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**Most of my books had previously been published on Amazon.**

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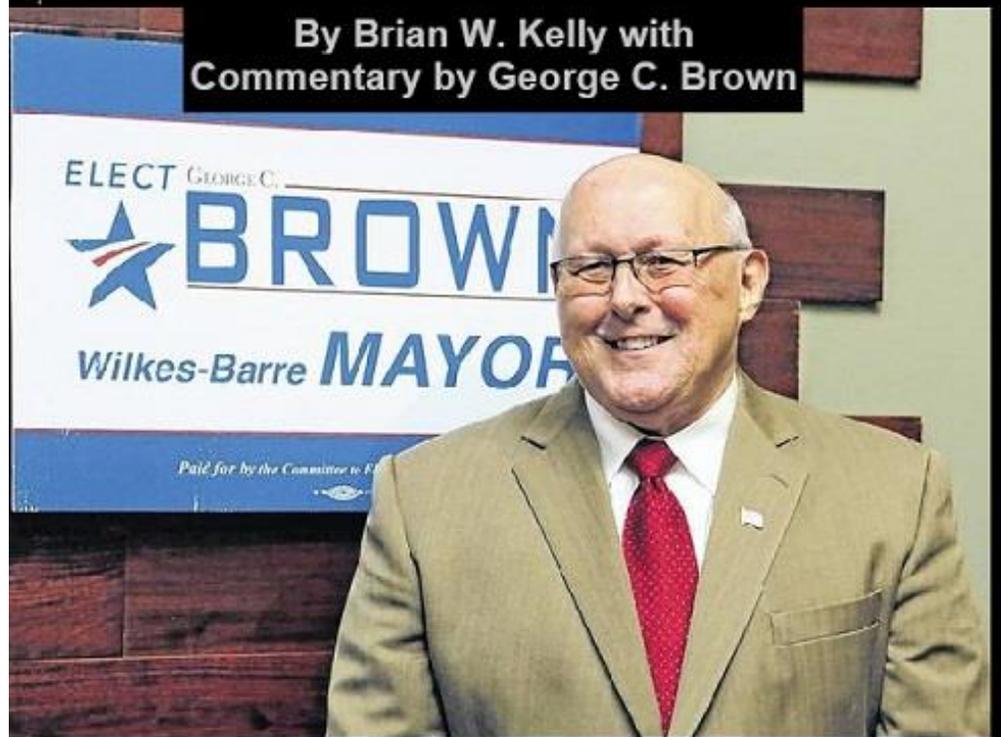
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# Hope for Wilkes-Barre —George C. Brown— Next Mayor of Wilkes-Barre

*The George C. Brown Wilkes-Barre Plan will create a better city!*

By Brian W. Kelly with  
Commentary by George C. Brown





# George C. Brown—Mayor of Wilkes-Barre

## *The George C. Brown Wilkes-Barre Plan will help create a better city!*

I wrote this back when and though it appears it is written by George himself, I did the honors. George and I were not 100% on the Brown Plan so we scratched the book.

In 2015, Brian Kelly ran against me for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. During this time, Brian wrote a book titled, *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory*. In 2019 as a follow-up and as a primer for Wilkes-Barre citizens, he wrote another new book titled *The Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future* and a shorter version called *Help for Tony George and the Next Mayor of Wilkes-Barre*. In these new books Kelly outlined a comprehensive plan to make Wilkes-Barre a City about which we can all be proud. I have endorsed Kelly's plan and added elements of my own and I am pleased to say that Mr. Kelly has endorsed my input and my candidacy for Mayor of the to-be Great City of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

When I ran for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre in 2015, I was hoping to change our City enough that we would begin a path resulting in a return to the glory of Wilkes-Barre past. I regret that I did not get that chance as I lost by a slim margin to the current Mayor, Tony George. Over these last four years, I have been thinking about what I might be able to do to better deserve the votes of the Citizens of Wilkes-Barre. This book is a reflection of my work. The new Wilkes-Barre plan I reveal in this book will result in a much safer City, a clean and beautiful City, and a much more affordable City. I have asked myself what else can be as important as these three elements. I want you all to know that I know how to attain all three goals plus 47 more and I intend to make them happen. .

We all know that the City needed a lot of improvement and when I ran for office in 2015, I was prepared to deliver on that promise. Now, coupled with the great work my friend Brian Kelly and I have completed, I am even more convinced, and I am very proud to say that that there is nobody—yes nobody—who has a better plan to offer Wilkes-Barre than George C. Brown. I am ready to move the City's gear box from reverse to forward, and folks, I already have my foot on the accelerator because I realize the citizens of this City have become impatient waiting for something good to happen.

The days of wondering and waiting to see if Wilkes-Barre will improve are behind us. With the planning I have already completed, reflected in this book, our City is already on its way!

I believe that just being a prior Mayor or Council Person will not do. The next Mayor and Council must explain in detail to the people why they should be elected. That's why I wrote this book—so the people will know all the answers. Like Brian Kelly, local author with 193 books, has recommended in his two new books about Wilkes-Barre, all candidates for City offices in 2019, must be more accountable to the people. Nobody should hide from the public even though City Hall may be a very comfortable spot.

I have adopted the precepts written in books originally written by Brian Kelly and I have added my own to create my Wilkes-Barre Plan. Kelly's objective in his books, not being a politician, was to inform all candidates what we must do to win this year in both the Mayor's race and the Council races. I agree with Mr. Kelly and I have memorialized my platform by producing the Wilkes-Barre Plan in this book. My major opponent took Mr. Kelly's invitation to inform the people & chose not to respond to his request for information. Instead the current Mayor has decided to keep it all the same rather than pursue the notion of a safe city, a clean city, and an affordable city.

I am hoping that I win the people's support. I have read the precepts behind a Safe city, a Clean City, and an Affordable City and I am adopting them as my own. They are incorporated in The Wilkes-Barre Plan which is the essence of this book that I wrote.

I ask the people of Wilkes-Barre to trust me that I will deliver as much as I can from this ambitious plan. I will be a full time Mayor and among us all we can soon have a much better City in which to live. Thank you for your support. George Brown for Mayor!

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Editor: Brian P. Kelly

**Hope for Wilkes-Barre—George C. Brown—Next Mayor of Wilkes-Barre**

~~Commentary by George C. Brown~~

Author Brian W. Kelly

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**Published by:** LETS GO PUBLISH!

**Editor / Publisher** Brian P. Kelly

**Email:** info@letsGOPUBLISH.com

**Web site** www.letsGOPUBLISH.com

Library of Congress Copyright Information Pending

Book Cover Design by Brian W. Kelly,

Editor—Brian P. Kelly

**ISBN Information:** The International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is a unique machine-readable identification number, which marks any book unmistakably. The ISBN is the clear standard in the book industry. 159 countries and territories are officially ISBN members. The Official ISBN For this book

**978-1-947402-77-5**

The price for this work is:

**\$11.95 USD**

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Release Date:

February 2019



**By Brian W. Kelly**

**Lifelong Residents of Wilkes-Barre, PA**

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## Dedication

*If this book were printed, it would have been  
dedicated to George's wife Marianne Miller Brown,  
and their three wonderful children,  
Dr. Heather Brown,  
Aimee Kearney  
and Christopher Brown,*

Surely George appreciates all of their efforts in his life and in this campaign.



# Preface

This is my endorsement of Mayor Brown:

I am proud to be able to endorse unequivocally Wilkes-Barre's own George C. Brown to be the next Mayor of our soon to be safe, clean, and affordable city. Mr. Brown is well known as a gentleman in Wilkes-Barre and his four years as a Council Person before the Tony George Administration, were filled with many accomplishments. His *ready to help* attitude and his *always available helping hand* made life a lot better for a number of Wilkes-Barre residents seeking assistance during his tenure.

For this reason and for many others, including a potential Plan for Wilkes-Barre which I designed to take a decaying city, which we now have, and to rejuvenate it into a safe, clean, and affordable place to live, is why he receives my endorsement. You can't find a better person for the job of Mayor of Wilkes-Barre, PA as George C. Brown. I hope you will join me in giving him your vote.

Many know from seeing the ads for my two books about Wilkes-Barre regarding the programs needed by the next administration, that I have done a lot of work as a private citizen. I analyzed the attributes required in our next Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. My idea was to outline all of the things the new Mayor should do to turn our city around. I took what I had learned and produced two books for the people so all would know what to look for in a mayoral candidate.

In December 2018, I sent the City Administrator an email asking him a number of questions. I planned to put the responses in the books I was outlining. I told the Administrator that I would take his response to the questions and publish them in books that I expected to complete in January or February of 2019.

The questions specifically asked about major accomplishments in the public safety area. Additionally, I asked for the Mayor's plans for the City in the next four years if he were reelected. I received no response.

With no input from the Mayor, I published just my questions in the first book titled *Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future*. I informed the public that I had sent the questions to Mayor Tony George through his Administrator.

I finished the books in February, and I dropped a set off at George Brown's home to see if he was ready to adopt the plans as outlined regarding safety, cleanliness, affordability and other notions.

Meanwhile Mayor Tony George called me and asked me for my support as I had been his opponent in the 2015 Mayoral election. At the time he

called, I planned to remain neutral on the race publicly. I told Tony that. I felt I had done my duty by writing two books that informed the Wilkes-Barre constituency about the programs and plans they should demand from a new administration and the characteristics they should look for in a new Mayor.

During the phone call, I asked Mayor George why he had not returned my questionnaire and told him I was prepared to put his responses in the books for a reprint if he submitted the responses to me . He told me he did not get the questionnaire. I told him about the books and that the books were out and that they included the questionnaire with no response from the City. That was well over a month ago (long time ago).

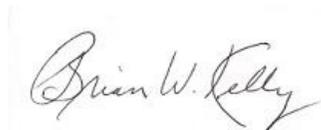
I also told him that if he got me the responses, I would alter the book(s) and include the City's responses in a do-over. But since the book was never printed, that will be unnecessary. Shortly after that he sent me an email and let me know he had the books and that he found them very interesting. That was our last contact.

In the meantime, George Brown was so pleased with the books that he had made them available for his whole family to read. When I talked with George Brown not too long ago, he was well schooled on the plans outlined in both books. He and I agreed that nobody can be against a safe City, a clean City, and an affordable City.

George Brown had examined the plan that is in this book, but it was after he had already built his plan. So, he did not need the Kelly Plan and we were not 100% in synch in favor of the Kelly Plan, so he decided to use the Brown Plan which has been successful. Some think this is a merged version, The Wilkes-Barre Plan. But it is not something George and I put out publicly.

All of this good will convinced me to change my neutral position for second election. Instead, I chose to endorse Mr. Brown for Mayor. George C. Brown and I are in synch. I know what he will do for the City and the extent is immense. More importantly, it is unmatched by his opponent for Mayor including yours truly.

I urge all of the residents of Wilkes-Barre to vote for George C. Brown for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. You can count on him.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian W. Kelly". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Brian W. Kelly  
Wilkes-Barre Author

# Prologue

Citizens Voice Subscribers in early March 2019 may recall seeing two big ads by Brian W Kelly offering the people of Wilkes-Barre an opportunity to see what Kelly believed to be a way for the Diamond City—Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania to become a better city. You may recall Kelly's plan for the City was embedded in two books which he had written titled: *Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future* and *Help for Mayor George & the Next Mayor of Wilkes-Barre*. These are available for free at the same download site as this book: [itsfreebooks.com](http://itsfreebooks.com).

In his books, Brian Kelly outlines how to “*take our City from the doldrums and make our great city even better.*” In his two ads, Kelly said that “*any candidate for major office in Wilkes-Barre who does not use this vision of a Safe, Clean, and Affordable City as their own, must be rejected by the people as they are not on our side.*” I am not sure of all the aspects of George Brown's Wilkes-Barre plan but he sure has done a great job with the City.

When I ran for Mayor in 2015 against George Brown and Tony George and another candidate, I first wrote my visions for the City in a book titled *Wilkes-Barre, PA, Return to Glory*. Unfortunately for both of us, neither won the election for Mayor.

I later wrote an interesting story about what a great place Wilkes-Barre is and was for me as a child growing up in this town and how great my Christmas seasons were. This book, he titled, *A Wilkes-Barre Christmas*. This book is also available for free download.

For a long time, Kelly's books were all available on Amazon and many were also on Barnes & Noble Online. Since I live about a block away from George, I hand delivered him copies. FYI, some call Brian Kelly a prolific writer and just this month, he authored his 193<sup>rd</sup> book. Of these books, 45 are sports books about your favorite college and professional football teams.

When I read these books about Wilkes-Barre, I thought, “Who would not want a Safe City, a Clean City, and an Affordable Wilkes-Barre City? The plans outlined in my books are very ambitious and though perhaps all aspects are not attainable in the short-term, they are a great goal and a great place for a new administration to focus its attention. Perhaps overall, it would have taken ten or twenty years for my Wilkes-Barre dream to be achieved, but the end

product, a much better Wilkes-Barre, I am convinced, would be well worth the time and effort.

I would like to close by saying the what I offered in writing my first Wilkes-Barre book, which happened at the time I was planning to run for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre in 2015, I wanted to put out a few dreams that I still have, and which now many Wilkes-Barre residents may have for Wilkes-Barre City. (Though with George as Mayor, he has been so great, that none of us can ask for much more.) I also talked about some ideas, followed by plans and actions. Together the notion of dreams and ideas and plans and actions in many ways is a definition of the leadership George Brown has been providing for years.

When I ran for Mayor, I had hoped to be an effective leader for the City so many years ago. So, I wrote the books including this one to put my ideas on the table to help the City. I see no reason to ever run for Mayor again as George C. Brown is a Mayor we can all count on. His goals have always been to move the City forward and he has accomplished that and much more with plenty to come. Go get 'em Gorge! Congratulations.

Sincerely,

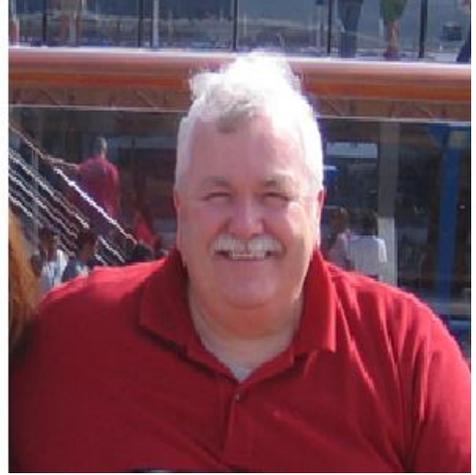
Brian W. Kelly == a one time candidate for Mayor

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## About the Mayoral Candidate / Author



### **George C. Brown:**

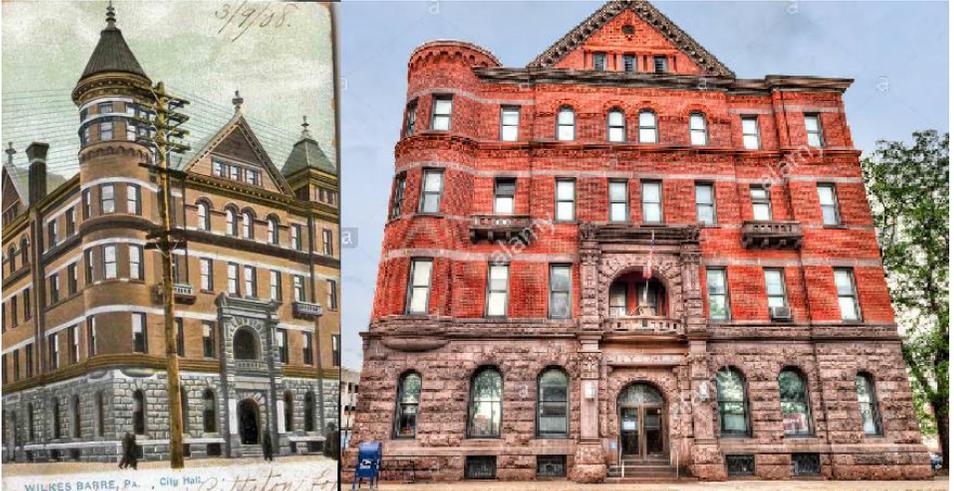
It is with great pride and enthusiasm that I announce my candidacy for the Office of Mayor of the City of Wilkes-Barre. As a lifelong resident of Wilkes-Barre, I am deeply invested in ensuring its success for future generations. My wife of 41 years, Marianne Miller Brown, and I were able to raise our three children, Dr. Heather Brown, Aimee Kearney and Christopher Brown, in a safe, community-oriented environment. I will work hard as Mayor to secure such a future for my two granddaughters and all of the children in the City of Wilkes-Barre.

### **Brian W. Kelly**

Retired as an Assistant Professor in the Business Information Technology (BIT) program at Marywood University, where he also served as the IBM i and midrange systems technical advisor to the IT faculty. Kelly has designed, developed, and taught many college and professional courses. He is also a contributing technical editor to a number of IT industry magazines, including "The Four Hundred" and "Four Hundred Guru" published by IT Jungle. Kelly is a former IBM Senior Systems Engineer and has been a candidate for the US Congress and the US Senate from PA. He also ran for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre in 2015.



# Chapter 1 George C. Brown for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre



Old City Hall with exquisite towers on left; New City Hall with no Towers on the right.

## Wilkes-Barre PA is worth the fight

People from Wilkes-Barre hate to see it go down without a fight. Among many things, ladies and gentlemen, I can assure you, it won't go down while I am your mayor and in fact, I can assure you, together, we will do great things. We will do so many great things in Wilkes-Barre that when we finish, the people may very well call it a miracle. Of course we need your prayers to get that miracle so I hope I can count on all of you and your prayers.

This will not be the last time that I remind you.

## I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!

One of the biggest issues in the campaign of 2015 was law and order and the safety of Wilkes-Barre. You may recall the major crime problem in Wilkes-Barre was that the City was declared one of the most dangerous places to live in the country. Tony George, an ex WB Police Chief capitalized on the many Wilkes-Barre murders by declaring that he was the best on crime and that he was to be forever known as the Law and Order Candidate for Mayor in 2015.

Well folks, we will not bore you with all the statistics that Wilkes-Barre has sent in because to make its reporting look better on crime, for political reasons, perhaps, Wilkes-Barre did not report all of its crime statistics. I have read analytical reports that this is the case though I am sure with recent changes in City Hall, there are those that would refute this information.

But, that does not let the current Mayor, Tony George off the hook. The police work for him . Has he put an end to crime in the City? Across from Nat Gawlas funeral home, people on what most think is a nice block in Wilkes-Barre, residents tell me that they hear gunshots on many evenings that wake them up and that when they report crimes or issues, the police response is weak. Is the city doing a good job on crime. It sure does not seem so and the current head of WB says he is ready to offer more of the same. Humph!

In just one week in February of this year, long after Mayor George was elected, the papers reported: The “Five shootings this week in Wilkes-Barre, police believe are connected.” Five shootings in one week would make 260 shootings in one year (5 X 52). That’s why the Wilkes-Barre Plan I have produced in this book, includes our plan for a Safe City. Keep reading this book to learn some specifics.

Two of the Wilkes-Barre shootings happened within just a few hours of each other. It is very disconcerting for residents, the Mayor, as well as the police chief who is doing his best with the tools he has been given by the Mayor.

Wilkes-Barre Police Chief Joseph Coffay reported to the Times Leader that his detectives believe some of the shootings are two groups retaliating against each other. Coffay warned residents to stay alert and “if you see something suspicious, report it to police.”

"Well obviously there's a danger because they're firing guns in open areas where people are around, and cars are driving so they just need to be aware of their surroundings and if they see anything to report that immediately. We're upping our patrols in all these areas. The detectives are trying to find the people involved so we can take them into custody so we can put a stop to this," Chief Coffay said at the conference.

During this tough week, Police were called to Dana and High around 5 p.m. finding 8 shell casings, according to the Times Leader, and two cars were seen with bullet holes in them.

Tuesday night of the same week, shots were fired into a house and Wilkes-Barre Police believe both of those shootings are also related to a man who was shot Saturday. This is Wilkes-Barre folks. We need a safe city and the George Brown administration is going to deliver that to the people as its first order of business.

Please don't get sick of me saying this.

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

----

As most know, I ran a campaign for Mayor in 2015 and Tony George our current Mayor was elected Mayor. I have learned a lot since then. Mr. George ran a steady administration. Accomplishments were rare when he took office and I regret to say that the Mayor's policies, especially his ideas on how to prevent crime assured that pace would be maintained or reduced. These four years have taught me a lot.

1. Same ole same ole will return same ole same ole.

There are many sources that suggest that point 1 above is the definition of insanity. To be specific:

**"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."**

The public safety operation currently under way at City Hall and the Police department is not working. Thinking that it will is just short of insanity. The George C. Brown Wilkes-Barre Plan solves the problem by causing the bad guys to get so uncomfortable in Wilkes-Barre that they pack their bags and the vamoose.

