

State of the Township



**Council President Craig Bowen
Bristol Township
January 19, 2017**

WELCOME

Good Evening, members of Township Council, residents, staff, friends and family.

Thank you for joining us tonight. I wish all of you a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

It is my pleasure to report on the State of our Township as we work together to build an even better Bristol Township. There are copies of the full State of the Township report available for you. This version will be available online tomorrow. Tonight, I will give you a condensed version with a PowerPoint presentation to accompany my text.



First, I would like to thank my colleagues on Council for allowing me to serve as Council President for a second straight year. It is indeed an honor.

All of you are a dedicated group of individuals that work diligently on behalf of our community, and, with the community's support are responsible for the great success we have achieved.

We may not always agree. We may at times have differences. But what matters most is how we work together to find common ground for what's best for Bristol Township.

I would also like to recognize the many committee members and other volunteers who devote countless hours to the residents of Bristol Township and work hard to better our community. And let's not forget our wonderful Township department heads and staff, led by our Township Manager Bill McCauley, for their important contributions.

Since 2012, we've witnessed big changes in Bristol Township, and, I've never been more gratified with what we've accomplished. I know that if our late Council President Bob Lewis was here today, he would be so proud of all that has come to fruition.

I've lived in Bristol Township almost my entire life. And there is an excitement in our Township that I've never seen before, and I suspect you've seen it as well.

People and businesses around our state and nation are now taking notice of Bristol Township.

And there are good reasons why people are starting to pay attention to Bristol Township, and the news is outstanding on so many levels.

A BEST PLACE TO LIVE IN AMERICA

You probably already know that Bristol Township has been a recipient of many honors and much praise over the past few years for the significant infrastructure improvements we've made, without ever raising taxes.

However, we received even more accolades and exciting news in September!

There was tremendous news that Money Magazine, a national publication published by Time, ranked the Levittown section of Bristol Township as the 41st Best Place to Live in the entire United States of America!

This special recognition from Money Magazine is a testament to the excellent leadership, vision, hard work, and courage of our forward-thinking Council members.

Not only did the editors from this magazine evaluate more than 800 cities across the country to come up with their rankings, but we were the only community in Pennsylvania to make the list!



Now we could have saved Money Magazine's editors a lot of time and effort and just told them what an amazing place, Bristol Township, is.

Those of us who live here, knew it all along.

But they didn't ask us. Instead they did their own statistical research and used a variety of criteria such as jobs, affordable

housing, property taxes, public schools, healthcare, recreational opportunities, and low crime, in order to select Bristol Township for their top 50 list.

After a careful analysis and site visit to our community, they then published some of the many factors that make Bristol Township such a special place to live, work, and raise a family!

Money Magazine's editors also recognized our "top-notch" School District as a reason Bristol Township is such a desirable community for families to call home.

Bristol Township is fortunate to have the excellent leadership of School Board Chair Angela Nober along with School Superintendent Dr. Melanie Gehrens and

talented teachers, and an engaged community, working for the benefit of our students.

We applaud them for their efforts and contributions to Bristol Township!

As I meet with government and civic leaders across Bucks County and Pennsylvania, I'm often asked, "How are you having so much success in Bristol Township?"

Well, we have a great story to tell and every chance I get, I do just that.

We now regularly receive phone calls from other civic and government leaders wanting to know, for example, how they can save hundreds of thousands of dollars each year by implementing an LED streetlight system in their community, save millions on trash collection while increasing recycling performance or pave as many roads as we did, without raising taxes.



Bristol Township's great success story has become a national model for other communities to follow!

In presenting my remarks this evening, I want to briefly recap some of the key accomplishments from 2016 and highlight some of the key areas of focus for 2017.

So let's talk about 2016. By all accounts Bristol Township had another great year!

REAL ESTATE ON THE RISE

In my State of the Township address last year, I said Bristol Township "must remain as an attractive community with a sound housing stock and viable neighborhoods throughout."

Money Magazine's editors rightfully pointed out that Bristol Township's homes are not only affordable, but we also have one of the lowest foreclosure rates among the top 50 communities on their list!



Now, let's look at home sales for 2016. The average sales price in 2016 was up more than 11% from 2015! And, the average number of days on the market fell from 52 days in 2015 to only 34 days in 2016, down nearly 42% from 2015!

We are increasing property values and restoring pride in Bristol Township as a direct result of programs initiated by this Township Council!

