

What makes a city

What makes a good city..a livable city

What makes a city great

As mayor, I have pondered this question over and over again for more than ten years.

What I've determined is it's a difficult question to answer.

There is a saying that Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

What makes a good city, a livable city, a great city.....I think falls into that same category.

Many of you know my background is in Urban planning, so I like to read about and study what makes cities work...

What I have determined is that there is simply no yardstick by which one could easily measure a city's greatness.

Even more confusingly, some features of cities may turn out to be a blessing and a curse simultaneously, depending on how you look at them.

Take Rome, for example.

Undoubtedly one of the greatest cities on the planet.

You could hardly find a greater density of cultural heritage sites in the world, and yet it is precisely because of these attractions that getting around the city is a nightmare.

Folks have told me you can't walk five feet without bumping into a visitor group, and don't even try to build a new subway, as the archaeology you'd uncover wouldn't permit you to go very far.

Berlin....another one of our world's great cities.

Today... Decades after the city became re-united, Berlin is a hotspot for the arts and culture.

But it is also a city that is suffering severe economic problems with almost half its population living in poverty.

London another great city, has been seen as a rival to New York as the world's leading center of finance.

Billions were made in its fancy glass-and-steel skyscrapers....

Yet at the same time, all this money turned London into one of the least affordable cities on the planet for average-income earners who were suffering from a lack of affordable housing.

So no matter how you look at things, it is hard to imagine the perfect city.

What I have found is that what makes a city interesting and attractive to some may make it a less pleasant experience to others.

Also people have different preferences.

Some wish to live in high-density inner city apartments while others desire to dwell in a family home with a garden.

So the picture that emerges when you try to define a great city is reallyquite confusing.

You may well have different and sometimes contradictory expectations of life in a city....

Just think about it...

- You want the convenience of having everything close-by, yet at the same time you also appreciate your personal space and privacy.
- You want to be close to cultural and entertainment attractions, but you don't want to live in a museum or have to deal with traffic.
- You want great job opportunities but you also want lower price levels.
- You want to be close to conveniences like airports and bus stations, but you want to be far away from any noise pollution.

If we are honest.....there will probably never be the perfect place.

After ten year of leading a city...I have determined, that there is unlikely a city

which will at every moment, meet everybody's expectations.

You see Cities are organic, their evolving and their spontaneous institutions;

the result of human action and less of human design.

But there are some common factors that make cities great.

Factors that we have strived to achieve and continue to build upon as we build our own great city....called Allentown.

First: a city must set the stage for memorable human interactions to occur.

A great city is one where people want to go out of their homes.

Public space is the common ground where people come together as friends, neighbors and citizens.

Places we share together—parks, streets, sidewalks, squares, trails, community gardens—are the primary sites for human exchange, upon which our community's, economy, democracy and society depend.

People are not out in public spaces because they have tobut because they want to—

It is the chance to have fun, hang out with other folks, and enjoy the surroundings.

There is not a single example of a city that rebuilt its public places with quality that has not seen a renaissance.

This is why over the last ten years we have worked so hard to rebuild the city's parks system.

- Creating a state-of-the-art playground at Cedar Beach Park
- Rejuvenating the city rose garden, fish hatchery and West Park
- Building new playgrounds on 5th street, Bucky Boyle Park and Franklin Park
- Redeveloping Keck Park on the city's East side
- We removed three dams, one on Jordan Creek, two on Little Lehigh Creek, which have resulted in much safer streams for public recreation.
- Improved the Golf Course Driving Range and replaced it with a state of the art Tee-Off facility with heavy-duty, synthetic turf and made it ADA-compliant through accessible walkways.

- We worked with our neighborhood associations to improve and beautify Allentown's streetscape;
 - Our Parks staff worked with residents to coordinate buying and planting of over 150 trees on city streets

This year we will create a Street Tree Inventory and system – to document, evaluate, characterize, and locate city street trees.