As you surely know by now, I George C. Brown am running for Mayor and I plan to win with your support. I have the best plan to fit the City and it includes quite a few surprises that you will like. Let me first present my short campaign announcement that is also on my web site:. Feel free to come to any of my campaign events. I can use your prayers and your financial support if possible.

## Chapter 2 Announcement: George C. Brown for Mayor

It is with great pride and enthusiasm that I announce my candidacy for the Office of Mayor of the City of Wilkes-Barre. As a lifelong resident of Wilkes-Barre, I am deeply invested in ensuring its success for future generations. My wife of 41 years, Marianne Miller Brown, and I were able to raise our three children, Dr. Heather Brown, Aimee Kearney and Christopher Brown, in a safe, community-oriented environment. I will work hard as Mayor to secure such a future for my two granddaughters and all of the children in the City of Wilkes-Barre.

To accomplish this goal, I will draw upon my over 38 years of managerial experience for several large, international companies, including RCA, General Electric and Thomson Multimedia. Having received a Bachelor of Science degree in Human Resource Management from Kings College and a Master of Science Degree in Organizational Management from Misericordia University, this community gave me the skills necessary to succeed in the private sector. For four years prior to running for Mayor, I used this knowledge to give back to the residents of Wilkes-Barre as a member of City Council. Now, I plan to continue to put these skills to use serving the people of the City of Wilkes-Barre as its Mayor.

- Graduate of Leadership Wilkes-Barre class of 1999
- Member of the Leadership Wilkes-Barre Alumni Council 2000-2004
- Prior Board Member of the Manufacturers and Employers Association of Mid-Eastern Pennsylvania
- Prior Board Member of the Hazleton YWCA/YMCA.
- Prior Member of the Advisory Council of Partners in Education
- Prior Member of the Board of Directors of Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity
- Prior Member of the Wyoming Valley United Way Allocations and Appropriations Committee.
- Prior Board Member of the Wyoming Valley Red Cross Blood Services
- Prior Board Member of Hazleton Big Brothers/ Big Sisters

End of announcement

I was very serious about helping the City in 2015 when I initiated my first campaign for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre and as I said, I have learned immensely from this experience. I am very serious again in 2019 to become your Mayor and to help our City rebound from a host of management issues.

I am serious about the prospects of making Wilkes-Barre a far more desirable place to live than it has been in recent times including its current state of affairs . I believe that together, we can make the City a much better place to live and again, I ask you for the opportunity.

Brian Kelly recently showed me a set of questions that he sent to the Mayor's office last December as he prepared to write his two new books. He sent the questions to the administrator as a request for information but unfortunately, the City does not believe that they must report their activities to the public and they ignored Mr. Kelly's request. So he could not include any comments from Mayor George about what the last four years were like or what the next four years would be like.

Taxpayers might want to write their own set of questions such as those Brian Kelly wrote in his request plus your own and see whether the administration will give you a response. They don't seem to like to give the people information to explain all the deaths and the gunshots intended to cause deaths.

About its plans for the City over the next four years if the current Mayor is fortunate enough to be reelected. Go ahead and write questions about them if you have the time. It would help all of us in Wilkes-Barre if politicians in office believed that all of us out here actually care.

FYI, here is what Kelly asked the City to which he received no response. What candidate for Mayor would refuse to answer an information request which would result in free publicity?

**Date:** Wed, 12 Dec 2018 11:08:10 -0500  
**From:** "Brian W. Kelly" <bkelly@xxx.net>  
**Subject:** Note

-----

Dear *Administrator*,

I was unable to see a Director of Public Relations or Communications Director title, so I am sure that you will know who best to direct this request for information. It is for my new book anticipated in January or February of next year. Thank you for your help.

My request is as follows:

-----

I am in the process of writing a follow-up book to Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory, a book that I wrote in 2015.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01J6LONXS/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?encoding=UTF8&btkr=1>

I would like to include a letter from a current City Official that I can place in the new book.

I wonder if you might send me a note in response to the following questions:

Re: Public Safety

What changes have been made to City police procedures since the Leighton Administration?

What was the effect of those changes?

Is Wilkes-Barre a safer City than during the Leighton Administration?

If so, how and why; If not, Why?

Re: Public Administration

What changes were made to public policy since the Leighton Administration that made the City a better place to live?

What improvements have been made to the city during this time in terms of infrastructure and items such as computers, software, etc.

What are several areas that have been identified for improvement and are currently being improved or cannot be at this time? How? Why?

Do City Officials believe that there are 1. Too few, 2. just enough, or 3. too many employees serving the City in various ways.

Does the City plan to take any action to help the new groundswell movement to prevent moving the three school district high schools out of Wilkes-Barre City? Why? Why Not?

Re: The future

For the next four years, what is the City's plan for improvement in all of the areas above.

Thank you very much.

--- end of note to City ---

A little tip from Brian Kelly follows. Please know that I want to be your Mayor so that I can turn around our City and move it forward.

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

Please do not vote for a neighbor or a friend or a crony or somebody the Party wants unless they think just like you think. Since you are reading this book, you certainly know what and how I think. At least you know you will know when you finish reading this work. I would ask that you consider my suggestions and of course vote for the best candidate possible for WB Mayor and for WB Council and also for the WB Area School Board. Of course I believe it is George C. Brown.

Dear friends,

I do believe that I am that person.

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

**God bless you.**

## Chapter 3 George Brown's Platform Points

The first three areas of the Wilkes-Barre Plan, which is the George Brown Political Platform or pledge are the most substantial and thus are numbered one through three. A Safe City, a Clean/Beautiful City, and an Affordable city. The Brown/Kelly platform aka, what Mr. Brown has named the Wilkes-Barre Plan is based on the items suggested in the Kelly books, which as noted by mayoral candidate Brown were written in early 2019.

I'll bet when you are in the twilight time between being awake and being asleep as your mind is shutting down, when you are thinking about what would be good for Wilkes-Barre, the first three elements of the Wilkes-Barre plan would come to mind a lot. However, when you go beyond the needs of safety, cleanliness, and affordability, it might not be so easy to think of other items for the list.

Fear not, my friend Brian Kelly has an active mind as you might think for a person who has written 193 books as of March 1, 2019. Some of his ideas after points 1,2,and 3 are indeed whimsical but if we could pull them all off, it would go a long way in making our City one of the most unique and finest cities in America. By the way, the numbering of the items after the first three is mostly random as I have not had the opportunity yet to prioritize these notions.

Wouldn't it be something if upon implementing a number of these ideas, we found that the biggest problem in Wilkes-Barre had become parking as the rush to get a look at such a creative City caused those from twenty-miles away to all the way across the country to come see what is happening in the new Wilkes-Barre. I think we could solve that problem (parking) if by doing all 50 items on the George C. Broan Platform, aka The Wilkes-Barre Plan, we can make it become our #1 problem. But, we have a long way to go. Your electing me Mayor by the grace of God is the first item we must accomplish.

Let me begin the platform points by writing a list of the dreams and ideas both from Brian's mind and my own that one day soon will be

prompting us to make implementation plans and action plans to achieve. The objective of course is to get things done without having to spend taxpayer money. Why not begin right now?

1. Advice to the new Mayor – a reminder to me
2. Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Safe
3. Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Clean.
4. Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Affordable
5. Support Building Preservation such as Coughlin High School etc.
6. Support Building Preservation Society – No more wrecking ball
7. Safe jogging, biking & walking trails – bike parking and rentals
8. Build a railroad around the city with a train garage by the river
9. Create 4 mini Stations for the CityCircle railroad
10. Create a Spur to Barney Street Mall
11. Create a RR spur to Pittston and Scranton and on to NY & Phila.
12. Run Tram cars downtown in warmer weather
13. Permit safe Rickshaw and Rolling Chait like transportation downtown
14. Create a City full of mini-malls in vacant Lots
15. Create a street mall between Horton St & the Creek on Barney St.
16. Facilitate Industrial Comeback -- 5 large mfgs. for new jobs in the City
17. Help NEPA Anthracite. Coal Industry come back some say? -- for jobs
18. Target desirable small businesses such as micro-breweries for city
19. Find Downtown Developer for Sterling Property & the Annex.
20. Invite developers to offer a new Palm House by Courthouse
21. Create several adopt a street programs – 1 financially & 2 for anti-litter
22. Hire a Grant Writer / New Business Coordinator
23. Paid for by outside funding
24. Hire a City Designer for any building / infrastructure projects
25. Paid for by outside funding
26. Hire a designer / coordinator for smaller special projects artists
27. Paid for by outside funding
28. Create Major Funding / Donation Opportunities for the city 1
29. Write letter to NY Times Adopt WB for \$100 million; RR & mini-malls
30. Change City charter and all signs to say this city adopted by
31. Committee--private donations--help poverty-stricken avoid foreclosure
32. Programs- affluent former residents, donate & startup businesses
33. Use WB Public Square more effectively – local concerts, speeches
34. Support candidates for office – Use City Hall Council Chambers
35. Create Seniors Transportation Committee
36. Create Youth Activity Committee – such as CYC dances etc.
37. Continually explore recreation opportunities
38. Build / Rehabilitate Swimming pools for City Residents
39. Make better use of bike trails in Kirby Park – other side of dike
40. Bring back Charles Miner Memorial with flowers

41. Keep reading tips like those in article to make city more attractive :- 101 small ways you can improve your city--  
<https://www.curbed.com/2016/9/22/13019420/urban-design-community-building-placemaking>
42. Invite Artists to decorate bus stops
43. Redesign crosswalks... Artists go to town with signature work & donors
44. Make designer seat benches in city spots --parking meters / bike rack.
45. Fight crime with neon.
46. Foster a guerrilla garden uprising-- permission for gardens in vacant lots--
47. Seed donations for gardens
48. Encourage amazing neighborhood block parties throughout the City.
49. Add the public libraries to the bus routes
50. Make some creative bicycle parking spots



## Chapter 4 Advice to new 2019 Mayor and new 2019 City Council

1. Advice to the new Mayor – hopefully a reminder to me
- 2 Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Safe.
3. Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Clean
- 4 Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Affordable



### Three parts make a whole plan

I include this in my book to remind myself and all the people of Wilkes-Barre that we mean business and we will not forget the people if, and hopefully when I am elected your mayor.

The three major prongs of our new Wilkes-Barre plan will become the linchpins of my administration. Of course they include making Wilkes-Barre a clean/beautiful city; an affordable city; but most of all a safe city. I could not think of a better way to become one of the best Mayors ever in the history of the City by providing these three elements of a great city to Wilkes-Barre residents. Who could ask for more? When Brian Kelly discussed the plan from his books, I agreed

that there is nobody in Wilkes-Barre who does not want it to be safe, clean, and affordable.

We call the first three elements of the plan and the forty-six others *The Wilkes-Barre Plan* . It is the product of copious research and effort. The better part of a year was devoted to research and discussions with crime fighters from different parts of the country and we have one of the best crime-fighting professionals in the country to thank for much of our safety material and for many of the safety precepts in the Wilkes-Barre plan. It all begins with a well-structured police department to lead our City into a new age in which gunshots are not a regular occurrence in our neighborhoods, and drugs and gangs are not pervasive.

Making the city clean also means a lot of things. One is that it removes the notion of *The Ax Man Cometh* or the wrecking ball comes again and our treasures and historic monuments that are left are again in jeopardy.

Let's go ahead and examine all the points in the Wilkes-Barre plan. In some cases, a platform point encompasses so much material it is presented in a chapter by itself. In other case, we combine items in one comprehensive chapter. Enjoy.

By the way, throughout this book so that you remember that this plan has not been adopted by the current Mayor and that I am committed to using the Wilkes-Barre Plan to revitalize our city, making it safe, clean, beautiful, and affordable, I will remind you periodically with these words:

**I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

Yes, you can!

# Chapter 5 Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Safe

## 2. Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Safe



### Wilkes-Barre Was Once a Safe City

Wilkes-Barre was once a safe city; however, it no longer can be stated as such. I recently reviewed the (UCR) uniform crime reporting stats for the City and it is alarming that a city of our size can have such a high murder rate.

Whether it is true or perceived, we citizens have heard the negative opinions concerning our police department. Of course there are heroes within the ranks. I have been assured by qualified sources that most of our policemen and women are hard-working, honest people who

dedicate their lives to the community. I also understand that the families of these officers commit to the police schedule and sacrifices as well. I will approach this City with an open mind, but I will not be a status quo mayor. The safety of our residents is too important to be an afterthought.

My office through a Public Safety Director or Chief of Police will work in conjunction with local, state, and federal agencies to create a firewall to contain and resolve our increasing crime stats. I will task all departments and community groups to help restore pride to this City.

Make no mistake about this election. With everything that is at stake, again it is your choice as to which direction the City should move. Some say we get the government we deserve. We deserve the best but often for reasons such as expecting a job for our kids or our nephews or nieces, we may not make the best decisions. The dirty politicians win in those cases.

This election is not about friendship and voting for the status quo—it is about survival and choice. Does our City survive another term of status quo? Are our children, parents, friends safe from the ever-increasing onslaught of crime? Will our home values tumble due to the negative publicity of our continuously increasing crime rate?

I would like to touch on another important subject here and that is our ability to afford the best protection we can get. I am keenly aware of public unions and our ever-increasing public pension burden. I believe we need to negotiate for fair practices, fair pay, fair taxpayer obligations, and fair service from Fire, EMS, and Police. All negotiations must be in good faith and must be the proper balance of affordability and service.

As your Mayor, I would establish a panel to evaluate, design, and encourage private development within our city. I will consider all avenues to draw businesses to Main Street Wilkes-Barre. These would include tax incentives- police foot patrols, bicycle patrols, parking options, etc. Like you, I want a vibrant, safe, clean, and affordable city for all to enjoy.

## **Public Safety – The Number One Priority**

There are no good jokes about Public Safety because it is the only factor that a city government must deliver and must deliver well. Nothing else compares to providing safety and comfort to the citizens of our community. That is what it is all about. The people would rightfully care little about any City structure if there were no Police and no Fire and no EMT crews to assure their safety.

In this campaign, I hope you have already noted that I am appalled how our City streets and the City's overall look evokes a feeling that some cleaning crew someplace missed a few spots. Public safety issues show up in homicides and other crimes stats and we are reminded about these when we drive down the dirty streets of our City.

Sometimes we see so many eyesores from potholes to rough roads, to dirt piled up in the roadways it is clear that the lasting impression a visitor or a potential employer would conclude is that keeping the City clean is not a priority. A dirty City is a workshop for crime. It seems to show the perpetrators that nobody in official Wilkes-Barre cares.

If the City cannot be kept clean, how can it be kept safe? Compared to even smaller cities in Pennsylvania, we somehow do not measure up...but we should... and we can for sure—if we choose to do so. I plan to see to that when you give me the chance. I ask you to remember that:

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

One look and a normal person could readily conclude that the huge street cleaning machines paid for by taxpayer dollars pull up their brushes when the streets look too full of debris—especially close to the end of a shift. Not cleaning out these big machines after a credited run would save the driver a lot of work. Don't think that does not happen. When it happens of course the streets become double-dirty and that is not good.

I am not saying that is so; but after all, somebody eventually must clean it all from the body of the truck—the brushes, and the whole deal. If the truck returns clean to the garage, such additional work is not necessary. Can this be? I have it from the horse's mouth that this

phenomenon has been a Wilkes-Barre issue from way back in the McGroarty administration. So, I know that it is. In the George Brown administration, we will find out. If it is so, let me assure you it will not continue to be so.

Bloomsburg is in many ways a model city to view. Take a trip to little Bloomsburg down the road from Wilkes-Barre and you will find a city well maintained, clean, and obviously attractive to visitors and potential employers alike. Somehow the small merchants on Main Street, Bloomsburg are able to keep their places nice and they find Bloomsburg to be an affordable city also. Affordable and clean, however, does not trump safe. Bloomsburg also claims great police statistics, and from visiting the town regularly, and knowing the perception of University students, I would agree. Safety, even in a College Town like Bloomsburg is #1.

I am inclined to believe that we Wilkes-Barre residents are too forgiving. If we all looked further into this nice small town called Bloomsburg, we would also find that it is a safe city. Even though, just like Wilkes-Barre, it has its share of University students. A field trip to Bloomsburg and a major discussion with their officials and shopkeepers and students should be an important item on any new mayor's to-do list. I have been there, and I will keep going back to make sure I get it right for Wilkes-Barre.

Just like Wilkes-Barre ought to be a clean city, and that is easy to evaluate with a trip around the City, it also ought to be a safe city but, we find that again, it is not. When such issues occur in a business, we blame management. It is time to blame current management again for the City's ills. City management makes all the decisions. They do not invite a person from Kingston in to see if things are going well. Wilkes-Barre officials are the heroes or the goats. Residents have a reason to be displeased with our report Card. The George Brown Administration is looking to achieve all A's by the end of year one.

Areavibes.com reports the Wilkes-Barre, PA crime rate as 70% higher than the Pennsylvania average. It is 22% higher than the national average. Looking at violent crime specifically, Wilkes-Barre, PA has a violent crime rate that is 98% higher than the Pennsylvania average and 62% higher than the national average. For property crime, Wilkes-

Barre, PA is 65% higher than the Pennsylvania average and 15% higher than the national average. No wonder people are scared.

According to city-data research of Pennsylvania and other state lists there were 74 registered sex offenders living in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania as of March 06, 2019. These and those statistics above are not the statistics citizens look for when seeking out a place to live or to build a business. We must do better. We will do better if I am elected Mayor. I assure you of that. I have a real plan.

Recent reporting by the Times Leader revealed that police statistics showed aggravated assaults with firearms increasing 300 percent between 2005 and 2015. Police officials cautioned the data wasn't necessarily precise, but acknowledged the trend was accurate.

Look again at our homicide statistics if you can find them for current years. Ask your friends. Ask your children; ask yourself! Has anybody ever tried to hustle you in downtown Wilkes-Barre or surrounds? Did you know whether they were carrying or not? Members of my own family have been accosted by such flagrant disregard for the law. We seldom hear of prosecutions for such actions because the people are too patient, and we endure too much. In my administration, for such abrasive crimes, our police will not be tolerant.

In fact, whether true or perceived, there are real questions by many as to whether the police always work their hardest for the people. As your Mayor, I will remain confident in the Police, Fire, EMS, and all city services. Trust, but verify will be the modus operandi of the new George Brown city management team.

My bet is that the current police and fire personnel will be our first line of defense in our endeavor to build a safer city. Any management structure, however, which permits second-rate results, must be changed.

It is my number one (# 1) priority as Mayor, to make Wilkes-Barre one of the safest cities in the country. Public Safety through fire protection, building protection, and most importantly through police protection is the tonic that can permit all residents to live well, without fear, while the public safety team deals with the bad guys. I would prefer to let nobody off the hook but if somebody must be let free, I

would instruct the team to deal with parking violators last. Ironically, parking fees have become a big revenue generator for the Tony George Administration and that frustrates the people who are victims of real crimes but need to pay for small parking violations much too frequently.

As many proud City residents, I live right here, and I see how bad things have gotten in my City. I have lived in Wilkes-Barre for all my life. I love Wilkes-Barre and I want Wilkes-Barre to be at the top of the USA Safe City List! That is my # 1 objective for our City!

## **WB Needs a Public Safety Director**

Few experts in police matters would argue the point that Wilkes-Barre is in dire need of direction and discipline within the police department. Though Wilkes-Barre is a relatively small city compared to giants such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, it is a City with considerable resources, though these resources are certainly not excessive. Yet, a \$50 million budget (2019) is far from chicken feed. Making each of those dollars work for City residents is a must. Having no major oversight over safety, cleanliness, or affordability is not the way to assure City dollars do the most good.

In the safety area, there is no better resource to invest in than a Public Safety Director unless you are not interested in public safety. Not having such a position is like letting the police run the City without direction. No Mayor can serve as Mayor and Police Chief and Public Safety Director and do any of the jobs well.

The Public Safety Director position is designed to provide the direction and discipline sorely needed by the City. Many of the continuing issues in Wilkes-Barre would have been resolved internally long ago if such a position were filled and staffed with a competent officer with the authority to make it right.

Maybe the female police chief who recently stepped down would still be the police chief or maybe she would not have been appointed. That would have been the Public Safety Director's decision just like the Police Commissioner's job in *Blue Bloods*.

It is time for the Wilkes-Barre Police Department to reorganize and prioritize its commitment to the citizens of this City. We must assure that we have a well-organized, well-trained, well-disciplined, and a committed set of officers. New officers that are hired as time goes by must be prepared to join the many professionals within the Wilkes-Barre Police Department, who proudly wear the badge of our City.

In 2015, you may be aware Wilkes-Barre commended nine such officers publicly for their bravery. It is difficult to find such stories about the police and crime statistics for the last four years. Why?