Township Council's innovative work back in 2012 to eliminate a burdensome \$500 escrow required to purchase a home has clearly paid off. By all accounts, we've

been successful in streamlining the sales process and encouraging home ownership in Bristol Township!

And, we must continue to build on our momentum!

Increasingly, Bristol Township is becoming the first choice of individuals and families who want to live in a community that controls spending, while at the same time expands services to its residents with an ever-improving quality of life.

PLACES FOR RECREATION

Money Magazine also took note of Bristol Township's exceptional family-friendly recreational opportunities and outdoor spaces.

Right in our backyard, a new segment of the Delaware and Lehigh Trail, a .35-mile trail segment that connects two existing segments of the Delaware Canal Towpath was completed, offering families a wonderful opportunity to connect with nature.



Just last month, we acquired the former derelict Miller Trailer Park in Croydon using Federal Community Block Grant (CDBG) funds. As a longtime eyesore to the community, the site will now provide three acres of public green space and be developed as a Community Park for the enjoyment of all!

In addition to the family-friendly activities Money Magazine mentioned in their article, I would also add our Fall Festival... In 2016, the Harvest Fest and Community Day were combined into a larger even more spectacular event that was attended by scores of local residents and visitors. And, for the first time ever in Bristol Township, the "Little Circus" put on two dazzling circus show performances that included trapeze acts, tight wire stunts, and a juggling show.

While Bristol Township residents love our traditions, including the Holiday Parade, the Annual Christmas Tree Lighting, and Easter Egg Hunt, Bristol Township will increase recreational activities to all corners of Bristol Township as we hire a full time parks and recreation director to lead our recreation department.

REVITALIZING NEIGHBORHOODS

Just one year ago, at the State of the Township address, I mentioned that by working together we can fight blight and bring new life to neighborhoods throughout Bristol Township. In a partnership with the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) of Bucks County, we began a new \$1 million blight elimination initiative to remove unsightly homes and encourage redevelopment of properties.

And, in just twelve months, we've been able to reduce the number of abandoned or vacant houses from 208 to only 146! Together, we are winning back Bristol Township's neighborhoods street by street!



Just ask long time-residents Bob and Linda Konyves how the blight elimination program has impacted their section of Croydon. The Konyves lives on Anne Street and have watched the house next to them deteriorate since the owner passed away in 2005. Bristol Township demolished this dilapidated property and is bringing new life to Anne Street! Mr. Konyves expressed, "We no longer have to look at the eye sore anymore. Kudos to Bristol Township for starting this program and sticking with it until results occurred!"

We want to improve your neighborhood, and keep you in Bristol Township!

MAKING BRISTOL TOWNSHIP SAFER

Bristol Township was selected for inclusion in Money Magazine's 'Best Places to Live' because of its relatively low crime rate. And, in 2016 under the leadership of Public Safety Director, Robert Coulton, we've made progress in our ongoing fight to make Bristol Township even safer. In fact, last year we experienced a 17.7% drop in overall major crimes. We are particularly happy to see burglary drop by 14% and aggravated assault by 55%!

Also, unlike many other communities around the country, our residents embrace and support our police department and its officers.

Our residents also want to see more police on the streets. So, in 2016 we added five new police officers to the force, bringing the total number of sworn officers to 61.

While police departments across the country are under scrutiny for using excessive violence, we've taken many steps to build trust between police officers and the community. That trust is critical to achieving our goals for public safety and necessary for avoiding the division and tragedy that has rocked other communities in America over the past few years.



Thanks to a grant from the Bucks County Redevelopment Authority, we've installed an in-car video camera system in every patrol vehicle as a way to document and record all traffic stops and promote safety and accountability.

By the end of this year, all patrol officers will be issued body-worn cameras as well. Not only will this technology be used to better protect our officers, but will also ensure better protection for bystanders as well.

When we are finished with this project, Bristol Township will have the most transparent police department in Bucks County!

Tonight, I would also like to acknowledge the recent promotion of one of our most prominent leaders in the police department. A lifelong resident of Bristol Township, Lieutenant Ralph Johnson began his career with the Bristol Township department



in 1986, first as a police officer, then a sergeant and was promoted to Lieutenant last summer after graduating from the Northwestern University Center for Public Safety.

It says a lot about a community when its young people grow up here, choose

to raise their families here and assume positions of leadership in their home town!

Lieutenant Johnson has played a pivotal role in professionalizing the police department. We are lucky to have him on-board! He is a home-grown success!