We have a lot of trees..over 11,000 trees consisting of 89 species.

- We oversaw a master trails network to link the city's parks together in a unified system
- Instituted the Movies in the Park, Doggie Dips at City Pools, the formation of Friends of the Parks and the publication of the Adventure Allentown Park guide.
- Expanded youth programming throughout the city.
- Were awarded the national title of Playful City USA for the sixth year in a row

- And for the first time in decades purchase land to connect our parks citywide.

We hired a new Parks and Recreation Director Lindsey Taylor who is continuing this progress in our parks.

An impressive list of improvements and accomplishments to say the least,

To date over \$11 million dollars has been invested in our city parks since 2006...a significant investment in this tremendous city asset.

but we have more to do.....

Last year we:

- Completed construction of Jackson Street Community Park.
- Completed repairs to WPA walls and stairs at Irving Park, Fountain Park, Jordan Park and Union Terrace.

- Completed first phase of In Ground Trash and Recycling program.
 - Six (6) sets of in-ground recycling and trash containers were installed at the Rose Garden Grove, Lehigh Parkway and Daddona Park.
 - 70% labor saving achieved servicing these parks
 - Cooled by the ground naturally – less smell

We increased attendance at the Fishing in the Park inclusive fishing event from 160 to 310 in the second year of the event.

Through this partnership with LVCIL, the city received the Chester R. Collyer “Key to Living” Award for 2015 for its commitment to inclusive programming.

Developed and implemented a very successful Allentown Lights holiday program as a temporary substitute for Lights on the Parkway.

Created the Allentown Library Butterfly Habitat Garden.....a cooperative project with the library, LCCD, Lehigh Gap Nature Center & PADEP

And this year we will begin:

Work on building the city's first skate park and dog park

Replace Cedar Beach Pool and Renovate Mack and Irving Pools

But parks are not the only thing in a city that facilitates human interaction.

One of the most valuable assets in a city is its road space...a network of streets connecting our great civic spaces, institutions, businesses and parks.

Over the last several years we have invested heavily in our road space and finished construction on the....

- The American Parkway Bridge which opened last November
 - Named #4 of the Top Ten projects in North America – by Roads and Bridges Magazine
- The 15th street bridge
- The Union street bridge

- The South Albert Street Bridge
- The West End Theater District streetscape lighting and sidewalk work on 19th Street.
- The Old Allentown Streetscape Enhancement Program
- Heart of the City streetscaping and lighting around Sacred Heart
- The Livingston Watershed project
- Basin Street Safety Improvements
- We Installed a Downtown Traffic Signal adaptive system
- Decorative crosswalks and new iron fencing around the Fairgrounds
- Installed over 200 sharrow road marking bike lanes on a variety of city streets.
- Completed construction on Decorative crosswalks on Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, and

on N. 5TH Street at the Art Museum, and locations along Parkway Boulevard.

We also built a new state of the art fire station on the city's east side.

Continued pushing for improvements of our gas lines both in Allentown and across the country having received a third consecutive award of \$50,000 from the US Department of Transportation Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

All this amounted to \$70 million in capital improvements

But that's not all...Also in 2015 we:

- Filled 13,521 potholes
- Removed 283,000 Cubic Yards of Snow
- Responded to 575 Graffiti Complaints
- Replaced and repaired 200 Storm Inlets
- Filled out over 500 Water & Sewer System Operations & Regulatory Reports

But our work is not done....In 2016 we will begin Construction on:

- Water Main replacements totaling \$5.1 million
- Turner Street Lighting Improvements
- Arts District lighting and streetscaping on 6th street
- Mack Blvd safety Improvements
- Chew Street Improvements
- Replacement of the Gordon Street Bridge
- Rebuild of the Tilghman Street bridge
- Build a New intersection at 6th and Lehigh Street and Church and Emmaus Avenue
- And install new, pedestrian safety improvements at Sumner and 13th streets

We will also:

Begin implementing Recycle Bank – a resident Recycling incentive program...coupons for recycling

Create a City Website with interactive screens to make it easier for residents to obtain trash and recycling information

Expand the city Solar Trash compactors and recycling program.