To assure that what is good either stays good or it gets better, when you select me to be your Mayor, please know that I am committed to building the safest city in the Commonwealth and in the Nation. Part of that process will be to establish a web-based program designed both to enhance public trust and confidence in all public departments, not just the police department, as well as providing services, which today are unavailable to the public.

## Communication with residents

The residents of Wilkes-Barre must have an outlet to contact any agency within City government with a formal complaint about an officer, public worker, or contractor and they must be assured that each and every complaint or comment will be investigated and reported to a board appointed by the Mayor. No overtime for getting the job done.

We all can speculate but with good reason that if such as system had been in place over the last sixteen years, [Tom Leighton & Tony George Years] we would not have had all the negative press, which unfortunately was well-deserved. The Headliner for one of the major City problems [at the time] was a person that we will identify only as Mr. Glodzik. He was the City's one source Towing Contractor. As your Mayor, I will avoid such entanglements and focus on business for the good of the City.

This individual's arrest cemented the notion that he and his business were not serving the City well. Yet it appeared that City officials were

still ambivalent as to what to do about the quandary they faced. Would the citizens of Wilkes-Barre be the winners, or would the cronyism continue? Our system is designed to prevent cronyism.

And so, if we had such a system, in which any member of the public could offer a comment or complaint, the issue would have made the headlines continually. Under the new Police System, it would receive an incident number and a phone call within 48 hours of the complaint. It would have been very difficult with the great newspaper coverage we get, for most residents to be unaware, and the prior Mayor would have been forced to action long before there was an arrest.

In such a system, internal investigations would immediately take place. They would not be public knowledge, but every citizen would have the opportunity to provide a statement concerning their specific issue / complaint.

I can assure you that in my administration, the new position of Director of Public Safety will be staffed by a highly qualified law enforcement officer or former police officer. This officer will be very familiar with policies and police procedures. He or she will also have strong administrative capabilities to evaluate current protocols and typical routines and will make recommendations to the Mayor for adjusting, significantly changing, or enhancing current practices.

As Mayor, my goal will be to make the police department as well as the fire department and all city government areas streamline their operations to become part of a high-performance organization in the most cost-effective manner. I realize that this requires my full commitment to the City, its citizens, its current employees, and I am ready to make that commitment. I am a life-long resident of Wilkes-Barre City, by choice, and I care about our City.

I will conduct a search for the Director of Public Safety shortly after taking office. My plan is to use a consultant who I know to help assure we get the right person for the position. When I can offer the position to the best candidate, it will be a great day for Wilkes-Barre.

I know what I am looking for and it is a major part of the Wilkes-Barre Plan. My selection will be as good as it gets for Wilkes-Barre or any other city facing the increase in crime that we have been experiencing.

I will look at the current officers first and assure that the candidates are not politicians in disguise. Ideally, I would like a career PA State Trooper with extensive investigative knowledge and many years as a police supervisor. It would help for the candidate to have undercover agent experience and it would be a great bonus for the candidate to have received multiple awards for extensive undercover activities and a successful retirement.

I know people like this, so I know they exist. We need a person with a love for the job, with tenacity, integrity, and a personal commitment to get the job done. I would be asking such an individual to assist me in transforming this City into the safest city in America. I am very pleased that I know the type of individual who can best serve the City.

In order to have such a long-time protector of the people to sign up to give Wilkes-Barre a “fighting” chance against crime, your job of course is to make sure that you elect George Brown for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. I know that I will find the best man for Wilkes-Barre to address its most critical need. The rest is up to you.

## **Mission of the Director of Public Safety**

The mission of the Director of Public Safety is to assure the security and safety of all residents and patrons of the City of Wilkes-Barre through the oversight and execution of the public safety operational strategies of the Police Department, Fire Department, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Emergency Management (EMA), Building Inspection / Code Enforcement, and the Community Action Team.

The mission of departments / sections under the purview of the Director also includes improving community and first responder safety through training, technology, fleet upgrades and increased community visibility as well as the enhancing and enforcing of team collaboration across all public safety areas.

The Director, through the various departments in the Public Safety Group, under the auspices and direction of the Mayor, would be prepared to oversee and lead the overall public safety strategy for the City of Wilkes-Barre. The objective of a Director Position for these

related departments is to create a professional and competent partner in the public safety arena to all businesses, and institutions, and individuals needing such services.

Looking forward into 2020, a new and important program known as The Wilkes-Barre Initiative to Reduce Crime (WIRC) will be operating under the auspices of the Mayor and run by the Public Safety Director. The objective will be to reduce the number of homicides and other major crimes in the City.

We definitely need real experts to make our City safe again. We cannot survive on legends. It helps to repeat that the priority is to brighten the City's future by making Wilkes-Barre a clean, affordable, and safe city.

## **We need a Special Violent Crime Unit**

My first act as Mayor as noted will be to hire an expert Police Commissioner, who will serve also as a Public Safety Director. The very next act will be to address the incessant crime and murder problem in the City through the creation of a special violent crime unit. How many shootings in a one-week period will it take before we all see this unit as an emergency. Normal police procedures cannot solve problems with drug thugs and gangs. The supervisor of a special crime unit cannot be an ordinary policeman. He / she must be a top-quality expert supervisor who knows how to deal with the worst of the worst.

Only our best police officers will be evaluated and selected for what may become a dedicated or at least almost-dedicated team of five officers. If need be, we will hire officers from outside. Safety is our most important mission. This will be an elite unit whose mission is to make Wilkes-Barre the city in NEPA of which the bad guys want no part. In fact, the bad guys won't even want to visit here because for them, it will be a crime career ender.

This unit will fight only violent crime... no domestic or minor burglary or traffic violation calls. Over 95% of the Police Force will be designated to regular duty. We have room for this special unit. The people of the City are not intimidated by traffic violations or parking

issues or domestic issues, but they are taken back at all the gun-toting bad guys, the drug trafficking, the gangs, and the murders. This administration will solve that, and we will run the bad guys out of town.

The mission will be restricted to fighting organized gang drug crime and homicides that result-- like Willow Street [a murder just solved recently], which really raised the mark.

Violent crime is our biggest problem. What happens when the bad guys stop killing each other? Will they leave or begin to terrorize the communities even more?

Our City has been unprepared. It is still unprepared. To the bad guys, Wilkes-Barre is a target city. We are like babes in the woods. For years, the bad guys have loved coming to Wilkes-Barre to do their pillaging because our countervailing force has been immeasurable against their willingness to torment our citizens. That will end in the Brown Administration. Please remember:

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

The good ole boy network and same ole; same ole has not cut it and it will never cut it. We must crush this gang drug thug problem to bits. We have to stomp it down so that it never resurfaces again in our City. We do have the resources if we have the will.

There are lots of ways to get the job done but wringing our hands in despair and saying we are going to do what we know we are not prepared to do is no longer on the list.

I believe that a neighborhood camera system must be deployed and depending on funding, it should be in conjunction with a new gunshot detection system in specified areas within the City. The current camera system may be repaired but we no longer can tolerate a system that does not work.

In addition, I know that our new Director of Public Safety will be committed to strengthening the relationship between the community and all Public Safety Departments / Sections and will be implementing

a new community outreach program for all nationalities and races, managed within the Office of the Director.

This program will enhance and coordinate all initiatives across the Public Safety Departments / Sections, other departments within City government, as well as with the Office of the Mayor. I will be a big player on this team.

The characteristics of the Director that I will choose will make him or her one of the best in the nation. The Director will hate crime as much as you do; and I do. He will be committed to leveraging partnerships across the law enforcement community within Luzerne County and surrounding counties / municipalities, the state and the federal government.

This commitment involves working closer with federal partners such as the Office of the United States Attorney, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, United States Secret Service and others to leverage federal assistance in addressing the crime situation within the City of Wilkes-Barre. We mean business. We will make the City safe once again. And all residents and all businesses will be pleased with our work.

Moreover, our federal partnerships will continually be enhanced with relationships between the Mayor, the Director, the Chiefs, and all department Heads within the Public Safety Group and City administration.

This will be in concert with the Pennsylvania State Police, Office of the Pennsylvania Attorney General, Office of the District Attorney of Luzerne County, Lackawanna County Police, Office of the Luzerne County Sheriff and all other local law enforcement agencies within Northeastern Pennsylvania. Our team of crime fighters will be trained to be the best it can be. *Don't mess with Wilkes-Barre* will be their slogan as the bad guys quickly depart to other cities.

## **Contract Negotiations Is a Team Effort!**

The Director of Public Safety will have a dotted line relationship with all other city departments / department heads to assure that the City is ready for any and all contingencies and emergencies.

Additionally, to assure Wilkes-Barre does not waste money, the City Administrator, Public Safety Director, Department Heads, and the Mayor's Office will evaluate all contracts, insurance policies, and maintenance contracts.

They will assure that all contracts are legitimate, and the services are performed according to the agreed upon terms. In other words, the good old boy network is a thing of the past. Cronyism in City affairs will not rule the City and in fact, it will not be tolerated. A safe city must be an honest city.

The Director will be helping the City in the beginning by assuring that all safety plans are in good order, and that all plans are good for the City. For example, three areas of past problems in particular, will be the first ones to be examined –

- Towing contract(s)
- Parking Authority plans / relationships
- Insurance contract(s)

Substantial savings can be afforded to the City if we negotiate our contracts properly and the Director will help assure that all work done is done honestly, and that the negotiators do not wind up winning while the City loses. No dishonesty!!!

## **Important Early Initiatives in the Safety Area – in no specific order**

1. Assure all plans are updated including floods, a potential nuclear mishap, police protective service etc. These contingency plans include the actions to take to assure success

- a. Proper training- equipment
- b. Traffic routing- hospital & prison evacuation etc.
- c. Looting prevention, etc.

2. Review all City Insurance policies. Assure a proper bidding policy is in place as these amounts are substantial.

3. Work on Police credibility so that the public perception of an honest, disciplined force is maintained.

- Conduct Internal Investigations to assure credibility and honesty.
- Internal investigations assigned a control number
- Review by the Mayor, the Chiefs, and the Public Safety Director.
- If internal charges are substantiated; check procedures to
- decide action against employee. e.g. Suspension / Termination etc.

4. Contract bidding: Major Supplies, Equipment, Public Utilities contracts must be bid and issued on a closed bidding process which is open to all legitimate parties.

5. Automated Complaint System: Build / Improve a Web based public complaint system for all public employees.

6. Task Force Assignments for Police: Police need to be assigned to county/ state or federal task forces, rotated on a two year basis. This provides less opportunity for a member of the force to become uninterested. .

7. Crime Files: Informant files are to be maintained and reviewed on a monthly basis.

8. Undercover Financing: Such funds must be managed tightly - accounting expenditure records etc.

9. Preventative vehicle maintenance: An officer needs to be assigned for every department -- police, fire, public works etc. to assure the city's expenditures are properly made.

10. Reports Mandated: Departments must report all expenditures accurately each month with reviews.

11. General improvements: The following items are presented in a bulletized list.

- When hiring those with prior investigative jobs such as state troopers, FBI agents, etc., if they already have a retirement pension, WB must negotiate not having to supply pension benefits. (Officer already collecting public benefits)
- Reduce the number of city employees who are issued a car, phone, and Gas card.
- Require all city employee to pay for partial health care.
- Accept any voluntary wage reductions to help the city
- Work to assure the pension payout system is fair to the city and the employees
- Set up internal accounts so that benefactors can donate freely and clearly for specific or general city initiatives. Advertise this on all city correspondence – billings etc. Publicly praise city residents and others who choose to help Wilkes-Barre from the goodness of their hearts.
- Enhance police and firemen fitness standards by encouraging physical fitness programs/ competitions to better serve the community. For example, there is a national competition in which officers can. Most officers are good policemen as are most other city employees. As Mayor, I understand that I will be tested as will my director, chief of police, and the fire chief. We may in fact experience resistance at first. This is exactly why I'm reinstating the position of Public Safety Director. This position will be responsible for implementing the essential guidelines as part of a collective research effort to determine those that are necessary to fulfill my commitment to the city.
- I will not be bought by the same people who have driven this City into the ground. As mayor, I promise all of the citizens that I will not appoint a yes man or a person with an agenda to this important position. I will demand positive results from all entities under my control as mayor and those positive results will benefit all of the citizens of Wilkes-Barre.
- A strong, experienced public safety director will bring the background necessary to ferret out who or what are the problems, understand the problem, and solve it immediately.

The Safety Director will have a relationship with the chief, who in turn must have a relationship with the officers and first line supervision responsible for the patrol/ crime investigations.

- The public safety director is designed to be a buffer for the chief of police- fire chief - public works. In many ways the Director will take the hit for all bad news, and then he or she will work to assure such things are one of-a-kind issues. The Director will be charged with building procedures to assure the operational flow is proper.
- The Public Safety Director will revise and / or draw up the field regulations and code of conduct that must be maintained by all employees. The chiefs would be charged with making sure all policies are followed by all members.
- Violation of—or any conduct considered contrary to policy will be investigated and reported so that it can be investigated internally, and either be substantiated or unsubstantiated.
- Discipline will be based on a progressive manner for insubordination and documented by supervisors. Criminal allegations against officers will result with suspension / without pay if charges filed. Desk duty until charged of investigation clears the officer.
- The use of vehicles by officers from city contractors must be terminated to maintain public confidence. Negotiations with the unions may be required if this is perceived to be a benefit.

## Summary: How to create a safe city

Besides an effective crime fighting unit as discussed above, there is more to building a safe city. Without getting you bored, it is a given that the people have a major role in their own system. Our kids will no longer be in the middle of the street playing kick the can down the road—at least until we clear out the bad guys from our midst.

The people in the community have a major role. A blog at [safewise.com](http://safewise.com) includes an updated list of eight of the simplest ways for the people to engage in this fight for a safe city.

- Know your neighbors. ...
- **Keep** up your yard and encourage your neighbors to do the same. ...
- Be extra cautious when you go out of town. ...

- Close your windows and blinds at night. ...
- Improve the lighting on your street. ...
- Encourage outdoor activity. ...
- Know your local police department. ...
- Install a security system.

Nothing in life worth having is easy.

## **Wilkes-Barre is not alone in its fight for safety**

While our City is closer to the bottom than the top of the safe city list, we are not alone. Cities across the world actually are doing their best to fight crime in the streets, in the home, in the back allies, and in the heart of the cities themselves. Not every city succeeds.

Medium.com offers Wilkes-Barre and all other cities of the world six summary points to remember to help make our cities safe. It all begins with *Control*.

There is no question that the cities proper contain more people nowadays. This can also be said as “The urban population is growing, with over 50 percent living in cities.”

The World Health Organization estimates that by 2050, 75 percent of the people on the planet will be urban inhabitants, up from today’s 50 percent. The old methods of keeping cities safe are not going to continue to work when faced with advanced thuggery. Therefore, cities must pay attention and implement advanced technologies to add to the existing protection designed to improve the lives of its citizens.

For any city seeking safety as a priority, there are a number of major components that must come into play. By implementing the best techniques, cities can become safer and smarter at the same time.

Medium.com’s list of six steps for creating a safe and a smart city are as follows:

1. Control
2. Visibility
3. Connectivity
4. Advanced Communication
5. Action Plan
6. Sharing and Collaboration

These are not new concepts. We have already addressed these in the prior chapters but Medium.com has organized them in a way that makes them easier to remember and easier to focus upon. Let's look at these six summary points briefly one at a time:

## 1. Control

Though it is not a bad idea to have satellite police stations spread across the city, there must be a centralized and well-equipped control room by Police HQ that is manned around the clock. This is a crucial part of the City safety picture as it focuses on the challenge of managing situations and incidents and appropriately handling the consequential masses of data that are collected.

The more we know about crime and criminals and their operating venues, the better we can handle the issues. Cities across the world are looking for solutions. Some have already found them.

Medium.com cites a system recently implemented in Nanded, India.

The Nanded City Council found an innovative way to enhance city security as well as meet its budget requirements. By creating a centralized command, control and communication center, which they call C-Cube, they are now able to monitor the entire city.

To achieve this, the city council did not do it alone. Instead, they worked with major security consultants and security solution providers. Below is a picture of their well-equipped control room, which has clearly become one of the keys to the success of the Smart City design in Nanded, India.



## 2. Visibility

Fighting blind is never a good idea. Visual information is extremely important for real-time handling of events, ongoing investigations, statistical studies (queues, crowds and traffic) as well as constant improvement through the debriefing of processes.

An observation and crime fighting camera network, located at critical spots around the city, is necessary to provide city operations centers with ongoing visuals relating to incidents, risks and progress of activities. Police across America are implementing such systems which first begin with cameras across the cities.

Visibility must also be smart: automating detection and using “machine vision.” Video analytics can instantly flag the incidents that need to be handled, pinpoint critical information as well as track specific people or objects. It is important for all of the tools to be integrated and managed by the centralized control room in our case, the Police Station or City Hall.

You can challenge me if you wish by telling me Wilkes-Barre City has over 300 cameras strategically placed to help provide the necessary data for crime fighting and you may say that this “lecture” on implementing a crime information system in this book is superfluous because it is in place already. Humph!

It goes without saying that the system must actually work in order to show positive results. If everything is hunky-dory, why doesn't Wilkes-Barre have the wherewithal to report its crime statistics regularly. An information system based on live and recorded data cannot be an afterthought. It cannot be effective if it is unused because of a lack of education, a lack of maintenance, and / or a lack of concern. Wilkes-Barre has been funded but failed to use the tools given to provide its citizens with any benefits. Why?

We only have to look at a fountain on Public Square as proof positive that Wilkes-Barre does not maintain its resources well. Not only that, but the fountain tells other tales that the City would probably prefer were not well known. The fountain's neglect is a clear indicator about the ineffective management of resources of all kinds by City officials.

If for ten years, the City could not keep a small fountain on Public Square operational and defended to the hilt its decision to allow it to continue as an eyesore and not fix it, what can we expect of a very expensive crime prevention system depending on three hundred broken cameras?

It is too bad that we don't get even more investigative reporting from our local media sources, but we must be thankful when we do get some insights from the outside press. Let's look at one story that tells an awful lot:

In 2016 Andy Mehalshick and Jayne Ann Bugda of the I-team reported the state of disrepair on the City's camera surveillance system. In the report, they concluded the system rarely ever works.

In Nanded City India and across the United States, these systems work effectively but in Wilkes-Barre Pa, the same team that maintained the fountain on Public Square were assigned to the camera project. What results should we expect? With a \$50 million budget we did not get it right--again?

The reporters visited the WB Police Department. That is where the command center for the camera surveillance system is located. Sources in the police department told Eyewitness News reporters that the entire system is almost always locked up. No officers have access to it.

Cameras are just about everywhere you look in Wilkes-Barre... surveillance cameras, but the servers for the cameras are for all purposes, inoperative. How can that be in a City run by a Law and Order Mayor? I have no answer.

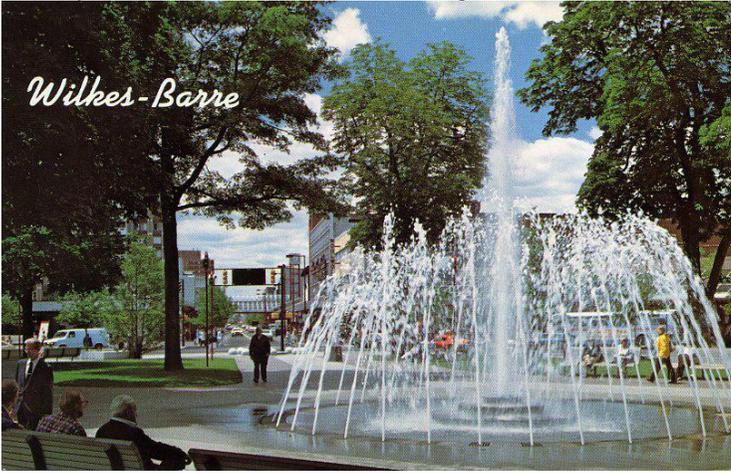
The reporters found that there are nearly 300 cameras located around the City but many of them do not work and even when they do work, there is nobody assigned to watch anything happening in the City in real time. They are not monitored. How can that help prevent or solve crime? It can't—that's how!

Wilkes-Barre's crime system took a dive into the netherworld when the City took control of the system from a private firm in 2016. Their report did not mention if any City employee was even assigned to manage this major asset, which since it is now dysfunctional, has been wasted. Since then, the great shots these cameras may be taking in real time are no longer a factor in fighting crime.

Ornate Fountain Indian Maiden Kankakee circa 1911



Less expensive fountain, once in working order on Public Square!



There is always an excuse in Wilkes-Barre, but rarely are there results. Mehalshick and Bugda did not use the word incompetence or ineptness to describe this major flaw. Let me do that. City officials say they want to revamp the system and are trying to find the money to make that happen. So, the City is just a few dollars from success. If only taxes could be raised?

