monies. Warren County has committed \$750 thousand and the project is strongly supported by the Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry (WCCBI) and City residents.
- **DewBoi Properties:** DewBoi will be investing \$1.4 million of its own funds as the match for a \$1.4 Million Redevelopment Assistance Capital Project (RACP) Grant; the formal grant application and business plan are due to be submitted in May 2023. This project is designed to bring apartments, a boutique hotel, and commercial space to historic Liberty Street.

- **Warren Community Education and Workforce Training Center:** A \$500 thousand RACP grant was awarded to the City and sub-granted to the Warren County Development Association (WCDA). This grant will be utilized to continue rehabilitation of one of the Commercial District's anchor buildings for use as a workforce education center.
- **Parking Garage Rehabilitation Project:** The \$5.3 million in funding for this project will consist of a \$1.5 million RACP Grant, a \$1.0 million EDCDI grant from the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), and \$2.8 million in loan proceeds. This project will help extend the life of the garage.
- **Eagle's Crest Senior Housing:** The Hudson Companies will construct a 40-unit senior housing project on the northeast corner of Liberty Street and Pennsylvania Avenue; this property has been vacant for 40 years. The need for senior housing was confirmed in the comprehensive planning process.
- **Comprehensive Plan:** The City's Comprehensive Plan is in the final stages of a year-long process to develop a plan that will guide the future of the City. The process has been truly comprehensive and involved City Staff, Council, the Planning Commission, City residents, and key stakeholder groups. It is anticipated that the Plan will be approved by Council in March, 2023.
- **Façade Improvement Program:** On behalf of the RDA, the City applied for, and was awarded, a \$50 thousand grant from DCED to be utilized in the RDA's Façade Improvement Program. This program is administered by the RDA and will assist business/property owners in the Commercial District in rehabilitating their storefronts.

#### **PARKS AND RECREATION:**

A key strength of the City is its amazing parks and recreational opportunities.

- **Crescent Park and Healing Garden Dedication:** A significant investment of time and resources was involved in the refurbishment of Crescent Park including the playground area and construction of the Healing Garden which is adjacent to the Warren General Hospital Cancer Center and Karen Bonnell Field.
- **Warren Pickleball:** Warren Pickleball is engaged in raising funds to build an 8-court pickleball complex that will be located at Betts Park. The courts will enable the fast-growing sport of Pickleball to continue and flourish in Warren.
- **Lacy Multi-Sensory Park:** The second phase of improvements aimed at making the Lacy Park Multi-Sensory Playground even more accessible for kids with special needs was completed. This phase consisted of removing the existing wood carpet surface and installing a new soft surface.
- **Tree City USA:** The City was recognized on Arbor Day as a "Tree City USA" for the 34th consecutive year; the City is proud of the region's Lumber Heritage.
- **Beaty Playground:** A new pavilion with water and electric facilities will be constructed adjacent to the playground equipment.

## **MUNICIPAL SERVICES:**

The City's professional staff has done a great job delivering critical services to our residents. Police, Fire, EMS, Codes, and Public Works are supported by the general fund and are critical to the well-being of the City.

- **City Police Re-accreditation:** In June 2022 the Police Department was re-accredited by the Pennsylvania Law Enforcement Accreditation Commission (PLEAC). The Department was first accredited in 2010 and was the first department located within the northwest region of Pennsylvania to earn this distinction. The re-accreditation review occurs every three (3) years.
- **2023 Municipal Budget:** Great work was done in order to pass a no tax increase budget while forecasting an unrestricted fund balance of \$2.6 million at the end of 2023. The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) recommends that, at a minimum, local governments maintain a General Fund balance equal to 25% of its expenditures; this would equate to approximately \$2.5 million.
- **Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Agreement:** Warren entered into an agreement with the Multi-Municipal Emergency Services Commission which is currently comprised of Clarendon Borough, and Cherry Grove, Mead, and Pleasant Townships. The agreement addresses the provision of Basic Life Support (BLS) EMS services within those municipalities while maintaining the staffing needed to provide this critical service to our residents. This agreement is the result of the hard work and dedication of the Commission, City Staff, and Council. This is a tremendous accomplishment and will be of great benefit to all municipalities involved.
- **Department of Public Works:** This Department continues to provide support for all of the City's infrastructure and building maintenance. These areas include the storm/sanitary sewers and treatment plant, 45 miles of city roadway, and City-owned buildings and parks throughout the City.

## **BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY:**

The success of, and continued investments by, businesses and industries located within the City are critical to the health and well-being of the City and surrounding communities. The careers and jobs they bring to the area enable our residents to live, work, and retire here. The City's role is to enable our businesses and industries to prosper and, while the City is not directly involved with these ongoing concerns, 2022 brought some significant developments and investments in the downtown with the opening of RadLands and Faded Floral Boutique. Both of these businesses are located in the downtown commercial district. Additionally, the local McDonalds was completely rebuilt in their location with a new state-of-the art restaurant. Late 2021 saw the opening of Mama Janes (formerly Perkins) and Taco Inc., both restaurants in the west end.

## **PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATIONS AND FAITH-BASED AND SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS:**

The charitable nature of the Warren Community has long been one of its greatest strengths. These largely volunteer organizations have been, and continue to be, some of the most important partners in the advancement of worthwhile projects within the City and Warren County. Along with the business and industry sector, many of the projects and events taking place within the City have received significant investment from generous philanthropic foundations and faith-based and service organizations. A prime example in 2022 was the resurfacing of the track and field at War Memorial Field. This million dollar

plus project was led by the Warren Sports Boosters with tremendous support from foundations, businesses, industries, and private donations.

**LOOKING FORWARD:**

Along with taking a look at all of the positive accomplishments of the past year we must also take a look at some of the challenges to be addressed in order to strengthen our city. Warren County's population continues to decline, thus reducing the amount of tax revenue available to local governments. This has a direct and material impact on municipalities' ability to provide and maintain critical services at the levels expected by our residents.

Unfortunately, the national inflation rate has been at historical highs, hitting 9.06% in June of 2022 versus a long-term historical average of 3.27%. This places tremendous pressure on municipal, business, and household budgets and requires not only continued evaluation of the necessary costs to provide services in the short-term but will also require continued diligence in assuring that we are investing for the future in a responsible manner. Investing in the future is critical.

All sectors of the labor force have been faced with significant challenges. A willing and skilled workforce is required for the business, industry, and service sectors to continue to thrive and invest in their futures.

Tragically, our community has been directly impacted by the scourge of the drug epidemic within the United States and, most recently, by the presence of fentanyl which has resulted in the deaths of two men within our community and the incarceration of several others. Our professional Police Department, along with other law enforcement agencies, will continue to take all actions necessary to combat this illegal activity to the fullest extent of the law. Likewise, fire and EMS first responders will continue to provide BLS to those in need. Additionally, the City will engage in public awareness outreach to further educate our residents of the dangers of illegal drug activity.

**IN CONCLUSION:**

I would like to reiterate and reinforce the great work done within the City of Warren in 2022, there is so much to be proud of! As we progress through 2023, we need to understand that the work to strengthen our future is a constant process and we will continue to work hard for the City and its citizens.

Sincerely,



David G. Wortman  
Mayor