Add 20 more intersections onto the city's adaptive technology signal system

And Begin Conversion of City Street lights (changing the 5,000+ Cobra Heads) to LEDs

All...These infrastructure improvements will provide benefits for decades to come and make our great city, even better.

A great city is a connected city – with a large number of opportunity-spawning, face-to-face, physical interactions between its inhabitants.

So the first key factor in making a great city is that a city must set the stage for memorable human interactions to occur.

The Second factor is that it must provide a baseline of predictability.

No matter how good the physical environment, visitors won't often come to a city where basic services don't work.

Nor will they often come to a city where their personal safety is too much in doubt. When services and safety get bad enough for long enough, the residents will begin to move elsewhere.

We saw this in Allentown...a few years ago no one and I mean no one wanted to be here:

So we set out to change that and focused on increasing city safety...

First assembling a quality leadership team in the police department that would work together to attack crime in our neighborhoods and for the first time make a commitment to truly cooperate with the community.

We did that....

Despite budget problems during the recession, we didn't layoff a single police officer or fire fighter and protected our investment in public safety.

We rebuilt our police force by hiring over 89 new police officers and securing federal funding for an additional 20 officers--- bringing the city's force to its highest level in over a decade.

We promoted a number of good officers to fill vacancies in the command staff. (Point out Asst. chief Dorney)

We worked hard to diversify our force hiring more female, African American and Hispanic officers to make it more representative of the population we serve.

Over the last year we:

- Fully implemented our in-car camera system to facilitate transparency and better document police citizen contacts
- Secured a \$250,000 DOJ Grant to implement a body worn camera program, with the goal of full implementation by the end of this year.
- Created the Youth Police Academy and Advanced Youth Police Academy, both of which are rigorous week long programs giving youth a positive inside look at law enforcement.

- Reinstated the Civilian Police Academy which gives citizens a firsthand look at law enforcement.
- Created the Cops Meet Block program bringing officers into neighborhoods to meet with residents and youth.
- Formed the Chief's Youth Advisory panels through a partnership with the Allentown School District, which allows students to speak to and ask questions of the chief and the officers that work in their school.
- Expanded crime analytics software into police cars so that officers can work smarter and be more effective.
- Enhanced our city wide surveillance system by adding an additional 15 cameras, with another 14 to be installed by the end of the year...making 29 new cameras on our streets with our overall count now exceeding 160+ cameras deployed in the community.

In 2016 we will also be implementing:

- The LIFE program in ASD middle schools, addressing the importance of good, positive decision making and the negative effects poor decisions have on your life
- Cops and Community – A series of 6 mediated discussions with students in the ASD alternative schools...to allow our most troubled youth to interact directly with our police outside of conflict situations
- Youth and Law Enforcement Curriculum – Community based opportunity organized through the Lehigh County Youth Collaborative that allows for open discussion between law enforcement officers and young adults.

And we will continue our Catch a Young Person Doing Right program....a program designed to reward students for doing positive things in their community.

As a result of all these efforts by our police, Allentown is becoming a much safer city.

Nine straight years of consistent crime reduction....

We have reduced our overall crime rate by a total of 30 percent, including a dramatic decrease in the most violent crime, homicides.

Year to Date we have seen a 21% decrease in Part I crimes citywide.

Though all battles are not yet won.....

We are advancing the front lines and making significant progress in our battle against crime in our community...

We are also providing predictability in how government operates.