Now wait a minute. The City took over the fountain on Public Square when it was working. Now it is not working. Dah! It is not scheduled for repair because there is no money. Dah! A recent \$200,000 grant for the Square was earmarked for line painting etc. Whoops, I got off track a bit. We are talking about the camera system. But the stories are basically the same. No maintenance, then disrepair, and then no money to fix and then officials say it was not their fault. Then whose fault was it?

City officials have a problem with fountains from way back. Some City residents may be unaware of the beautiful fountain on the Square that was in place and operational closer to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It may have been three fountains ago. Because it was using too much water, City officials shut it down and disassembled this treasure of absolute beauty.

They are said to have locked away the beautiful statue of Princess Kankakee in the City's special vaults for unused valuables. It was never sold but it disappeared, nonetheless. There was an investigation quite recently of this magical mystical fountain figure and the strange

disappearance of the statue of Kankakee. The Indian maiden that was once centered there on top of the fountain disappeared. What happened? Nobody knows. It's gone. Perhaps it was hauled to the Island of Misfit Toys and will be appearing in that holiday film this year?

Mehalshick and Bugda ended their piece on the camera system with the following: “ Word of the camera problems has some people who work downtown very concerned.” Humph!

Wilkes-Barre almost had the visibility solution in place for crime prevention. Do the officials really care what it takes? Can we trust the caretakers of City assets to do the right job in the future for important crime fighting tools?

### **3. Connectivity**

Another necessary aspect in creating a smart city is using IoT (Internet of Things) solutions. IoT is a system of interrelated devices that can transfer data over a network. These innovative solutions improve city operations and increase safety through the smart sensing of daily life in the city—anything from license plate recognition to gunshot detection systems.

The objective is for the city's functional main systems to be connected and integrated. Then all relevant information can automatically be collected, correlated, and made actionable.

### **4. Advanced communication**

Field professionals and the operators of the centralized control room require an advanced communication solution between them. This is another must-have item for a smart city. Using live broadcasts from any desired location and live first-hand reports from the field operators, from their squad car systems and communicating GPS units, a smart solution can notify the control area which operators are available and where. As a result, everyone involved can effectively collaborate with one another at any given time.

## 5. Action Plan

The system must have documented procedures for how to handle any security related incident or events, with the above advanced implemented technologies. Clearly this would take the communication to the next level and would result in constant improvement of the procedures for the benefit of the city residents.

## 6. Sharing and Collaboration

The success of operating a smart and safe City relies on the collaboration between the many departments: power plants, information systems, hospitals, schools, and law enforcement among others.

Creating a smart and safe city not only requires state-of-the-art technologies. It requires forward thinking and a relentless concern for perfection in use. It needs the seamless incorporation of technologies, communication, and smart implementation. More importantly, it needs to be properly controlled to ensure the safety of the City's leaders and its citizens.

For Wilkes-Barre, if the City is able to ever make its partial camera system workable again and is able to implement the full six-point plan, it is incumbent on the Mayor and high-ranking City officials to assure the system provides the biggest possible gain for the City. This system and the six point plan we just discussed will be operational and well-staffed and well maintained in the Brown Administration.

Please remember when you go into the voting booth this year:

**I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

We surely do not need a fourth fountain if you get my drift.

# Chapter 6 Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Clean

## 3. Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Clean.



When you read this chapter, feel free to take a spin to the Internet to look at beautiful sites from Wilkes-Barre's past such as the Palm House and others from the golden years. Nobody can tell me that the things our grandparents did for this City are impossible for us to do! We must remember that nothing good happens overnight.

I am inclined to believe that nothing happens overnight in Wilkes-Barre and that is simply the nature of the beast. But good things do happen when good people decide they will get them done. It may take a bit longer than tomorrow, however for all the good we have defined and other good to come, to materialize fully. But, it will come.

No matter how many tomorrows it takes, Wilkes-Barre will have its clean city. It will be cleaned incrementally one neighborhood at a time, and with God's grace, most of the neighbors will be pitching in. As it becomes cleaner and cleaner, with the programs we outline for artists and craftsmen in the Wilkes-Barre Plan, it will also become beautiful.

While the City's Administrators will be coordinating this effort, the Public Safety / Police folks will also be cleaning up the city one neighborhood at a time for another malady.

City officials will handle the businesses and the downtown area for the cleanup and the maintenance. We know we cannot do it overnight but by the end of a four-year term and hopefully long before the end, the

City will be remarkably clean, and it will have lots less bad guys living in town. Like many things we will be doing, we will be partnering with unpaid city resident volunteers and others, in addition to our patriotic youth to make things even better.

Under my three-prong platform, the Wilkes-Barre **Clean City Action Committee (CCAC)** will be established by the City and its focus will be a project called The Clean City Initiative (CCI). A clean city is the objective. A goal is to turn the entire project over to the people when it becomes fully functional. We will designate a liaison in the administration to assure this initiative is a priority.

The cost of cleaning up after others is a high and it take a lot of sweat labor so our initiative will help assure the City stays clean. Let's clean the City from top to bottom one time, and then let's maintain its cleanliness through caring neighbors, caring shopkeepers, and caring volunteers. The committee itself will be set up as a non-profit organization to focus on a lot of cleaning, some greening and the overall beautification of the City of Wilkes-Barre PA.

The CCAC's mission is to assure that Wilkes-Barre becomes and stays an admirable city, and one of which the residents can be proud. To do this, the committee will need to build bridges between quality of life resources and the various neighborhood groups, merchant associations, CCAC volunteers, and Wilkes-Barre citizens.

The Clean City Action Committee is to be designed to improve and enhance the physical environment of Wilkes-Barre through beautification, solid waste management education, riverfront awareness activities, and litter abatement programs. Among other things, its mission is to educate citizens; and encourage their participation in this worthwhile venture.

As a new organization, the group is to become an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful Inc., which as you may know is a national organization with the same purpose. The committee will be set up to be successful using their proven methodology. Among other things, what I like about this organization is that we get to share a common philosophy that each of us has a responsibility for enhancing our community environment.



Keep America Beautiful Volunteers in Action [www.kab.org](http://www.kab.org)

Like the 600 plus other affiliate cities and counties in the US, and some internationally, when we fire up, our small group will depend on volunteers to implement many worthwhile projects each year. Volunteers are sorely going to be needed for a variety of projects including litter cleanups, tree and flower planting, youth environmental education, marketing support, and more. Wilkes-Barre is a first-class city and we all will expect first class results.

The promise of a clean Wilkes-Barre focuses on beautification aspects such as cleaning up the loose dirt and trash on the sides of city streets and roads, parks, and public areas, as well as keeping residential areas and properties well maintained—and that means free of 18 to 24 inch-high weeds, baby trees, dust bunnies, and spent cigarettes mounds. The City will also be focused to assure that we remain a clean-air and clean water community.

Philadelphia, Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton, as well as Pittsburgh may be great cities in which to live but their air quality is listed among the worst 25 cities in America for Air Pollution. The CCAC will work with City officials to assure that our area stays clean in all ways, but we admit we are looking for that which pleases the eye first.

Clean for a city can also be defined as being functional and in good repair. A piece of junk is a piece of debris is a piece of extra-large litter.

For example, what purpose does it serve to have a rusty, broken down parking meter, or a stop sign where the paint is completely worn away? How about traffic signals that do not work? What about street sign poles with missing street signs? What good is it to have a beautiful fountain on our Public Square that is dry and an eyesore? What difference does it make to have once busy bridges becoming dirty, filthy eyesores in a major commercial area of our city? You know what difference it makes and so do I. It is the difference between a city with pride and one without.

Is the state of the City regarding something so easy to address as cleanliness a tribute to the inability of the City and its current leadership and resources to make things work? You tell me. I see what you see. Fifty millions of budget dollars does not buy much in Wilkes-Barre. It apparently gets spent on budgeted items, but I see what you see.

If every one of the 260 employees in the City made \$100,000 a year in wages and benefits, there would be \$24 million left in the budget for everything else. It should be available for projects to help the people. I do not accept that there is not enough money for Wilkes-Barre to be clean. Do you? The idea of City volunteers doing cleanup work a few times a year is not new but in the George Brown administration, these volunteers will be recognized as the city heroes they are every year at the City picnic either in Kirby Park or Public Square.

If I have the good fortune to become the next Mayor of Wilkes-Barre, things will be much different for the better. Anything that is in place should work or it should be removed. If it is not in place and it should be in place, it should be built and maintained and be better than you can even imagine. We will partner with the vocational technical schools so their practice work to becoming tradesmen becomes a useful accomplishment for a clean and beautiful Wilkes-Barre. Under no circumstances should any structure or any areas of the city detract from the appearance and overall function of the City.

## The infamous fountain on Public Square

From best I can tell, there were at least three major fountains on public square, dating from way-back. I have read with great interest that the rationale for example for having a once attractive, now broken fountain on Public Square is that the City, with a then \$43 million budget (Now \$50 million) could not afford the \$40,000 to fix the fountain. Yet, somehow, we are able to afford the fence installation to keep people away and the overall unattractiveness and the dirt and the feeling of ineptness we all get by looking at a City deteriorating in its core center. Meanwhile we have completed major grant projects costing millions in other areas of the City. It simply does not pass the smell test or the sanity test.

If we like drawing people downtown to Public Square for nice events, would it not be nice for the visitors to be impressed? It helps if the place looks nice and is clean. Not so much now. The broken fountain with a fence around has been a long-time eyesore in the major business district and visitor center of our City. It is a reflection of an “I don’t care” attitude when people see that .

Moreover, where are the public bathrooms that are never open during events anyway. The bloggers don’t seem to be able to find any available. Will King’s make the old Ramada restrooms available so that there can be foot traffic again on Public Square?

Are the bathrooms on the square broken too? Do they exist? Would it not be nice for the Vo-Tech school to rehabilitate the underground latrines that once existed on the Square years ago when I was a kid? Would that not be a great project. I bet a lot of people would be willing to donate the materials for the kids to revamp the underground latrines that I used as a kid.

This would help us save a buck, provide a service, and teach Wilkes-Barre kids how to manage interesting projects that will live on long after they graduate. It also would stop urination and defecation on Public Square. Hey, folks, this is not San Francisco. Maybe we cannot – not – afford such restrooms!

As with most new City action groups that will be formed by this administration if we are fortunate to be elected, donations from Wilkes-Barre citizens; citizens from neighboring communities; those citizens with a history of a residence in the greater Wilkes-Barre area; and of course those friends of the City who simply care about Wilkes-Barre—will be accepted for this project and all other projects. These gifts will be most appreciated.

Would it not be nice if there were a way to bring a Percy Browns-like operation back into downtown? How about a Boston Candy Kitchen or even a Cheesecake Factory? Yes, without tongue in cheek, my administration would welcome such overtures and we will seek them out. You'll be proud of what we can and will do.

### **A one-time City monument becomes a decaying building—then a pile of debris**



### **A one-time City monument becomes a decaying building—then a pile of debris**

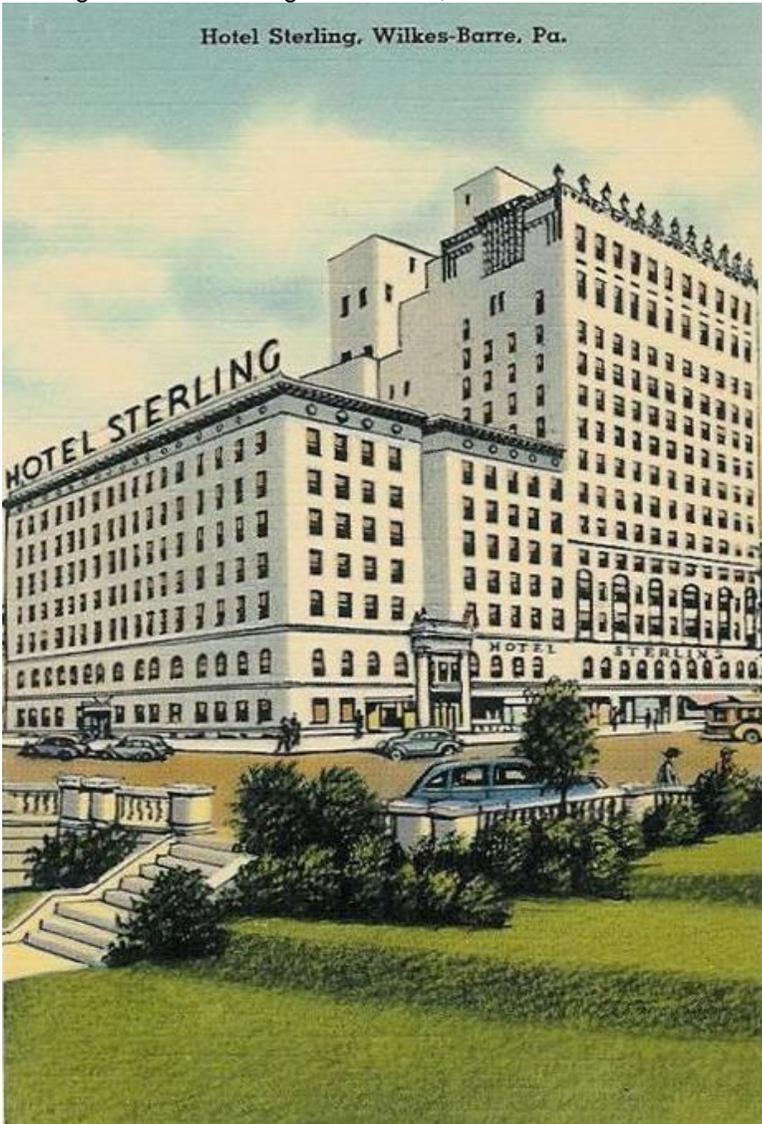
This picture was one in a montage taken by a local artist before the Hotel Sterling a 113-year old landmark on the right above, a building that once overlooked the raging Susquehanna River, was quickly ripped down. The tower portion which was the highest building in the City for years had been demolished years earlier. The Ax man did it. What a shame.

You can see the unkempt overall appearance of the street, the curb, the tree lawn, the dirt and the look of disrepair wherever your eyes look

upon these sad pictures. Look closely and you will see. This is page 1 of Wilkes-Barre for many visitors. We can do better folks, I promise.

## I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!

Original Hotel Sterling With Tower, the Picture of Grandeur



Think about the decay of the Hotel Sterling and you get an idea of how things have been for too many years. Compare the two pictures .

As I understand it, over \$6 million dollars was invested in the structure before it was demolished. It was apparently used to make parking lots out of several surrounding buildings and the leaky roof of the Sterling was never fixed. Thus, the building kept getting worse and worse. Six million dollars of the people's money was wasted. Before it was torn down it was a tribute to inept City management. Four years later, the area is still a pig-sty even without the Sterling. Why?

All I really know is that it will not be like this in the Brown Administration. Please permit me to "swear again."

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

Doesn't the whole Sterling deal frost you? It sure gets to me. Would you have been able to build a roof for starters for \$6 million? By the way, it was \$6 million in federal tax money and casino profits that a company called Citivest claimed they poured into the property. Look at the picture of the Sterling and the Annex, not the picture of the original Sterling, and tell me if Wilkes-Barre City officials were adequate custodians over such a prestigious landmark. The City chose to rip it down but only after somebody chose not to fix it properly.

And then while the building was in such a sad state of affairs minus the \$6 million, a major section of the city on River Street was completing a river beautification project while the Sterling side was continually maintained as a pig sty. How were City Officials not partly responsible for that?

In fact, the area for what seemed like forever was partially shut down giving visitors an even longer look at the demise of our City and the demise of a landmark that the people thought should be saved. What happened would not have happened if I were in charge. Check the article on the Sterling demolition and the Historical Society right here: [http://opacity.us/article136\\_hotel\\_sterling\\_to\\_be\\_demolished.htm](http://opacity.us/article136_hotel_sterling_to_be_demolished.htm)

Look at this snapshot from inside the Sterling on the next page. You can almost smell the debris just by looking at it. Stuff like this does not happen overnight. What a shame! Sure does not look too clean. Can you tell where any of the \$6 million dollars may have been spent?

How could something once so good ever get so bad? What about the things we cannot see?

Despite the travesty of the Sterling, I don't feel embarrassed saying that as a lifelong city Resident, I still love Wilkes-Barre. After all, I grew up here and I am happy to live here. Our fine City is far from a perfect City; but I know it can be closer to perfect than it is.

There certainly is excessive taxation for the poverty-level of the city as well as other issues of which most people are too aware as they drive through the town. Unfortunately, because of the real issues from which they suffer, some City residents have a hard time singing any praise at all for our fair City or its current leaders. I am very prepared to change that, and The Wilkes-Barre Plan is the blueprint I will use.



Surfing through the blogs about Wilkes-Barre, PA, there are an awful lot of people who care like I do about the City. There may even be some that care even more than I do but not many! There are also a lot of people who are disgusted with the dirty politics as well as what they call a dirty city in what overall seems to them to be the dirtiest area of the state.

What a legacy! We're going to change that. With the Wilkes-Barre plan, we will change that. You can bet on it. You may find it trite that I do this but please indulge me for you must know that if you vote the same as last time everything else stays the same. Who wants that? I am prepared to implement The Wilkes-Barre Plan about which you are reading.

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

If dirt and dust and debris and weeds had value, the Tony George Administration would have a rich and prospering town to brag about. But they are not of value and they detract immensely from our otherwise fine city. And, so of our population, in our dirty city, over 35% of the residents find themselves trapped under the federal poverty level. That is not good. I promise to engage the Congress for its help in solving our elderly crisis. We also have some other innovative notions to spruce up and stop foreclosures of properties owned by the elderly. Why has this not been a priority?.

Unfortunately it is not hard to discover dirt and dust and an overall blah look and feeling in far too many places in our City. We must give some credit to certain areas that have been improved but still are not as clean and as inviting as they should be. These include the Cinema on Northampton Street in the area in which Percy Brown's once stood—in Wilkes-Barre's one-time heyday.

I am not talking about the blah of the future, but the blah does represent the present and the recent past. My reason for writing is so that like the Ghost of Christmas Future, which Brian Kelly so recently wrote about, we can make Wilkes-Barre better and not accept its future demise. Many bloggers show their blah and disgust for what has happened physically and politically with Wilkes-Barre when they write what is on their minds.

I agree that it should not be this way but nonetheless it is. The bloggers do not feel good about the chances of the City surviving. They expect the people to vote in the same people that made it this way. Some go so far as to say that no one cares about Wilkes-Barre.

Of course that is their opinion based on their observations. They add that it is because it is a big part of Northeast PA, which they say no one visits—because it is an expletive hole. That's being kind from many of the posts I have read. Even those of us who love Wilkes-Barre cannot deny what she has become. We can and will change the City and by doing so we will change that perception.

I have read the Wilkes-Barre Plan from start to finish in its unvarnished state as presented in Kelly's two books. I have added to

the plan since Brian wrote those books earlier this year. The essence is that the ills shall be purged and the good shall prevail in all ways for no claptrap will be permitted, period. Please indulge me again as I remind you that I am running for Mayor to accomplish a lot of good for the City.

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

Would it not be nice to tap much of that negative energy for positive purposes to help the City overcome its many issues? All things are possible. Some cite that in their opinion there are dirty towns up and down the Valley along with dirty bars. Some go so far as to call this area the arm pit of the state. Even those of us who love it here for our own reasons, wish it could be better. I know we can make it better but not without paying attention to details such as keeping Wilkes-Barre City clean, if not pristine and beautiful. I say we do all three.

Rather than offer teachers \$45,000 per year as Governor Wolf suggested recently, why can we not get the Governor to invest dollars into cities that prior state administrations have dismissed as lost causes. Wilkes-Barre has potential but Wilkes-Barre could use some help for sure from alumni of the City and from our government in Harrisburg. Why should Philadelphia and Pittsburgh get all the Governor's help?.

## **Does Wilkes-Barre Need a Ramada or a Crossgates?**

In a series of posts from less than a year ago, a number of bloggers chose to comment that Wilkes-Barre had just lost its most modern hotel, the Ramada to King's College. Historically, the hotel was built as the Sheraton, who named it the Crossgates. Nonetheless, it did not survive as a Sheraton.

It was bought and it became a Ramada. A local entrepreneur ran it successfully for many years but as the Public Square stopped being an attraction, few out of towners came to the hotel to visit the City.

Recently it was sold to King's College, and this great college just made it part of its campus. But it looked so nice as an inviting hotel right on Public Square. What could be more attractive for businesses

entertaining the possibility of relocating? Now, Gus Genetti's great hotel up the road from the Square is what we have after many hotels in the past have disappeared from the always active work of the wrecking ball. One or two new hotels in downtown Wilkes-Barre would be nice. My administration can guarantee that we will bring in one and possibly two hotels as part of our rejuvenating Wilkes-Barre Plan.

If there is nothing else, in my queries I have learned that there is an overwhelming disdain for taxes in Wilkes-Barre because they are unaffordable. Even the bloggers are aware of the tax implications of the Ramada going to a non-profit. And, so, King's plans for the Ramada as noble as they may be, were not all met with citizen approval.