On the fire safety front, Bristol Township again allocated \$100,000 in "Glasson Grants" for the township's five volunteer fire companies. Council's commitment to public safety will ensure that our fire departments have the state-of-the-art equipment they need to keep our community safe.



IMPROVING THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF BRISTOL TOWNSHIP

Working together, Bristol Township completed several capital projects last year including renovating the interior of the Municipal Building as well as building a new police sally port and a salt shed.

It's also important that Bristol Township provide a welcoming environment to its residents and guests.

Last year, Bristol Township began a \$1.3 million renovation project to improve the exterior of the municipal complex. Beautification and accessibility improvements such as attractive landscaping, new



curbs and handicapped accessible ramps were installed as part of the project. This week, we completed the finishing touches and installed a stately town clock that adorns the entrance to the complex and will greet visitors approaching the municipal building.



Residents now have a municipal complex and building that they can be proud to have as the township's place of business!

Long gone are the minefield of buckled asphalt roads and tire-swallowing potholes. Bristol

Township has invested more than \$15 million since 2012 to pave 122 miles of township roadways without raising taxes! We are not stopping!

I'm proud to say that Bristol Township now has the smoothest and safest roads in Bucks County!

Our efforts to upgrade traffic signal controls and pedestrian crossings throughout Bristol Township undoubtedly increases pedestrian safety and quality of life for all. That's why we completed upgrades at Mill Creek Rd and Orangewood Drive and at various other intersections last year.



THE RECOVERY HOME ISSUE

Under the leadership of Council Vice President, Amber Longhitano, with the strong support of this Council, community fact finding meetings were held to address the issue of so called "rogue" homes in our community. It was discovered that there are absolutely no State or Federal rules or regulations which govern the operation of recovery homes in this Commonwealth.

Bristol Township spent a great deal of time crafting a new ordinance which we believe does not run afoul of federal protections for the disabled. The Township strongly supports those of our citizens who are struggling with drug and alcohol dependency and wants those who own recovery homes to be responsible owners, dedicated to protecting this vulnerable population. After months of fact finding and research Township Counsel drafted a new Ordinance with the strong input of both the State and Bucks County Recovery Homes Associations to try to deal with the epidemic of drug use in our community.

We call upon the Commonwealth and Federal Governments to follow the lead of Bristol Township and take responsibility to come up with comprehensive

regulations for the proper running of recovery homes. This issue is truly a matter of life and death.

ENCOURAGE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Encouraging businesses to locate in Bristol Township and creating jobs continues to be the highest priority for Council!

Bristol Township welcomed 114 new businesses last year!



Royal Farms, Med-Flex, Zober Industries, CVS, First National Bank of Newtown, Gabes Department Store, Urge Fitness Center and Aldi Supermarket are examples of some of the companies who are enhancing the business climate in Bristol Township!

WHAT IS AHEAD FOR 2017?

Looking to the future, Bristol Township will continue to work diligently to achieve our goals of building a better Bristol Township!

Looking at our finances, Council continues to take pride in its efforts to prudently manage finances. The current Council has held the line on taxes, and actually lowered them twice, since 2012, Council again adopted a budget that does not raise taxes or increase fees! Further, the administration is confident that we ended 2016 with a healthy surplus.

The transformation of Bristol Township is not yet complete! Our efforts to revitalize and beautify the business district in Croydon will continue as we break ground on Phase 2 of the Croydon Streetscape Project. The 2017 Adopted Budget also includes \$2 Million for a new Council initiative, the Bristol Township Beautification program with the goal of aesthetically improving the gateways to the Township.



Let's not forget our team of professionals who are committed to serving the residents of Bristol Township and help make so many great things happen. Bill McCauley provides excellent leadership as our Township Manager, and Scott Swichar, is the Deputy Township Manager and our Township's "right-hand man." Let's thank them for their dedication to Bristol Township. I also want to express our gratitude to our Township Solicitor Randy Flager and Township Engineer Kurt Schroder for their professional guidance and ensuring that we are able to provide the best possible service to our residents.



In conclusion, Bristol Township was named one of the Best Places to Live in America by Money Magazine, because IT IS one of the best places to live! We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, like our late Council President Bob Lewis, and honor them as we chart our course. We prepare the path forward for those who will take up the torch after us, our children, who want to live in our great community. With our collective ability, hard work, and brainstorming we cannot fail. We must stay focused on our task, be goal oriented, work cooperatively as a team, and forge even more partnerships for the benefit of the Township.

Thank you for listening. God bless all of you and Bristol Township!