We have striven to make government work for you, not against you...we did this by:

- Rebuilding our finances (turning deficits into surplus)
- Improving our bond rating from a B- to an A+
- Using an innovative approach to fully fund our Pensions (something no other city in the state or maybe even the country has accomplished...we won a national award for our creativity and

ingenuity...Reducing our annual pension contribution by over \$8 million dollars a year as recently reported by the auditor General

- This last year we negotiated a 5 year Collective bargaining agreement with the city fire union with a first time contribution to healthcare. Avoiding costly arbitration and saving tax payer dollars.
- Eliminated the Per Capita Tax
- And again in 2016 the citizens of Allentown will be seeing their eleventh straight year of no property tax increases, thus providing predictability in our tax base.

So the key factors in making a great city:

A city must set the stage for memorable human interactions to occur.

It must provide a baseline of predictability.

And Third.....It must provide a broad selection of opportunities to thrive and prosper.

Once, financial opportunities dominated this discussion, but today, thriving means increasingly including the quality of life, not just the standard of living.

In other words, the city's "cool factor" is growing in importance.

A key to this is culture....

Now when I say culture it is not just about art museums and symphonies, it is also about the smaller local artists who through their talents are making a difference in the community.

I'm talking about places like the Alternative Gallery on 4th street

This is a unique location with over 45 studios for rent to local artists, spaces for local art exhibits, film screenings, bands rehearsals and concerts.

(Acknowledge Brandon Wonder)

We are also working on creating a unique urban place by adding more restaurants and retail into our urban core.

A recent survey commissioned by the planning and design firm Sasaki Associates asked 1,000 urbanites what they love most about their city.

More than 40 percent cited restaurants and food; while 32 percent said local attractions;

And when asked, “what would get you out of your neighborhood?” the findings are largely consistent: 46 percent would venture out for a new restaurant; 25 percent would travel for a new store; 24 percent for a new cultural event;

This is why we have focused so much attention on our downtown, and places like the 19th street corridor and our riverfront.

To date 18 new restaurants and eateries have opened downtown and numerous new retail outlets.

- Last year the city partnered with the Hamilton Main Street program to complete several façade improvements in the 1000-1100 block of Hamilton Street.
- We Completed the Downtown Allentown Development and Urban Design Plan to guide new development.

- Coordinated the implementation of the Upside Allentown Plan to improve the neighborhood surrounding the central business district.

And this year we are creating the Retail Mosaic Program – This is a public private partnership involving the Hamilton Main Street Program; the 7th Street Program; Chamber of Commerce, City CDBG Funds, CADC and local, organic business people.

The program will be a competition to award and open 10 new retail related businesses within the downtown area.

Companies with well-thought out written business plans will be able to apply through a website, and compete for awards consisting of:

- \$15,000 in forgivable loans;
- an ecosystem of professional support services that new entrepreneurs require
- and readily available real estate.

But it's not just the places, the projects and the programs that make a great city....

The most important factor, which is included in all of the points above, is clearly a city's people.

In Aristotle's politic he states, "a city is not to preserve life but to define the good life."

But that good life.....while abundant for some is elusive...if non-existent for others.

If we are to become a truly great city...we have to become a place where no one is excluded.

We will never achieve that "Good Life" as a community as long as we have people who are struggling.

- As long as we have veterans sleeping on our streets
- People who are going hungry hoping for a hot meal
- Children who can't read
- Families who are dreaming of a real home and a better life.

As long as we have this in our city....

No matter what progress we made the day before, or the year before, our work isn't done.

Not even close.

What could a city, our city, do to make the difference?

This challenge begins on our streets ...and I would like you to meet some folks who are doing just that,

These are our city's unsung heroes if you will...people like:

Pastor Tony Adamo and Dan Cooper from Kingdom Life Fellowship.... in Foglesville (stand up)

These folks come **into the city every weekend** in the cold...standing just a few blocks down from this hotel on 7th street

They grill hamburgers and hot dogs for folks who are poor and homeless, pass out food, clothing, and gifts at Christmas to those in need.

Thank you.