Many citizens think that the Ramada as a hotel added to the Wilkes-Barre good feeling. It was an attractive and clean establishment. Most of us saw no reason for the only hotel on Public Square to become part of a private campus, especially with the magnificent Pomeroy's structure on the other end of the block being occupied by Luzerne County Community College. This feeling is reflected in several blog comments below:

1. "Just more tax revenue the city will lose to a So called "Non Profit" What a joke!
2. "Oh wait, let's just wait and let it become another Hotel Sterling.....instead of expanding the local colleges to attract more out of town or even local students to attend and then become professionals and stick around to better the area!!

By the way, <http://wbtruth.blogspot.com/> is one blog that has no love for how the City has been managed. There is no room for corruption in Wilkes-Barre. We simply cannot afford it. Besides, corruption is too ugly for our clean city initiative. In this section, we are talking literally about a clean city in terms of its beauty, but to repeat, nobody wants to live in a city that is dirty—politically or otherwise.

Admittedly the King's building and the LCC building do make that side of Public Square look attractive. My idea would be to have our most marketable storefront area, Public Square be the city's finest commercial area for stores and restaurants and to bring as much traffic into downtown for shopping and business purposes as possible. The

city needs business taxes for sure as I agree that the people are overtaxed.

## **From the Outside In—Bloomsburg is Attractive**

When traveling through Columbia County, you and I have often thought how nice it would be if downtown Wilkes-Barre were as inviting as downtown Bloomsburg, a much smaller burg. In Bloomsburg, for example, the City has a wide range of companies and bustling establishments and stores that contribute to a vibrant local environment. The city look and feel is quite attractive especially near Main Street, Bloomsburg, for sure. In other words, when you appear on Main street in Bloomsburg, it actually looks like more than it is because it is well decorated, and it is clean.

The architectural heritage and the overall 'feel' of the downtown area in Bloomsburg make it a big draw for visitors. Nobody has to convince me to go to Bloomsburg for the FAIR or for picking apples or cutting down the family Christmas trees or whatever. Visitors to The Bloomsburg University campus, which directly adjoins the City's downtown area are invited back by the pleasantness of the surroundings.

The University ranks as one on the really great things to see in Bloomsburg PA. Just as Wilkes-Barre has seen property deteriorate when leased out to students who are here for just four years, Bloomsburg, and most college towns in the state report some blighted and slum areas, once populated by working families that have been made less attractive by student incursions (renting the places).

From my observations, unfortunately, Wilkes-Barre suffers from blight much more than Bloomsburg as our blight is almost immediately obvious whereas in Bloomsburg, you are deep into the community before you spot an issue. Wilkes-Barre needs about 10,000 Michael Anthony's to visit our city and hopefully soon. But since he is no longer available, we'll have to do it ourselves. I do think we can. Nothing in life worth having is easy

Wilkes-Barre could surely use more companies and bustling establishments and stores that contribute to a vibrant local

environment. Unlike Wilkes-Barre, in its presentation on Main Street, the small community of Bloomsburg (14,000) shows off a charm that is catchy, and it makes you want to come back. My wife and I love that City. When I am Mayor, I will not forget the impact of Bloomsburg on Wilkes-Barre eyes. We surely can have a city as nice and even much nicer than Bloomsburg. You can count on that.

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

Brian Kelly told me a story about when a friend of his first got married, he and his wife bought a fresh Christmas tree in Millville, which is right down the road from Bloomsburg about ten miles, and they celebrated after loading the tree into the van at Dick Benefield's Groaning Board at the Hotel Magee.

It was a great experience. They surely did not favor Bloomsburg over our city but... They still love Wilkes-Barre and they live here but they commented that they would sure love anybody with an idea like Dick Benefield to come by to Wilkes-Barre for a visit—and yes, we would give a high five to any idea about setting up a nice Groaning Board in our fair City.

One more Bloomsburg story before I have taxed your patience. Most of us have been to the Bloomsburg Fair. It is another Kelly missive. The same couple came back to the Bloomsburg Fair and stayed at the Hotel Magee overnight. Brian and his wife, along with the other couple, Ken and Karen Evans, wanted to see Bob Hope in person.

Hope was already seventy-five years of age. Kelly remembers how Mr. Hope began his act by describing how thrilled he was to have landed at Bloomsburg International Airport. Brian thought he was kidding but he was serious. However, it was really Bloomsburg Municipal Airport—minus the International part. You can see it in the picture below.



The look and feel of Bloomsburg has not changed much for me over the years though it has changed in the residential areas. Residents say it is not as nice as it was in the years past. At least it is still nice but like all cities in this poor economy, it is tough doing well.

Wilkes-Barre needs to come up to the Bloomsburg or better standard so we too can enjoy a certain pride in the beauty in our city. Just by focusing on something important gives us all more of a tendency to help make it happen the way we want rather than if we ignore it. Wilkes-Barre will be a much cleaner and more beautiful city if you choose to elect me as your Mayor. I promise you that.



# Chapter 7 Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Affordable

## 4. Making / Keeping Wilkes-Barre an Affordable City.



### Our City must be affordable for its people

This story tells it like it was for many in Wilkes-Barre

On the average, the people of Wilkes-Barre are very rich in spirit but unfortunately, not very rich in material wealth. Most, like my friend and his wife grew up in a three-bedroom standard issue coal-heated home. They lived on High Street in the Rolling Mill Hill. There was a Heatrola stove right between their dining room and what they called the “parlor.” Some other people in the City had coal furnaces to heat the whole house. Not theirs.

They had an aging rental on High Street for which the family paid just \$25.00 a month for about 30 years before the landlord had to raise the

rent to \$50.00. The dad did all the maintenance never wanting to wake up the landlord to the major rental deal he was getting. Nine of that Irish family lived in the small home, half a double. The dad took care of his grand-mom and grand-pop on mom's side; as well as the mom and the five kids.

Despite having little, they never knew they were poor. They lived in Wilkes-Barre, and nobody at the time in Wilkes-Barre knew they were poor. The mines were just about closed and there was little for anybody, but crime was almost non-existent.

Wilkes-Barre is still not a well-to-do town; but people manage somehow. Surely, more and more are close to the end of the rope financially. Powerball and the Megamillion lotteries for many offer much more hope than the local economy. Unfortunately, there is little industry and so it seems that unless you have a corporate or government job, life is tougher than in most places in the state.

Though I have been fortunate in my employment, many of us with friends in city or county or state government over the last ten years have watched their salaries, pensions and benefits spiraling upward while those in industry were spiraling in the opposite direction. . Government officials have achieved only limited success negotiating union contracts favorable to taxpayers, even though taxpayers are less able than ever to handle the load.

Many of us remember quite vividly that for 2013, Wilkes-Barre Mayor Tom Leighton initially proposed a back-breaking 31% property tax increase on all Wilkes-Barre residents. The population was going down so why a bump in the taxes? Many wanted that answer; but it never came.

After sharpening his pencil, the Mayor settled for "just" 26%." This is substantially more than the meager raise in social security payments and the salaries of private sector workers who live in the City. It did not matter that it was unaffordable by the masses, the Mayor said Wilkes-Barre needed it. The implication was that *Wilkes-Barre needs the money more than you do*. I do not think so folks. Few do not have a measure of hurt in our City.

Meanwhile for city residents, the price of groceries, gas, rent, and home maintenance, and mostly everything else has been growing really fast. We all know that household incomes are not moving anywhere close to costs. If the federal government was not lying about the real cost of living in their published consumer price index, we seniors in the City would be getting a daily affirmation about how the cost of everything is out of control.

So, on top of everything else, the federal government enjoys cheating the elderly by telling us there is no inflation and then they tell SSR recipients that there is no COLA increase because costs are not climbing. Yet, the storekeepers increase prices and for years gas was going up and up and up. How do SSR recipients with no other means keep up with it? They starve or stop paying taxes and lose their homes.

You have heard the underpinnings of the government rationale for cheating on the consumer price index. Economists convinced the government that when people cannot afford steak, they'll eat hamburger, so they substituted hamburger for steak in the CPI cost formula to cheat seniors out of a raise. They said the protein was the same.

Then when hamburger rose in price, and cans of tuna were cheaper, the CPI moved from hamburger to tuna. Then, when people were beating the system by using cat tuna, they priced cat tuna into the CPI instead of regular tuna. You can't find this on the Internet anymore as Google does its best to please the federal government. The public remains uniformed about the feds ripping off seniors. Yet, Washington takes before Social Security ever gives.

Brian Kelly told me recently that he wrote a short book in 2018 that was able to help seniors come to grips with what the government was doing to them. It is called *Government Must Stop Ripping Off Seniors' Social Security!* It is still available at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1947402641>. It explains a lot.

The point is that seniors in Wilkes-Barre received nothing extra to pay their 2013 City property tax bill it. That's a fact. Seniors were going broke while City employees were getting nice wage increases. With a poverty rate of 35%, Wilkes-Barre leaders should have been ashamed of what they were doing to the entire population of Wilkes-Barre.

Dear Mayor and Council, before this election even comes, please know this: The pockets of the people are empty. Get used to it. Cut something! Cut something else and then Cut something else. How about giving the population of the City a break?

I promise as Mayor that I will remember the 35% and higher poverty rate and I will keep city finances in line and I surely hope I can reduce the rate to further help the Seniors living in Wilkes-Barre.

The average homeowner's property tax went from a 2012 payment of \$591 to \$744 in 2013. On the average, the amount was \$152, a 26 percent hike. Some pay a lot more than that. The Mayor also increased the price of several city fees, including recycling service and city-issued garbage bags. These are budget busters.

I had a friend who before the blue garbage bags used to put his garbage out in metal cans after taking the plastic bags, dumping them into the cans, cleaning them out, and then putting them back in the kitchen bucket. That's how close some seniors cut it every week. Even the Mayor's increase in fees in 2013 was beyond the meager increase in retirees' social security payments. This made an already unaffordable tax burden even less affordable.

There are those who say nothing can be cut or you'll lose services? What services? The people, mostly poor, pay all kinds of fees for any service the City provides. With 53 job titles of City Employees having large overtime budgets, I see no reason for tax increases. It is time for tax decreases and no overtime so seniors can afford to live here. I will see to that folks.

Few people had the money to pay the Leighton increases without major cutbacks in their ability to live their lives. Yet while the City was going broke or, so it's said in 2013, and thus needed a 26% bump in taxes, for 2014, all city employees received a standard 3% raise. Seniors got no increase at all in COLA from president Obama that year.

Obama had not gotten the same memo that Leighton got. The citizens of Wilkes-Barre were not so fortunate. Some suggest that this clearly demonstrates that the full 26% increase in the millage rate for 2013

was not entirely necessary. Let me assure that the George Brown administration will consider the people first. Please permit me to say again:

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

Many residents have family working for the City, and they are enjoying the fact that their relatives and friends have such fine wages and benefits. It is a wonderful thing when someone we know gets a job at the City or the County or the School District because that is one person who will be able to keep up with the cost of living. Not the rest of us and that is unfortunate. The governor does not realize we are not Philadelphia.

Unfortunately, the reality is those fine wages and benefits must be paid for by people in this City, who are barely surviving.

## **Average Resident's Paychecks v. City Worker Paychecks**

As many know, the Mayor posts a budget document each year, and all are welcome to view it. The salaries for all City employees by title are included in this report. To demonstrate the disparity between the taxpayers and the wage and benefit receivers, I have taken this information and analyzed it further so that you can see the big differences between the payers / citizens and the receivers / employees.

It is not my intention to suggest that all of the employees of the City are not worth their wages, for I believe that indeed they are. However, to be honest, I do not see how Wilkes-Barre citizens can continue to last much longer under such a huge tax burden. The poor in Wilkes-Barre cannot pay the city's stiff taxes.

They ask the City Administration to figure something out. But nothing changes. In the George Brown administration, if it is to come, and God please bring it, I will figure out how to keep our seniors from having to give up their homes in order to eat. I got the message loud and clear.

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

The following chart from 2015 shows ranges of salary for city employees. This data is not presented this way in the Mayor’s reports. The first chart below shows just those employee titles, whose salaries are less than \$40,000 per year. There are only twelve or thirteen of them, and so, it is not difficult to write these in a chart, and it is not difficult for a taxpayer to read these titles, and salaries. Here they are:

Lowest Salaries of City Employees – Those less than \$40,000 per year. All others exceed \$40,000 and they have gotten four years of wages with raises since this chart was established.

<b>City Employee Job Title</b>	<b>Salary per year</b>
Police Secretary	\$24,825
Parking Enforcement Attendant II	\$24, 931
Parking Enforcement Attendant I	\$27,702
Civilian Clerk II	\$31,328
Custodial Worker City Hall	\$32,450
Disease Specialist	\$34,472
Protective Inspection Clerk	\$35,444
CA Coordinator Comm. Director	\$36,050
Revenue Clerk III	\$37,806
City Assessor	\$37,863
Driver IV	\$38,030
Driver IV	\$38,030
Disease Specialist / Inspector	\$39,388

Nobody in the City makes less than \$25,000.

In this next chart, I show the distribution of salaries within various categories. We begin with the category in which the lowest salaried employee in the City in 2015, the Police Secretary, who made \$24,825 per year is in the first grouping of employees making \$20,000 or more. We end with the Police Chiefs, and the City Administrator who are in a league of their own in the highest salary bracket—even higher than the Mayor’s, and not including overtime. Here is the chart:

2015 Salary Distribution within dollar categories:

Lowest Salary for City Employee = \$24,825
--

260 of 260 employees make \$20,000 or more
257 of 260 employees make \$30,000 or more
248 of 260 employees make \$40,000 or more
187 of 260 employees make \$50,000 or more
108 of 260 employees make \$60,000 or more
015 of 260 employees make \$70,000 or more
006 of 260 employees make \$80,000 or more
003 of 260 employees make \$90,000 or more
Highest Salary for any City Employee (Chief) = \$91,305

\*\*\* None of these salaries include overtime wages.

The highest city salaries in 2019 are now well above \$100,000. Moreover, in the most recent budget, fifty-three city positions were budgeted overtime. Fifty-three! Who are we kidding folks? Fifty-Three! There should be zero overtime. We all know that.

To help put these City wages in perspective, here are some numbers about the regular citizens who hold private sector jobs in Wilkes-Barre.

Statisticians have found that the median earnings for males in Wilkes-Barre is \$27,232. Across the state, the median wage for males is \$38,788. It's a good thing that our people do not live here and have to eat someplace else. At the Federal level the median wage for males is \$38,921

The median wage for females in Wilkes-Barre is \$18,961. Across the state, the median wage for females is \$22,899, and at the Federal level the median wage is \$23,115. Somehow dollars shrink in value on their way to Wilkes-Barre. As your Mayor, I will find out why and I will stop it or scream about it to the CV, the TL, the Radio and TV.

Using these statistics, we can approximate the average wage of all employees, by combining the median values for males and females. There are slightly more females working in Wilkes-Barre than males. There is just a 3.8% difference in the number.

To average this out, for argument purposes only, because the difference is so small, let's use a 50/50 split in the number of females and males. The average of the two median figures would therefore be calculated in this way: Male median wage (\$27,232) + female median

wage (\$18,961) = \$46,193. Now, to find the average (mean) -- not the median since we do not have the raw data, we simply divide \$46,193 by the number in the sample, which is 2 (male and female).

\$46,193 divided by 2 is \$23,096.00. Therefore for reporting purposes, the average wage for all Wilkes-Barre residents is \$23,096.

So, how do regular employees in Wilkes-Barre compare to those employed by Wilkes-Barre city. The lowest wage of any unelected city employee is \$24,825. Therefore, the lowest wage earner employed by the City makes \$1728.00 more than the average wage of Wilkes-Barre residents who are not employed by the City.

Using the data from the tables above, we can approximate the median (most frequent / mid-point) wage of a City Employee at just about \$58,000.00. That means that if all 260 employees were in a listing numbered from 1 to 260 in ascending sequence by wage, employee number 130 would be making \$58,000. Half of the employees would be making less, and the other half of City workers would be making more than \$58,000.

If we take this \$58,000 wage and divide it by the average wage for Wilkes-Barre residents, which by the way includes the Wilkes-Barre City employees' salaries, we would have a calculation like this: \$58,000 divided by \$23,096 = 2.511.

This means that the “average” City employee makes approximately two and a half times more in earnings than the average non-City worker. It is these taxpayers, making 2 1/2 times less who pay the salary of all City employees. These citizens of Wilkes-Barre are not fortunate to be employed in the much better jobs that exist in City government.

Not all police in the state of PA are in fat city. Considering the average income of residents, Wilkes-Barre treats officers quite well. In other areas of the state, the police wear the same uniforms, take the same risks and train to the standards of all Pennsylvania police officers. Yet state records show about 28 percent of municipal police officers who patrol communities in Western Pennsylvania are employed part time, making \$10.50 to \$16 an hour with no health benefits. It makes one think if Wilkes-Barre might be a bit too generous. Just saying.

## WB Bloggers have an opinion

To City employees, they may find themselves scraping along with about 250 employees making over \$40,000 plus overtime. To Wilkes-Barreans; their numbers are not so good. On a number of blogs that highlight Wilkes-Barre issues, citizens of the City are outraged with the disparity. The recent 3% across the board raise did not go over well. The average Joe in the City makes so little that he would need an 8% raise to match the average dollar raises awarded to City employees by the Mayor just in 2014. Here is a typical blog comment:

“This really ticks me off because in this time of financial hardships for most, these city employees are getting a raise. How about we pave more roads and actually try to stop crime before it happens instead.”

There was also an open message carried in the Independent Gazette. It is addressed to Members of Wilkes-Barre City Council, the Mayor, and the Staff. It is well written and expresses the dire financial straits of a large percentage of city residents.

It is in another blog entry. This one is signed Ray Arellano:

*“Before I am out of time, I wish to state unequivocally that I am opposed to any tax increase or increase in any of the fees currently in force, except for maybe the parking.*

*I live in the Rolling Mill Hills district. My neighborhood is comprised of mostly septuagenarians and octogenarians, some of which are borderline ninety. At age 77, I am considered the “kid” on the block! Most are widowers or widows. They came up when there were no 401(k)’s or reliable pension plans, so most rely on their Social Security checks and meager savings.*

*All of them hope that they can outlive major repairs to their homes. They are one water heater or furnace away from a major financial crunch. They pee in their toilets three or four times before flushing to save on their water bills. They only put garbage out every other week because of the cost of garbage bags. They pay exorbitant school taxes even though they have not had a child in school in fifty*

*years!! They cannot get to the store for groceries, so they have to pay to have what meager things they buy delivered.*

*They worked hard all their lives to pay their bills, raised a family, and through no fault of their own, have lived too long. Many have outlived their children, their families, and friends. They only turn on the light in the room that they happen to be in and keep the thermostat in the low 60's, using blankets for warmth.*

*When they last saw their mate, they had to continue trying to fly with one wing, and for a while they were successful, but now it has become an insurmountable task. Waiting to die has to be the most depressing for them and some go to bed wondering if maybe tonight it will be over. If they are forced into a nursing home the speculators will buy their homes, and they will rent them to the dumpster overflow from out of state, until they are no longer habitable, then walk away.*

*It shouldn't have gotten to this point, and it wouldn't have if you had been better stewards."*

*Ray Arellano, Wilkes-Barre*

Here are a few other comments from the Independent Gazette regarding the taxation situation in Wilkes-Barre. This one is from Linda Urban:

*"A few comments for the City of Wilkes-Barre's elected and highly paid insiders. How much is enough? How much money do you need in order to be happy?*

*You have brought our city to its knees and bankrupted us.*

*You have stolen from us. Your neighbors for the most part despise you after finding out just what you have been taking from us.*

*The practice of rewarding certain pals with excessively high paid jobs for votes in order to maintain your lifestyles is passé'. We know your game.*

*We live within our means and always have. We punched a clock or logged our hours and didn't expect a fellow employee to cover for our absence from our job.*

*We won't pay for your ridiculously excessive salaries and benefits, campaign donations to local pals, new homes, vehicles, gas, cell phones, vacations, pricey clothing and shoes, private school educations, or your family lifestyles with our money any longer.*

*You aren't special anymore. You are rather a disgraceful cornered den of jackals.*

*Your wealth and social prestige is all because of us so remember that when you walk or drive through our dying neighborhoods or bask in the sun aboard a cruise liner or on southern Florida beach. It's all because of the past Wilkes-Barre naive or foolish baited voters.*

*I suggest that those of you that have been milking us for decades go and try to find a non-taxpayer funded job that even remotely compares to what the city salaries are. Even from years ago!*

*If it weren't for the city taxpayers in most cases many of you would be either moved on or living in a normal day to day survival mode.*

*Greed has destroyed our city.*

*So again, how much is enough?*

*Reduce your salaries or clean out your desk. We cannot afford your lifestyles.*

*Linda Urban, Wilkes-Barre*

*\*\*\*End of bloggers' comments\*\*\**

## **Do we pay too much in taxes?**

The latest statistics, which we have cited from 2015's election time above were provided for 2012. They show that 26.8 percent of Wilkes-

Barre residents live in poverty. In 2019, the number below the poverty line is now 35%. That does not provide much room for city officials or any taxing authority to increase taxes or fees of any kind. In fact, it really says the pendulum ought to start swinging in the other direction. Wilkes-Barre must begin to reduce taxes, before the City or its people all go bankrupt.

City residents believe that any increase in any taxes or fees is too much. Wilkes-Barre residents feel they already pay ala carte for services such as garbage, recycling, and even flood protection in addition to huge taxes. One could rightfully believe that “you pay for everything here.”

Besides a safe city, one of my top objectives as Mayor is to create an affordable city and a clean city for all. At a minimum that means no tax increases or fee increases during my term(s). In fact, my pledge is to do my absolute best to reduce taxes—most notably property taxes. Increasing taxes or fees on a bleeding public needing a big break hurts Wilkes-Barre’s people even if it enriches the City government coffers.

Those of us with friends in city or county or state government over the last ten years, know that salaries, pensions and benefits have spiraled upward and out-of-control. Meanwhile with the economy in bad shape, taxpayers have not had it so good. City leaders achieved only limited success negotiating union contracts favorable to taxpayers during this period.

Worsening the problem for the public’s ability to pay is the lingering effect of a recession that has whacked Northeastern Pennsylvania with crippling poverty and for a time a 9.5 percent unemployment rate – the worst in the state. When things get bad, in recent times, Wilkes-Barre gets them worse than any other municipality? Is somebody selling us out?.

Wilkes-Barre has been hit worse than the rest of the state and the nation. The unemployment rate in our area is the highest in a state which is now recovering simply because the former governor was an advocate of enhanced gas drilling. The current governor wants to whack all gas heat users in PA with a new tax that he says will affect just the drillers. Humph. No driller will exist if they do not pass on the tax to John Q. Public.

It is too bad that there is no oil or gas in Wilkes-Barre, and the coal mines have been shut down for more than fifty years. The current governor's tax on drilling will increase the people's heating and hot water bills. How does that help the citizens? The current governor wants teachers to make \$45,000 per year by law. Will he say how much senior citizens need to take home to pay the increased school district taxes for his unfunded mandate? Can any senior citizen in a poverty-stricken state live in Wilkes-Barre with taxes exploding all around?

I root for my City and soon, I hope to lead it, but facts are facts. In our City, as noted above, in the past, more than one in three people have lived below the poverty line. This means in 2015, these people were below a yearly income (2015) of \$22,811 for a family of four with two children. This is according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Meanwhile, though I do not begrudge them of their fair wage, the lowest salary for an employee in the City of Wilkes-Barre other than a parking attendant is substantially more than the average wage of most citizens of Wilkes-Barre.

The taxpayer's ability to pay over the last ten or more years has been degraded and this has been totally ignored. Yet, City salaries have increased substantially. In fact, the most lucrative jobs in town are held by those who work for the City, the County, the State, and the federal government. How is that fair to the poor residents of this community?

There are few suggestions that increases in taxes have not been needed to pay for government services. Of course the money has been spent. But, one can argue that the price of such services is not affordable to a good part of the citizenry of Wilkes-Barre. But, they have no power to opt out of services they never receive.

As you may have seen on Brian Kelly's web site in 2015, some people, writing on the blogs are still really, really upset. Yet, there are others who have even suggested this is OK: "We may not like to pay higher taxes, but it's just the flip side of government services. If we don't want to pay higher taxes, then we have to give up the level of government services we are used to." Well, maybe we do because people cannot go losing their homes to keep the City running.

What if a city cannot pay for the services supposedly demanded? Would the residents prefer to get less services or pay more from their meager wages to support City employees? More than likely, the City employees are getting fair salaries while the people in the community are working for slave wages because that is all that is available. Still it grates on citizens to have government employees making more than 2X the average for their community?

I have no survey results on that question but on balance, from reading the blogs, it is clear that citizens of the City are not happy that City employees are doing so well because the residents are sacrificing beyond their means.

It would take time get an accurate survey answer, but logic dictates that those making less than the minimum salary for a City employee would suggest that maybe things are not fair.

There is a growing number of Pennsylvanians that have targeted the property tax, as the number one enemy of senior citizens in Pennsylvania. One group that takes this fight seriously is the Pennsylvania Taxpayer Cyber Coalition (PTCC). These folks are dedicated to equitable tax funding of Pennsylvania schools. They see the property tax as the enemy of mankind's ability to live in a comfortable home.

Their concern is that many people who own their homes outright and have for many years, find that they are paying more in property taxes per year, than they would be paying in rent. In many cases this is because of poor fiscal management by school districts and municipalities such as Wilkes-Barre, but sometimes it is because it is simply easier to give huge pay raises than to say no, "we cannot afford that."

Property tax increases are the easiest way to steal from taxpayers. Considering that most home owners buy their homes, so they do not have to pay rent, this is a perplexing phenomenon indeed. This group introduces the problem on their web site in these words:

"Many Pennsylvanians lose their homes and a lifetime's work to sheriff's sales each year because they can no longer afford to pay their property taxes. Senior citizens on fixed incomes are increasingly forced

to sell their homes because of unrelenting increases in their tax burden. Young families cannot afford to purchase a home because the per-month property tax escrow is simply too high.

“Multigenerational family farms are being sold piece by piece to pay property taxes, devastating Pennsylvania agriculture. School districts in areas of the state with limited population and no commercial tax base are in distress and are unable to afford to give their children a quality education. Job losses, outmigration, and abysmal state economic performance caused by burdensome property taxes are devastating Pennsylvania’s economy.” The PTCC also notes the following:

“Over the past few years the PTCC and PCTA— (*Pennsylvania Coalition of Taxpayer Associations*) has been asking homeowners to send us their real-life stories telling how relentlessly increasing school property taxes are affecting their quality of life. The response to this request has been overwhelming; the letters starkly demonstrate the frustration, fear, hopelessness, and anger that is widespread throughout ALL age groups and families from all areas of Pennsylvania over the lawmakers’ inaction in addressing this issue.”

“These politicians who refuse to support elimination and offer nothing, but lame excuses MUST be shown that their inaction and endless political games are jeopardizing the welfare and the lives of many thousands of Pennsylvanians. They MUST understand that what they are doing (or not doing) is destroying the future for good, honest people who only want to live their lives without the fear of financial ruin.”

If lawmakers truly care about homeowners in Pennsylvania, they will consider carefully the letters written to PTCC—two are shown below. These clearly demonstrate that just as in Wilkes-Barre with so many struggling to make ends meet, this is a contagion. Here are some REAL faces of the property tax issue and how the procrastination and cowardice towards eliminating school property taxes is affecting the lives of REAL people in a plight similar to the taxpayers of Wilkes-Barre.

### **PTCC Letter # 1:**

“My husband and I wish to thank the Coalition for all the effort put forth to help save homes in Pennsylvania. Our local representatives have done nothing to show taxpayers they are serious about tax relief, just the usual rhetoric.

We personally have had to list our home for sale since last October due to the \$7,000 school tax bill we can no longer afford as working middle class residents. This is not a mansion, but a 200- year-old house that we have worked to restore for the last 16 years. We can pay our mortgage, but we can't possibly pay the \$584 per month tax payments.

The “relief” from slots is a total joke, a slap in the face of taxpayers. At today's oil costs it has become a choice to have heat or pay taxes. I am sure our home can't be saved in time, but my hope is others will benefit.

We are not sure we will ever own a home again in PA, renting is far more affordable and stable and after losing so much on this home at our ages (55 & 53), it does not make sense to start over again, until we move to another state that does not penalize homeowners.

It goes without saying that the taxes are keeping us from selling in this district. - Anonymous, York County

### **PTCC Letter # 2:**

“My husband & I are on Social Security now, & though we have some savings, it won't be long before we have to use it for the ever growing taxes that are due in Spring & Fall.

The PA school tax is especially burdensome as you well know. We had hoped for a resolution to this long before now by the abolishment of that tax.

If our savings are used up with those taxes, what will we use when an emergency comes along?? With the ever-rising prices of gas & oil & food, the money we have to work with is getting less & less.

We urge you to please put into law the END of the huge Property tax before ours & the savings of countless others is gone, homes lost, & hope erased. We have worked hard all our lives to maintain & keep our home, & now the resources that we thought we had, are like water sadly slipping through our hands.

– Folks from Elverson, Chester County

## Taxation Without Representation is still alive in Wilkes-Barre



The above reality check on government spending is from the Wilkes-Barre Taxpayers Association. Former Mayoral Candidate Frank Sorick is the long-term president of the group.

Though the letters on the prior page are not from Wilkes-Barre residents, they could very well be as we suffer from the same exorbitant taxation system as the rest of the state. That's why HB 76 is so key. I always liked Eddie Day Pashinski and I still do but in this

matter, he does not represent any of the hurting citizens of Wilkes-Barre (or so it would seem) in the current fight to help all of us keep our properties rather than give them up to the tax collector.

Besides PTCC, the people of Wilkes-Barre have another great friend in the Wilkes-Barre City Taxpayers Association. We should pay more attention to them. Our local group is working in conjunction with The Pennsylvania Taxpayers Cyber Coalition PTCC to get property tax relief for Pennsylvanians.

## **What Can Wilkes-Barre Officials Do?**

To address citizens' complaints that our City is becoming unaffordable, what can Wilkes-Barre city officials enact in terms of a lean budget in coming years that cuts the property tax rate and adds very few new employees and services and perhaps even cuts some. As Mayor if I were elected, and even now as a private citizen, I have the answer. It is the same answer that we all have been using in order to survive this poor economy. We have had to do it and we do not expect our City to make our burden worse.

Wilkes-Barre City must live within its means. If we cannot afford 260 employees to dote over us and provide for our every need, then we must reduce the size of the city workforce. Another option is to reduce the salaries of some of the employees who work for the City. But, it would be nice if we did not have to do that.

Can we afford an average salary of \$58,000? How about \$70,000? Can we afford a minimum salary of \$25,000? Can we afford a maximum salary without overtime of over \$100,000? You tell me. I can certainly say that my objective is to reduce expenses and lower taxes – especially the property tax rate. That is what I plan to do if elected Mayor.

If you cannot afford to buy groceries, what do you do? You cut back. While the population of Wilkes-Barre is declining every year, there should be no need for our budget to be ballooning out of control. We must fix this, or we will have no City. I am sure our dedicated City employees will do their part to help this City recover and once again become affordable.

The City income tax of course is reasonably low compared to most cities that impose such a tax, but compared to surrounding communities, it is higher than most. So, we need to look at that even though it is not as pressing as property tax relief. Many residents are saying no to all taxes and they are packing up and heading for greener areas to live.

With the School District getting ready to finance a big Taj Mahal High School, and the City always looking for more, who will be living here supporting City employees if we all decide to pack up and leave? With City employees' earnings increasing while the citizens' own earnings are decreasing, it is a tough sell to convince anybody in Wilkes-Barre that they should have to cough up a little more for the Gipper!

It would be nice if we could afford high salaries and a high number of employees to match. The facts "on the ground" sure are pointing to a conclusion that we cannot.

### **People who love Wilkes-Barre may choose to help us.**

Let's invite those with something to spare, who are good friends of Wilkes-Barre to help our City become affordable. We should have a Donate to Wilkes-Barre Web Site so whatever we might receive does not have to be shared with Go Fund Me! We have other ideas in the other Wilkes-Barre Plan platform points following this chapter.

Besides many tax reduction notions, the City under the George Brown Administration, if I am so fortunate to gain your vote, would set up trusts / funds so that we can take gifts from residents who love this City and we can take bequeathments from prominent citizens and others who choose to direct the proceeds of their estates to the betterment care of Wilkes-Barre City. If we had some revenue from those who credit Wilkes-Barre with part of their lifetime success, that would be wonderful. Of course we would have to promise to work hard to get ourselves back on our feet, so we would not need handouts as our prospects improve.

To make this work, we first would need to announce that it is not a stupid notion to donate to your city instead of giving it all to an errant nephew or a church, which may be torn down tomorrow. Would it not be a great service for a resident to set up a will that includes Wilkes-

Barre as a recipient? Many people feel a debt of gratitude for living so many wonderful years in our City that they would love to give something back. And, of course we need it to help make this city regain its stature as the great a city that these folks remember.

We would need part of a job description / job or a person in the Administration to become adept at grant writing and being able to solicit those Wilkes-Barre alums who may have the means to help the City. Other ideas are included in other parts of the full Wilkes-Barre plan.

To do this of course, we would need a well-structured schedule of gift accounting and gift recognition. It would be appropriate to see statues in Parks etc. for those benefactors so kind that they would choose to help our City. There have been those in the past such as the Kirby Family (Kirby Park), or the Miner Family (Miner Park) so that such benefactors can be recognized in the same fashion as the wonderful plaques in churches for donors being so generous for the wonderful causes for which they contributed.

In our case, of course it would be to keep our city safe, clean, and affordable. Thanks ahead of time for those willing to help Wilkes-Barre. Any Mayor, not just me, can ask the people who have more to give, to help in this way.

We must give credit where it is due, but we should not have to endure a 3% raise for city employees already doing OK in Wilkes-Barre when the Social Security bump is less than 2% and sometimes zero. Tom Leighton has already begun a good job by collecting donations from nonprofits. Payments compared with Scranton and Hazleton are quite nice, and we must credit Mr. Leighton for that. His “windfall” came from Wilkes-Barre General Hospital and King’s College, who were major contributors to the \$437,000 prize from payments in lieu of taxes which the city budgeted in 2014. Unfortunately the dollars were used to give out raises to many people doing quite well.

And, so, my thinking is that Wilkes-Barre’s finest taxable commercial properties are now occupied by colleges, hospitals, and many other non-profits, many of whom do not directly benefit Wilkes-Barre taxpayers as The General and King’s did last year (2015).

I would be happy to stand corrected. However, I personally know of not one city scholarship granted by any of the colleges to a Wilkes-Barre high school student simply because they happen to be a citizen of Wilkes-Barre. I bet there are ten or twenty such students or more who could use such help. Do you know of any who got help? How about a few free hospital days for selected City residents?

I know of not one resident of the City who was treated to an extended hospital stay simply because they were a Wilkes-Barre resident. I know it is not so simple, but, I think you can see my point. The leader of Wilkes-Barre should do the best for Wilkes-Barre while the leaders of other organizations or institutions should look out for their best interests. I would like to see even more financial cooperation between the non-profits and the City. In my administration if you see fit to elect me your Mayor you will see just that. Please remember:

### **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

The colleges and the hospitals and other non-profits gain substantial tax breaks that you and I would not have, and most people think these institutions help Wilkes-Barre. It may help some merchants downtown and this in turn helps the City, but for the most part, Wilkes-Barre is not the big gainer. Tuition in all colleges is a hundred thousand dollars or more for 4 years. Kids then go into hock for their whole lives trying to pay back their loans.

There is no deal of which I am aware, which gives residents of our City any priority in our City Colleges just because the student is home grown. That sure would be nice, and you can bet I will ask for Wilkes-Barre City scholarships. And, I will see what can be done to help the poor in our City who are in need of medical care.

There is some good news and bad news about the affordability of Wilkes-Barre's taxation system on its residents. Here is the good news:

The cost of living in Wilkes-Barre is 16.5% less than the Pennsylvania average and the cost of living in Wilkes-Barre is 15.2% less than the national average. So, if Wilkes-Barre residents had the same money as all Pennsylvanians on the average, and as all Americans on the average, we would be doing quite well on the cost side of affordability,

independent of taxes. But our taxes are crippling and only a few citizens benefit from this in their paychecks.

**There is more good news:**

In Pittsburgh, the median price of a home is about \$120,000; in Wilkes-Barre, the median home value is \$52,800. This is good unless after twenty years, you are trying to sell yours. So, Wilkes-Barre Residents can theoretically afford a home easier than those in Pittsburgh. But, in what conditions are these homes, as most Wilkes-Barre taxpayers cannot even afford the paint to make their properties shine.

**And, so there is some bad news:**

This results in more bad news as Wilkes-Barre home values have declined -1.7% over the past year and it is predicted that if they go up again—if- they will rise just 0.5% within the next year. Wilkes-Barre residents like to boast to Scrantonians that anything you can do I can do better, but so far it is not so.

Homes are more noticeably larger in the Scranton Area, and though they are not as inexpensive as Wilkes-Barre's properties, they are much more elegant, and the people buy them because they somehow have the money. In Wilkes-Barre few have the money to afford a Scranton home.

For example, the median list price per square foot in Wilkes-Barre is \$46, which is lower than the Scranton Metro average of \$89. The median price of homes currently listed in Wilkes-Barre is \$63,500 while the median price of homes that are sold is much less, so the sellers are always unhappy with a median sale price of \$51,485. The median rent price in Wilkes-Barre is \$625, which is lower than the Scranton Metro median of \$750.

The bad news is that in a nutshell, life in Wilkes-Barre or Scranton is not as good of a financial deal as life in Pittsburgh using home values are a gauge. But, life in Wilkes-Barre sure seems to be somewhat worse than life in Scranton. Check the murder rate.

## **Minimize your tax burden by doing certain things:**

Property taxes can be extremely burdensome for a homeowner. They tend to rise steadily over time and, even once you pay off your mortgage, the taxes keep on coming. The good news, however, which is minimal, is that there are some things homeowners can do to reduce their property tax burden. City officials should tell the people how to make their tax obligation be only as large as it must be. In our administration, we will have counselors to help the people make good financial choices as it can only help the City.

Permit me to repeat that property taxes can be extremely burdensome for a homeowner. For Wilkes-Barre City homeowners, this is more the rule than the exception. Property owners in Wilkes-Barre not only have to pay the real estate tax to Wilkes-Barre City, at the local level; we also must pay a County Tax, a huge School District Property Tax, and a Wilkes-Barre City income tax.

All tax rates mysteriously tend to rise steadily over time and, even once you pay off your mortgage, the taxes keep on coming. For some people, the tax is much more substantial than what they would have imagined as the amount for which they could rent their property to a passer-by.

There are ways that individual home owners can minimize their property tax burden. I will give tips in that regard but my goal as Mayor of Wilkes-Barre is to reduce the amount of taxes all of our citizens pay. If I can offer a tip for you to reduce your tax burden because of your special circumstances, I will do so. It is not a right to pay taxes. It is clearly a burden, which most Americans cheerfully take on to help their communities. But, have communities become too grabby? Is Wilkes-Barre asking for too much?

I would advise that you keep reading to learn some simple tips that any homeowner can follow to lessen the pain when tax time rolls around. (For related reading on tax issues and mortgages, see *The Mortgage Interest Tax Deduction* and *A Tax Primer For Homeowners*.)

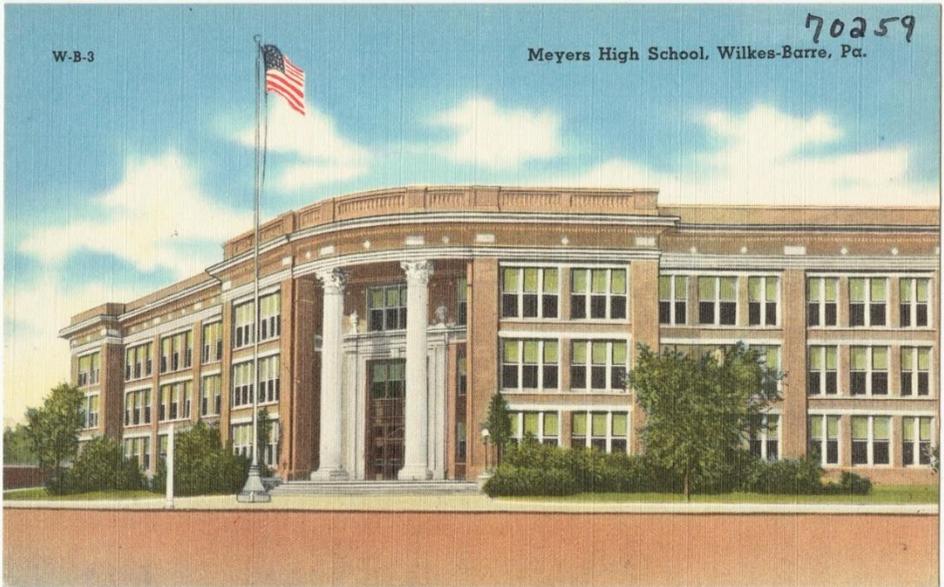
<http://www.investopedia.com/articles/pf/06/mortgagepoints.asp>)

You might consider reading *The Mortgage Interest Tax Deduction and A Tax Primer For Homeowners*, for additional information about saving on real estate taxes. If you are already aware of these devices, then I regret stealing any of your time to evaluate them so I will end this chapter right here ad right now.