There are folks like Pastor Emmanuel Suarez from Hope community church on 12th street, constantly serving our children...they gave away hundreds upon hundreds of gifts during the holidays to our neediest families..... Thank you.

David DeJesus...Emmanuel Church around the corner from here on 8th street.

Always reaching out to his community, serving food, helping our poorest families....Every summer he has a street festival put on by his church just to serve the folks in his neighborhood...Thank you

There is Jack Feltch and the Lehigh County Conference of Churches.

In 2014 the city partnered with Lehigh county and the Conference of Churches to open a new homeless drop in center at Alliance Hall

Last year we expanded upon that and worked with the conference to create an emergency warming station with beds and showers for both men and

women in an old unused pool house at Fountain park

So no one has to spend a single night sleeping on the street in the cold.

When the crisis arose around the issue of excepting refugee families from war-torn Syria...

It was Jack and the conference who organized an event in which hundreds from our community came out and said we will not bow to fear or bigotry...

We will come together as a community with open arms to accept these families in love as a community should and make them part of the fabric of our city.

Thank you.

Then there is our own pastor Bob Stevens

He opens his church every weekend to serve breakfast to the homeless...

I worked with one of the families who volunteers every Saturday selflessly...the Brace family (all of them), to make breakfast a few weekends ago.

True servanthood ...thank you

I am so proud that in my many years as mayor I have seen this kind of selflessness demonstrated by our citizens and business community many times.

There is a great quote which says, “A city becomes a world when one loves one of its inhabitants.”

Indeed, Allentown, like all great cities, succeeds because of the character, commitment and collaboration of its people....people like these I’ve pointed out.

There are many, many more like them.

As I stand here ...I have faith.

I have faith.... that in Allentownwe have the talent, and we have the heart, to keep doing that work until we are a city where...

- every family can make a home,
- every kid gets a strong start in school,

- and every adult has a fair chance to build a better life and career.
- Where we leave no one behind.

This is the vision of an Allentown at its best.

It's how we've made history....And it's howwe'll make the future.

That's what I ask each of us to commit too...today.

Bring to the table not just our own wants....But a vision for our common welfare as a city.

Finding common ground, even when we don't agree on everything.

Protecting what we love about our city by, sometimes....embracing change.

Today I'm asking us as Allentownians to come together, and go the extra mile, to make sure our success reaches everyone.

I'm asking this because I know that not just the state of our city....but the VERY SOUL of our city needs to be strong.

(Pause)We have been on a journey that has presented some incredible challenges.

For a long time many people couldn't see a way out.

But we made it....

No one bailed us out.

No one came to our rescue.

Instead we tapped.....into our best qualities to create solutions:

- the pride of our hardworking people,
- the imagination of our entrepreneurs,
- and the wisdom of our experts and many of you in the community.

Allentown is now a resilient city.

And the results speak for themselves.

We will meet our challenges and keep changing the world.

And our future will be greater than any one of us can imagine.

As is so often the case throughout our history, it is our young people who show the way.

I want to play for you a new Video...A video who's words were written by students at Allen High School. It is a video that talks about our past and the possibilities of our future.

I'm sure it will inspire you as it has inspired me.

Play the video

Our City, our people, our history, is a resounding testimony to the achievement of the impossible.

It's time for us to claim it....to own it...to accept the awesome responsibility that history has laid at our doorstep.

We got up off the ground.

We rose from our knees and took that step.

The first step was the hardest step.

Now the path is at our backs and we are on our way to a stronger more resilient Allentown.

The state of our city is and continues to be strong.

It will only get stronger in the years to come.

And it will be because we are different....because we work together...because we value each of our individual stories and how they come together to make a community.

With the foundations we've laid our city is poised and ready.

In this year, at this time – more than at ANY other -- the future is ours to shape.

Roll up your sleeves with me.

We should never be content to crawl or walk.....when we know this city was called to soar.

Let us show them what Allentown can be.

**Let's show what we can doWhen we do it
togetherThank You**