## Chapter 8 Support Building Society & Preserve Historical Monuments

5. Support Building Preservation such as Coughlin High School etc.
6. Support Building Preservation Society – No more wrecking ball

### Stop the Axe Man from Doing More Damage



### Three City High Schools to be Demolished?

Before I explain this, please know that unlike the previous administration the George Brown Administration intends to do its best for Meyers, G.A.R. and Coughlin, which are in danger of the Wilkes-Barre axman at the insistence of what some would call the corrupt Wilkes-Barre Area School Board.

It can only make a Mayor's job more difficult to keep jobs and businesses in the City when even our own high schools are bailing out of Wilkes-Barre. I will do my best to put a stop to this as it will damage our City and we can't have a city with no high schools at a time when

we are looking for renaissance not decay and neglect. Here is what we know so far.

From <http://preservationpa.org/uploads/2018-PresPA-At-Risk-newsletter.pdf>

AT RISK ELMER L. MEYERS HIGH SCHOOL Luzerne County  
341 Carey Avenue Wilkes-Barre, PA Threat: Demolition Beginning  
in May 2008 and extending through April 2012.

[Yet, here we are at the beginning of 2019, and Meyers is still here, and it is still functional and still in working order.]

Preservation Pennsylvania worked with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the United States Environmental Protection Agency on a program entitled, “Helping Johnny Walk to School:

“Sustaining Communities through Smart School Siting Policies.” This program encourages school districts to retain historic schools, to locate new ones in locations where a portion of students can walk or bike to school, and to use schools as a center of community activities beyond regular school hours.

The Elmer L. Meyers High School, built in 1930, stands as a testament to the importance of continuing such programs. As a Depression-era construction project, the school embodies the grand design of early 20th-century public architecture. It serves a diverse neighborhood and is located in a central location that children can walk to.

The Wilkes-Barre school board has planned to consolidate several of their schools, including Meyers and the historic James M. Coughlin High School, and build a new school approximately four miles from Meyers. The plan was created as a reaction to several feasibility studies done by the district indicating that renovation of their historic high schools would be cost prohibitive.

The plan ultimately concludes with Elmer L. Meyers being demolished in order to build a park. This historic school serves as a community anchor and ties the residents to the area. Losing this

school would mean that children would be bussed out of town for school.

Wilkes-Barre Area Save Our Schools has been advocating for the school to remain in use, and locals are preparing a National Register nomination for the Elmer L. Meyers School. Preservation Pennsylvania hopes to work with the district's school board and the local community to encourage the building's preservation either as a school building or new community use.

## **Special landmarks do not have to be destroyed**

Throughout this book, as we have discussed one neighborhood or section after another, we found a lot of holes in our City. There are many vacant lots where once magnificent buildings stood. The latest of course is the Hotel Sterling, but our history is replete with the Axe Man delivering damaging blows to our future, and the City wimpishly agreeing with the anti-public school board to take down one monument after another that can never be replaced.

We have two more monuments that are about to come down if they are not cared for—The Irem Temple Mosque, and The Hotel Sterling Annex. This must be stopped. There is recent good news on both of these as we know the Annex is being rebuilt and the Irem Temple Restoration Project is collecting donations to bring back the Irem treasure. See picture of the magnificent Irem Temple on the next page below

## **Good News on Irem Temple**

There are good people in Wilkes-Barre trying to save our City independent of the government and the ax man. There is now something called the Public Square Pop Up Museum, which has been in the works for months. It officially opened at the end of December 2018.

"Our purpose here is to really showcase our area's local history," said Beth Archer. "We know we have a great history here, and we want other people to learn about it!"

The pop up museum is part of a joint fundraising venture between the Wilkes-Barre Preservation Society and the Irem Temple Restoration Project.

The Irem Temple is a century-old structure on North Franklin Street that has sat vacant for about 15 years.



"We're looking to turn the main auditorium into a venue space with things like concerts, flea markets, vendor shows, and weddings," said Archer.

The remaining 17,000 square feet will become a permanent museum and the beginning of the heritage tourism industry in the Diamond City.

Admission to the pop up museum is free, but donations are greatly appreciated. The Irem Temple Restoration Project is expected to take at least five years to complete. Yeah Wilkes-Barre, this is a clean victory for the people.

Besides other treasures in the City, the Wilkes-Barre Area School District, whose mission seems to be to not care at all about Wilkes-Barre per se, wants to rip down our three high schools and replace them with a huge Plasticville building in a different City. The new structure is to be built over toxic material and compared to the existing high schools, it may or may not last thirty years.

I am 100% against this. Brian Kelly passed this latter to me which he wrote in protest of what is going on. He sent it to both papers. The Citizen Voice printed it on the day before New Year's Eve, 2014. The Times Leader chose not to print it. Here it is in its entirety as printed. It says it just as Kelly meant it. Many in Wilkes-Barre including me have thanked Brian for writing the letter as it represents the feelings of those of us who care.

#### LETTER TO EDITOR

Published: December 30, 2014

Editor:

*The fixes required for Wilkes-Barre Area School District high schools have been depicted as unaffordable by taxpayers regardless of the approach — fix it or demolish and build it again cheaper. I don't think so. I don't buy it. It would have been interesting if the numbers and "plans" had been presented at Wednesday's meeting along with the impact on millage. We all know the school district has not been a tax bargain for local taxpayers. More importantly for all of us living in Wilkes-Barre Area, the question should be, "Do we really want to destroy historically important, well-built school*

*buildings and replace them with cheap quality 30-year models?”*

*Wilkes-Barre High was established in 1890. It later was renamed Coughlin High after GAR opened in 1925. This old Coughlin school building is in fact the oldest public high school building in Pennsylvania. Can you believe some people want to tear down the oldest public-school building in the state? The Coughlin Annex structure was built in 1952. The original Coughlin building was occupied in 1909 though construction had begun much earlier. Citizens of Wilkes-Barre Area need to get involved and think about what is being proposed and we must ask ourselves if there are not better ways to solve this problem without doubling our already unaffordable school tax burden.*

*In March 2005, Cliff Greim wrote an excellent piece titled “New Construction vs. Renovation for Older School Facilities.” Though 10 years old, it still covers the issue quite well. It is available for all to read online.*

*Greim offers readable counsel on the big decision for Wilkes-Barre Area:*

*“Generally, schools built in the 1950s or earlier have impressive architectural character and often are fixtures in their neighborhoods. They are structurally sound and can accommodate new systems. In addition, there is often strong sentiment to keep them in some form.*

*“Newer schools built in the 1960s and ’70s generally lack architectural character, are not energy-efficient and are constructed of cheaper materials. These get torn down more often or become hand-me-down conversions from high schools to junior highs or from junior highs to elementary schools.”*

*All of the buildings in question were built before 1950 other than the Coughlin Annex, which was built in 1952. I think it is safe to say that the same logic Greim discusses for post-1950 buildings applies to the Coughlin Annex.*

*I admit I was taken back by board members who said, "It's going to cost a lot but it's something we have to do." I would ask whether they would vote to tear down historic Independence Hall if it were within their responsibility back in 1860? It helps to know that at that time, this famous Philadelphia structure was about the same age as Coughlin is right now. We all know that Independence Hall is the birthplace of America. We also know that the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were both debated and signed inside this remarkable building. Independence Hall was built between 1732 and 1756 to be the Pennsylvania State House. It still stands and thrives.*

*Would Independence Hall have been torn down by WB School Board?*



*Originally, this building housed all three branches of Pennsylvania's colonial government. Yes, it was built even before the U.S.A. became the U.S.A. It is now two and a half times older than Coughlin High School and it has a lot of life left. Think of the famous graduates of Coughlin, GAR and Meyers, and think of all the memorable events at those schools. These buildings are special landmarks in our home area, and they do not have to be destroyed.*

*GAR is almost 90 years old and Meyers is the baby at 85 years of age. Why would we give up these historically significant, well-built structures and replace them with 30-year throwaway, square buildings made of sheet metal, plastic, and other cheap materials? We have historical buildings with grand designs, granite and limestone interiors, and exquisite stained glass auditoriums. Who are we to cast this all away so that in 30 years another study like this can be done as we rip out the structures to be built and go with even cheaper buildings with 20-year lifetimes or perhaps a modular school or a few trailers?*

*Where there is a will, there is a way. Somehow we lost our will with the Hotel Sterling after spending \$6 million without fixing the roof. Let's keep our will and our wits as the board tries to shove a huge millage increase our way ... for a less desirable outcome than the status quo.*

*One off-hand suggestion I have is to budget about \$1 million or more per year if we can afford it. We can bring in a great building contractor from our area to allocate five or 10 artisans just for Wilkes-Barre Area, to begin work on these buildings, one year at a time, one objective at a time. Let's get the hazards out of the way first. When real emergencies occur in the other buildings, we can dispatch this crew of experts along with Wilkes-Barre Area maintenance personnel to fix the problems posthaste.*

*I would also use our political representatives to get waivers for the beams that can withstand lateral forces. This is a very costly undertaking and should be ruled out immediately. Clearly all of the Wilkes-Barre Area buildings in question have not been blown over by big puffs of wind in the 85 to 105 years in which they have been standing and they are not going to be blown over tomorrow or any time soon. I would also try to get waivers for increasing the physical size of the classrooms. They seem big enough to have been able to be used for conducting classes for many years and surely they could continue to be used. Waivers would save a lot of money and they are practical and safe.*

*I would bet that the local and state historical societies would help in gaining the waivers. How can we consider destroying such history for a promise we know will be broken 30 years from now? After all, citizens make the laws. If the laws do not fit, waivers are a good way to save money and still have the benefits of a safe school.*

*When all the emergencies are fixed, I would put the new team of artisans to work on one floor at a time of one building at a time. I would use as many vocational students to help in the effort as possible. Think of the training they would get. Additionally, Wilkes-Barre Area also has a lot of maintenance personnel, who I bet would love to learn new skills working with the best artisans in the valley in building, plumbing, electrical, carpentry and other endeavors. Where there is a will, there is a way. Nothing in life truly worth having is easy. Why give up the best for a solution that may not even be good enough to be second-best?*

*Brian Kelly*

*Wilkes-Barre*

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**Have we not learned our lesson with the wrecking ball?**



# Chapter 9 Safe Biking, Jogging, & Walking

## 7. Safe jogging, biking & walking trails – bike parking and rentals



**Around Town Bicycles kicks off Saturday Morning Ride series**  
**April 8, 2017 Times Leader Local, News, Top Stories 0**  
**Katherine Pugh - For Times Leader**

WILKES-BARRE — The brisk weather Saturday morning didn't stop a group of about 30 cyclists from gathering at Around Town Bicycles for the start of their annual "Saturday Morning Rides."

## **A dream, and an idea for Wilkes-Barre**

Please do not get sick of dreams. You will find the George Brown Administration to be full of dreams, ideas, plans, and actions, and we want it that way. The overall dream is about getting Wilkes-Barre City out of its temporary rut. While working to do that, I think we can at the same time be making our city safe, affordable, and clean as discussed. But that too is not all. Among many ideas that would help the city prosper, the idea discussed in this chapter will help our City become desirable by those people, such as entrepreneurs, who might fall in love with Wilkes-Barre as we all have. Maybe some people who can help can move here and gain some great opportunities for exercise

and fun. We'll all love them for it while they are peddling safely from hither to yon.

Why not make the City better than it ever has been by making it accessible and friendly to biking, jogging, and walking from point A to point B. Providing recreational opportunities to stay fit and healthy is a critical part of being an asset to residents for any community.

And, so it is incumbent upon any mayor and council to want to be sure that there are bike paths and well-maintained sidewalks. These, along with walking and jogging paths would encourage a healthy lifestyle in safety. It would also make our City a lot more fun, and what is wrong with that? Rest assured folks, it is in my Wilkes-Barre Plan.

So, let's examine the notion of safe streets and bike paths for both biking and walking. Wilkes-Barre is not a large city geographically and therefore mostly everybody in this City is within a half-mile of what could be interconnected bicycle facilities. Such facilities should be able to take those people on bikes or walking from very close to where they live to work, to shop, and to green spaces without fearing for their safety.

There are many gaps in today's pedestrian network though many sidewalks and handicap curb structures built in recent years have made the situation much better. But, the job is not yet completed.

Clearly all of this is not in the Mayor's sole purview as there is a City Council involved, which in past administrations has been a rubber stamp for the Mayor's whims. Any mayor must develop a good working relationship with City Council to work as a team for the betterment of the City and its people. I intend to have a great relationship with Council, a role I once held in support of the City.

First, there would need to be community meetings to assess needs. Then, officials would need to develop long-range plans to address those needs, while being consistent with funding availabilities and land-use requirements.

Would it not be nice if Wilkes-Barre adopted an enhanced bike sharing program that put say, 50 bikes in operation in 2019 or 2020? Yes, we

have the beginning of such a program right now:

<http://wilkesbarrebikeshare.com/>, so, for some this is not such a new idea, but it has never been formalized and adopted by the City.

BTW, in addition to Gus Genetti, a major advocate of the program, the WB Rotary Club is behind the bike share notion for Wilkes-Barre. Is it not wonderful that Wilkes-Barre's # 1 entrepreneur, Gus Genetti is behind the bike share idea in Wilkes-Barre?. It is nice of Gus to help out.

With more pick-up and drop off points, the program could be much better. There are many programs in other cities such as Pittsburgh, which added 500 bikes in 2014. Biking is good for a lot of reasons and if we make it safe, it can also save the expense of gasoline.

Major cities are placing more focus on biking and walking as a means of getting around with less focus on recreation for the sake of recreation. It is a great idea. In order for Wilkes-Barre to do this, we would have to examine our streets, and help quickly redesign those, with minimal costs, to be amenable as much as possible to both bike and pedestrian traffic.

We have some great parks and we have two huge bridges connecting parts of our City with recreation areas that are also part of our City. I am talking about Wilkes-Barre's Kirby and Nesbitt Parks. We can do lots more than we think. We have the asphalt path on the dikes which are blacktopped and are as nice a path as any, anywhere—and they have a great view of the Susquehanna River.

Even here, it would help to have pedestrian and bike lanes so that nobody is injured from not knowing the "rules of the "road." We don't want joggers being accosted by high speed bikes when both are merely recreating. And, we need to come up with a better way to permit pass-through when the top of the dike seems to end.

Where needed, we might try to carve out a special one way or perhaps wider two-way bike path in the dirt away from the asphalt on the dikes. We need to use our heads properly. Some things will work, and others will not. When the cost is not prohibitive, we can test out ideas and see if they work. But we first need dreams, ideas, and then plans, before we take action. What we do not need are negative thinkers.

The objective would be for our City to have significant, well maintained, bike paths, park bike paths and wonderful walking areas that can be shown as a commitment to encourage biking, jogging, and walking. And yes, of course, we would need to monitor this use so that it continually works. Having a citizen committee interested in pedestrian and biking activities with the steady ear of the Mayor, whoever he or she may be, would help make this even more feasible.

Leading cities for bicycling are implementing innovative bicycle infrastructures (a.k.a. cycle tracks, green lanes, intersection enhancements, bicycle boulevards, etc.) to encourage people who are interested, but very concerned to ride a bike in the city.

We should examine ways to implement these types of innovative bicycle facilities to attract even more Wilkes-Barre residents to ride bicycles and to be assured that the chances are low that they will be harmed by cars or that they may harm pedestrians.

Clearly in our City as in others, in just about every neighborhood, besides the idea of safety period, one of the top concerns is drivers simply going too fast, driving aggressively, and/or not yielding to pedestrians. We need a plan in Wilkes-Barre to calm traffic and make our neighborhoods safer and more comfortable for us to walk and bike? What speeder does not regret the accidents they cause. Is everything so important today that we cannot take the time for safety. Neither you nor I think so.

We first must identify the problem areas and then put forth workable solutions. Have you ever heard a city official talk about making the city safer for pedestrians and bicyclists? Me neither? It is not on their lists of important items—aka—the items that will get them reelected. Well, folks it is up to us to put them there.

It all starts by making the public aware. Police can be counted on to do their jobs and to keep us safe. Our obligation does not end when there are police willing to help. All of us can drive more safely—but we could also use friendly, yet firm reminders.

Of course this program would involve more focused police enforcement of existing traffic laws. I know the police are stretched

thin, but we may be able to use them to lead volunteer emergency police that could be used in problem areas. These extra people can be used in similar fashion to the school crossing guard system. Why not if it helps the kids, and if it helps the population of WB in general.

The “police” would be self-policing, with the authority to issue warnings to drivers that become part of their unofficial driving record. Local citizen patrols could be formed, and they could be asked to help create greater citizen awareness. After all, it is our City!

The Chief of Police must be intimately involved in the safety of cyclists and pedestrians as we permit people the free access to streets designed now only for automobile traffic. Bicycle and pedestrian safety should be a city priority. Hopefully, in due time, the City will hire a Public Safety Director with a major mission to make it all work, who reports directly to the Mayor.

The Public Safety Director would continually work in operational matters with the Police Chief and would also help codify and explain any new regulations needed so that Council can get them passed for the good of the City. When Council needs to approve them, the Director would present them to Council for their approval.

The Director would "direct" that the Chief apprise his officers of the City's priorities. They would need to look closely at jaywalking and gridlocking and to create awareness of potential problem areas and to alert motorists to requirements of giving bikers proper clearances.

If there is a will, there is a way. A nice billboard about bicycle safety factors may help our out-of-town driving guests as to how serious we are about protecting our bicycling and walking public.

To the extent it is possible with the problem of street parking today being the most efficient form of parking in our City, open streets would surely be wonderful. Even periodic open streets can be enormously popular events as we have seen in nearly 80 cities and communities throughout the U.S. As long as residents understand the goals and the rules, they will not purposely try to impinge on good ideas to help us all.

Open Streets temporarily restrict motor vehicle traffic on one or more streets at a time so that people can use them for scheduled physical activity—walking, biking, running, playing, or even a block party with street dancing. The Mayor should work with community stakeholders to make Open Streets Wilkes-Barre a reality?

The City of Wilkes-Barre must act as a cheerleader in the implementation of a comprehensive education program that is pervasive in its ability to increase and maintain a constant positive awareness related to traffic safety, infrastructure, and way-finding. It is one of our basic jobs

Wilkes-Barre residents want the Mayor to take the scarce resources of our City and use them to gain the most benefit for all the citizens in all areas. I see no problem with this proposal. I love it in fact.

I am an advocate for common sense quality of life issues, which certainly include bicycling and walking. Even our fine Police, who make Wilkes-Barre safe for us all, can be more visible on City Police bikes in our neighborhoods.

I do bike myself but not as frequently as when I was a kid. I make it a point to frequently walk the dike and sometimes even the streets in my neighborhood. I admit, I also use my recumbent bike and treadmill when it is cold like many days in NEPA winters.

I understand how our open spaces, bike trails, jogging paths, and bike paths have been utilized where they exist. I have personally seen the difference when a road does not have a bike lane and I have come dangerously close to being hit by passing cars. This is not good for the cyclist or the driver.

If we can make it better, we should make it better. Over time, almost all identified issues can be solved. But we must identify and track them, and then solve them. Those that appear unsolvable may even be solved at a later time, as we get better at what we are doing.

I understand the prioritization and seriousness of bicycle/walking related issues. I know that safety is number one but let's start thinking about what we can do once we feel safe rather than wringing our hands wondering if that can ever be. It can.

Our police are great. With the proper leadership, they will make our City as safe as the safest cities in the country. If there are not enough police, I will figure out how to give them better tools and if we still need more police, we should get more though we must watch to keep our city affordable.

My idea upon taking office is to provide a comprehensive long-range plan, which would build on current assets. I think we need a one-year plan and also plans that go out five, ten, and at least 20 years. The administration must also vigorously respond to new solutions. Public initiatives, undergoing constant review, should be brought forth, and examined, and implemented as appropriate.

I would expect that we can do this seamlessly but nothing worth having is ever easy so there will always be some lumps and bumps. I would expect that before we see any smooth roads, we will encounter a lot of bumps on the way to a lot of great solutions.

I am not naïve enough to believe that Wilkes-Barre citizens can ride bicycles all the time as an alternative to nice warm transportation. But there are lots of times that we would be able to do just that. I know this from experience.

Brian Kelly, who authored this book with me, recently told me a story about when he went to King's from 1965 to 1969. His dad fronted him some cash after HS graduation from Meyers and "they" bought a Honda 50 for Brian to go back and forth to school from the Rolling Mill Hill. It was a two-mile ride or so. Though unable to achieve breakneck speed, a Honda 50 could travel a lot faster than a bike. It looked a lot like a moped without the petals.

When he reached King's after two miles for class in December and January of his first two years, with his multiple layers of hoods and masks, and other necessary clothing, he literally had ice forming from his watering eyes.

Yet, he took the little Honda, because it was easy and inexpensive to get where he needed to go, and there was no problem parking it. Since bicycles go slower, and since the rider does not always have to get to an 8:00 AM class, perhaps less icicles would form. Brian says he

probably would have simply got a bike and could have done the same thing in about ten minutes if back then, he had thought that was a good idea. In retrospect, he says “I guess I just wanted my Honda 50 and I had to pay my Dad back for it, but it did get me there faster.”

You may have heard of Somerville, a small community adjacent to Boston Massachusetts. It is at the top of the game for bike commuting in the Northeast, so says the League of American Bicyclists. Other top areas include Cambridge, New Haven, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. Maybe one day Wilkes-Barre can be on such a list. Everything good starts with an idea. Massachusetts, by the way, like Pennsylvania, is not a warm state.

Somerville is dedicated to bicycling. The city has 14 miles of bike lanes, 6 miles of bike paths, and 25 miles of shared roads marked for bicycle travel. With all that in place, the city went forth and completed its first cycle track as a protected bike lane. A cycle track is in fact, a bike lane that is separated from the roadway and traffic by some form of physical barrier. Beacon Street, which runs into Boston, has never looked better.

And so, we have Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania and Boston Massachusetts (Somerville), two cities with little more in common than long cold winters, and the hardiness of its people. The only objection I could think of to the utility of making Wilkes-Barre more bike friendly would be the cold weather we share with Boston. Yet, Boston has proven it can be done and that the people love it. Soon, if we choose to move on this, other communities in NEPA would want to be involved.

### **Can we stretch Wilkes-Barre to Pittston?**

Stretch your imaginations, please. How about a nice bike / walking trail adjacent to the "choo choo train" that one day may be circling the Square two-blocks out, each day in the future. How about extending a train from Wilkes-Barre past Eighth Street and right on into Pittston PA, the home of the greatest Tomato Festival on the planet. I see there is a lot of track already on that side of the river bank. A bike path right next to it sounds like a pretty good idea.

Since a train around the city is more than just a little project, if we gain the interest in bicycling and we act on it, we can surely create a bike path along the same route. Even without the train, which I know is a dream, and not yet an idea, why not be able to ride a bike, reasonably unencumbered from Wilkes-Barre, along the river to Pittston? Now, there's an idea. While others say, "Why?" Let's help Wilkes-Barre be known in the future as "the City that says, 'Why Not?'"

In June 2005, many of us recall that Mayor Thomas Leighton suggested to Wilkes-Barre residents and friends: "The biggest obstacle that we must overcome, is the negative attitude of a small, but pervasive, segment of our population. We must reverse this negative attitude. We must be taught how to believe again." I believe!

At the same time, the Mayor unveiled a new slogan for Wilkes-Barre: "I believe." The slogan turned up on buttons, key chains and signs distributed by the Mayor's office. Mr. Leighton's Pep Talk to the City was a good idea, no buts about it.

I believe we need to believe we can, but we also need to dream, to create ideas from our dreams, discuss those ideas with City leaders, decide what our priorities will be; plan to achieve them, and then get the job done.

Believing we can, is a great start in forming a great attitude. Those who believe they can, do! Those who believe they cannot, are always 100% right.

In 2015 , Wilkes-Barre held a major election. We are embarking upon another election cycle in 2019 which, because we live in America, will give all citizens of the City the opportunity to bring in the leadership of our choosing. There is already leadership in place. The Current Mayor and a number of Council members are running again. Let's challenge them to reveal their plans to make Wilkes-Barre better before we reveal our vote at the polls. You see my plans right here in this book. I hope you are pleased so far.

After twelve years of hard work by Mayor Tom Leighton and his administration, our current Mayor and Council have had their own

four years (2015-2019) to improve our City. Have they met your expectations? Dear citizens of Wilkes-Barre, I am not kidding. Please remember:

## **I am George C. Brown. And, You Can Count on Me!**

Ask the others what they think of the "Choo Choo" project and the pathways / bicycles project for biking, jogging, and walking. Wilkes-Barre does not have to be number two in anything.

Of course, we will hit some potholes along the way for sure, but we can look to the future now that local elections are in front of us again. We can see the opportunities for some great improvements. How about the Mini-Malls or the little town and hotel by Barney Street? This is a great idea and it will make Wilkes-Barre even greater than anyone can imagine.

Surely, we should thank Mayor Leighton and his administration and our prior Council before 2015 for their service and we must likewise thank Mayor George and his administration and our Council before 2019 for their service as we move on to select our next leaders for terms from 2020 to 2023. I am ready to be your Mayor and as you can see I have a lot of work in front of me.

With effective leadership, there will always be new dreams and new ideas. Whatever the composition of our political officials, we must remember they work for us—each and every one of us. And so, it is up to us to help our leaders make the right decisions about our future. We have to engage the system until we correct it. We can achieve a better Wilkes-Barre one step at a time. We all want better for Wilkes-Barre? There is nothing political about safe biking, jogging, and walking so we should be able to get an answer.

We live in America. In our country and in our state and city, the people run the government. We often forget that, and we get stuck voting for politicians when we should be voting for representatives of the people. Public officials may think that they run the government but that is not true. It is the people. We the People are in charge. We determine the government we get, and we determine the government we choose to keep. Remember that in 2019 and always.

By having a vibrant city, when Mayor George finishes his time with the City, we need to be prepared to elect new leadership. This is why I feel so good about our prospects as I gain the opportunity to lead this City. We the people are in charge. Democracy means that every four years in Wilkes-Barre, we pick the people we want to lead us for the next four years. Let's not blow our opportunity. I am well prepared to be your Mayor.

From reading the local blogs and talking to people for years about our City, it is clear that the citizens of Wilkes-Barre would like things to be better. Like myself, they would like a safe city, an affordable city, and a clean and beautiful city. They would like jogging paths and bicycle paths. They would like safe roads to travel by car or by bike or when walking.

Surely, there have been great improvements in the uptown areas of the City and during the Leighton years, many have been substantial. Yet, the people you meet on the street continue to openly discuss making the changes necessary to put Wilkes-Barre back on the map again. The way I see it, Wilkes-Barre is a city ready to return to its roots. The people are sick of the dark days of poor government. I am ready to lead Wilkes-Barre to its future destiny as a fine city again.

I think one of my first decrees when and if through your grace I become Mayor, will be a decree that would have consequences. The decree will say that "Dreams are back in style in Wilkes-Barre Pa." Pursuing dreams about our community and its people is a prerequisite for bringing back the great days of Wilkes-Barre, PA. I am ready, thank you.

Let the dreaming begin folks, and soon after, let our great ideas, plans, and actions help make our dreams come true. And if I might add, let none of us sit on the sidelines or somebody may deflate our goals. Get in the game Wilkes-Barre!

Now, how about going to a Wilkes-Barre bike shop and picking out a beauty!



# Chapter 10 Downtown Transportation — CityCircle Railroad

8. Build a railroad around the City with a train garage by the river
9. Create 4 mini Stations for the CityCircle railroad
10. Create a RR Spur to Barney Street Mall
11. Create a RR spur to Pittston and Scranton and on to NY & Phila.
12. Run Tram cars downtown in warmer weather
- 13 Permit safe Rickshaw and Rolling Chair like transportation downtown



## Choo Choo Woo Woo for Wilkes-Barre

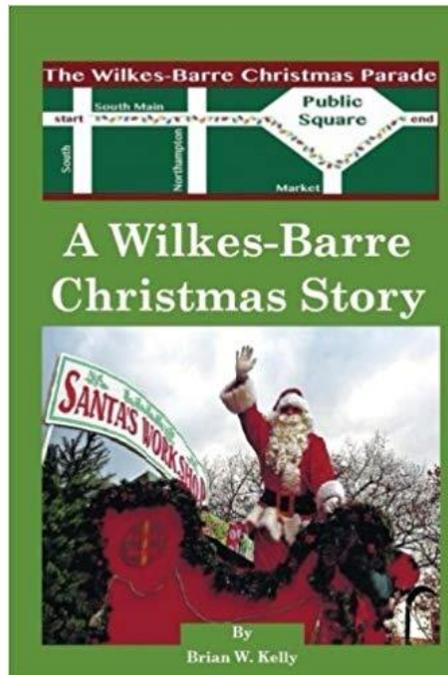
Though I like all of these ideas that we present in this book, this one comes from the creative mind and continually churning fun brain of Brian Kelly. He wrote up this idea about four years ago and fine-tuned it in this recent book titled *Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future*. Think of this as a dream but if we can find a multi-billionaire out there someplace who would like to adopt our fair city, and we just might, surely he or she would help us with a number of our special projects. This would be a dandy for sure. I would definitely support it if we could get the interest and get the funding. FYI Brian feels the same way.

## How about a full-sized railroad around Public Square? – by Brian W. Kelly

My sons Brian and Mike like Lionel Trains as well as LGB. LGB did not come to our home, however, for about thirty years or so after I got my first train when I lived on High Street.

When our boys were little, they called trains either Toot Toots or Choo Choo Woo Woos. The names were taken by the time Katie, our daughter was born and she was OK with that as long as she got to run the trains with all of the older brother competition.

Without mincing words here, let it be known that I have often thought about a full-rail sized "choo choo" train circling the outer Square from say two blocks out. Within the train track circumference, there would be minimal City automobile traffic. Only vehicles to benefit the severely handicapped at say 5 miles per hour would be permitted. That's faster than most can walk, anyway. There would be other transportation such as Trams, Rickshaws, and Rolling Chairs like on the Atlantic City Boardwalk to move within the confines of the tracks.



There would be lots of free parking spaces on the perimeter and if there was not enough parking in certain areas, I figure we could build them somehow without busting the City's budget. I think our City would need to be adopted in order to get this project off the ground, but it can be our dream and we can publicize it. Until we get financing,

Wilkes-Barre can be *The City that Almost Got a Train*. To read a about a Wilkes-Barre Christmas Story involving a boy and a train, it helps to know that I wrote such a book two years ago and it is available at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1947402161>.

Though improbable, it would be an even greater accomplishment if for this big train project, we could get the tracks on the river side of North and South River Streets and have them go all the way up to North Street on the river side of the dike from perhaps South Street. The tracks of course would need to be built like a fortress and would have to strengthen, not weaken the dike system in those places. Moving from south to North, the tracks would be built for the railroad train to go under the Market Street Bridge and the North Street bridge before the tracks made their next right turn after North Street. .

Back to the river side, further down from South Street, towards South Wilkes-Barre from Wilkes University would be a little spur and a little garage for the train or trains to be kept dry in the off-hours and the off-months. Of course these special items would need a place to be locked up in the off-hours. The spur would take the train down to West Academy St. or thereabouts and perhaps behind Barney Farms, where its garage and repair area might be located again, on the river side of the dike.

Back up to South Street, moving from Wilkes University to King's College, going under the Market Street Bridge, and then the North Street (Veterans) bridge, the tracks could then come up and make a right turn. They would go up the Courthouse hill and then the North Street hill and eventually the tracks would come down the other side of the hill going East to someplace around Pennsylvania Avenue. The tracks might need to be trestled or tunneled to go over River Street and other streets on the way. Hey, I am a dream and idea man, not an architect. We're still just dreaming.

This notion is still in its dream stage and has not reached the idea stage and of course. It is a lot of miles away from a plan but it sure is exciting as a dream and with a monstrous amount of funding from a benefactor willing to adopt the City, I think it could very well be done. I have no idea as to what the Army Corps of Engineers would need to approve such as project on the City's river dike, or how long it would take but let's just say that nothing begins without a dream.

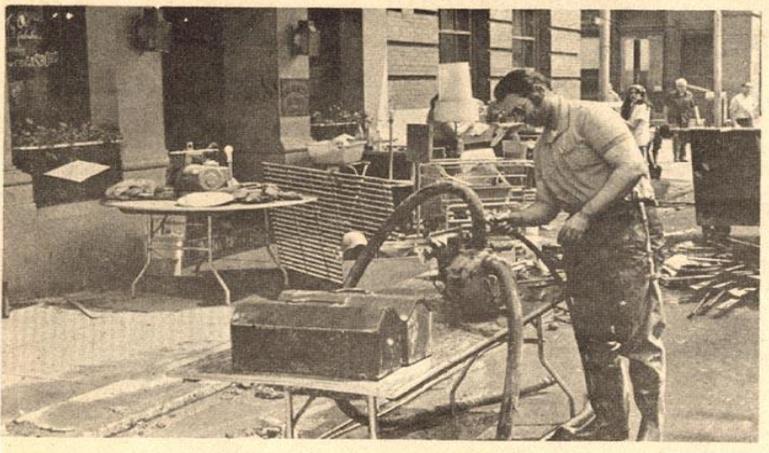
I have not mapped it all out, but I believe when there is a will, there is a way. I think it can work the more we think about it and the more we want it. Why not? Money is no object folks for if we cannot figure out how to afford it, we simply do not do it. But the dream will be out

there for whenever we can afford it or for when the perfect Wilkes-Barre benefactor comes by. With animation so real today, we could probably have the Wilkes-Barre CityCircle Train rolling over tracks on a giant movie screen such as that at the Kirby before you can say – (fill in a really long word right here between the parentheses).

We might need a little bridge over the tracks here and there or we might need to dig out a section and have the train go underground – like under the sidewalks at Wilkes on South Street-- for a bit anyway. Hopefully, it could be done without major, major expenses but we would have to do it right or not at all.

We do not have to try to get it all done at once but instead we can bring various parts online over time. The mental trip around the city that I am outlining is not complete yet. Our train from the dike at Wilkes to Penn Ave is just about half way down the tracks.

From 1972 'til today, Gus has been making Genetti's Inn ready for challenges



**Gus Genetti washes pump as other employees wash office equipment.**

After several more blocks on North Street, the tracks could turn right again to come down Pennsylvania Avenue, maybe on the opposite side of the Street from Gus Genetti's or perhaps over by the old Stegmaier Brewery. There are some rail-beds there already, so we would have to see if they could be used. We surely would not want to take too many of Gus's parking spots. I bet Gus Genetti would be serving coffee outside his hotel the day of the first train ride, if we are so lucky.

Another option would be to go down to the boulevard and begin the trip back. This leg would take us down to South Street again. At this point, we would probably go under South Street Bridge and head towards the river. The objective would be to not get in the way of traffic at all.

So, in my dream I see the tracks for this big train set being laid mostly underground with a heavy metal plate on top of it so that the tracks would not really be in a tunnel at times, but it would perhaps seem so.

Of course, we would figure it all out in time as these "dreams" again, are not yet "ideas." At the river, to begin our second run around the downtown section of Wilkes-Barre with Public Square in the middle of the trip, we would have to get to the other side of River Street, and the other side of the dike to begin a new run.

I would suspect that the best way to do this part right in front of the Wilkes Center for the Performing Arts would be to go underground. Heck, maybe we would even have an underground Train Station there also so Wilkes Students can take the train all around Wilkes-Barre.

What a neat idea? Thank You! But, right now as noted, it is in the "dream stage." It is not crazy, but it is way out of the box, if not a bit off the wall. Perhaps some national figure like a rich ex-president or another philanthropist might consider underwriting the whole thing. Wilkes-Barre could again become an oasis of beauty and innovation in Northeastern PA, for all to see and for all to visit. And I am convinced that just as in *Field of Dreams*: "if we build it, they would come."

I do not care who helps but with the right people, Wilkes-Barre can show how it can be done. I am thinking that perhaps climate change advocate billionaire, Tom Steyer or billionaire Libertarians, such as the Koch Brothers, or perhaps Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffet, or Microsoft founder Bill Gates might want to pitch in to help Wilkes-Barre in its trail back to glory. Why not? I do propose though Mayor Brown (that sounds good doesn't it) that we put a big letter in the Wall Street Journal seeking a billionaire to adopt our City and get his or her name on all the neat stuff we hope to build to create the most unique City in the world. Why settle for green cheese when we can go for the moon.

How often do you think anybody asks these gents for a small handout for a city on its way back? In my original Wilkes-Barre book, looking at the great spirit of Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, I wrote:

“Maybe Microsoft's Paul Allen, Seattle Seahawks owner, would like to help. God knows we could use the help.” Unfortunately in October 2018, Paul Allen passed to the angels. He was a great adventurer and a good man, and we will all miss him. Paul Gardner Allen was an American business magnate, investor, software engineer, humanitarian, and philanthropist.

Alongside Bill Gates, Allen co-founded Microsoft in 1975, which helped spark the microcomputer revolution and later, with some help from IBM, the company became the world's largest PC software company.

Paul Allen would have liked Wilkes-Barre's projects. Never say never. I bet there is a foundation out there in which noble causes such as ours can be fulfilled by making the proper request. I urge Wilkes-Barre officials, hopefully our own George Brown in 2019, to make such a request. Then, the dream can become an idea and a plan overnight.

Before he became President, while he was still loved by the media in 2015, and he had a hit show, my personal pick would have been the master builder, Donald Trump as he would know how to get it done. I thought that perhaps he could team with a guy like Paul Allen. Just like there is no reason to rule out Paul Allen. There is no reason to rule out the Trump Corporation or the Trump Family, or Donald Trump himself if this project tickles his fancy.

My point is that there are a lot of good people, liberal and conservative just waiting for a town like Wilkes-Barre to help them move on to a great project where their fortunes can mean something to regular people such as the people of Wilkes-Barre, PA.

Maybe the Wilkes-Barre Project can help us borrow a name from Reno Nevada, which we know is "The Biggest Little City in the World." Wilkes-Barre can become "*The Funnest Little City in America*" or something like that. We could bring in the professional namers or have a contest to get the right name.

Hey, maybe Mr. Allen, a sports lover like many of us, has heirs who would help us bring a "Wilkes-Barre Barons" minor league team back to Artillery Park. We know this great field on the West side in Wilkes-Barre is now used by Wilkes University's Baseball Team. They could play every now and then if not permanently when Wilkes is not at home.



### << The Late Great Frank Pasquini

Can you imagine when the new Barons would play the SWB Yankees? And, why not? Good talk sometimes creates good dreams which sometimes create good ideas. Let's keep them coming.

If I had my way, I would have Wilkes-Barre's greatest funds development person of all time, my great friend Frank Pasquini, RIP, working on all these solicitations. He would bring them in for sure for Wilkes-Barre. I would need to contact God for that one I know. But God is always on my contact list. Our great friend Frank Pasquini, a can-do guy went to the Lord on March 2, 2017. Look at the gleam in his eye. Frank would have gotten it done.

I am not suggesting that all of these areas would need to be traffic free, especially in the beginning as we perfected the notion. Remember it is all still a dream. However, the speed limit within the two-block radius around the Square would need to be reduced to perhaps no more than 5 or 10 miles per hour, while we tried our best to make this work—if of course, most of us think it is a good dream worth putting into a better idea. Nothing worth having is easy. Would you not enjoy working on something like this?

Maybe the first part built would be the part on the other side of the dike. It could run from Wilkes to Kings on the river side of the dike. Why? Well, folks—why not? Wilkes-Barre could become the “Neatest Little City in the World.” I like that.

I know that this is an out of the box notion to say the least. We would have to think really big. A notion is something between a dream and

an idea. Being out of the box is sometimes a very lonely notion. I hope somebody is out here with me but, rest assured, I am a quick study and I would be pleased to tell this story as it evolves—to anybody who will listen.

I would advise our next Mayor, hopefully George Brown, not to take action unless there is a consensus and a probability of success. That's why we need a guy like Frank Pasquini, and his friends with the Benjamins (\$100.00 bill) in the bank.

## **Spurs to Pittston and a Barney Street Mall**

10. Create a RR Spur to Barney Street Mall
11. Create a RR spur to Pittston and Scranton and on to NY & Phila.
14. Create a City full of mini-malls in vacant Lots

### **Can we stretch our Wilkes-Barre CityCircle Train to Pittston?**

Stretch your imaginations, please. How about a nice bike / walking trail adjacent to the "choo choo train" that one day may be circling the Square two-blocks out, each day in the future. How about extending a train from Wilkes-Barre past Eighth Street and right on into Pittston PA, the home of the greatest Tomato Festival on the planet. I see there is a lot of track already on that side of the river bank. A bike path right next to it sounds like a pretty good idea.

Since a train around the city is more than just a little project, if we gain the interest in bicycling and we act on it, we can surely create a bike path along the same route. Even without the train, which I know is a dream, and not yet an idea, why not be able to ride a bike, reasonably unencumbered from Wilkes-Barre, along the river to Pittston? Now, there's an idea. While others say, "Why?" Let's help Wilkes-Barre be known in the future as "the City that says 'Why Not?'"

## Can we stretch Wilkes-Barre CityCircle Train to Barney Street?

There are train tracks right alongside Barney Street at Horton. Our WB CityCircle Train can have a spur from Genetti's to CrisNics on Barney Street and then when the Barney Street Mall is completed, it will connect right to downtown. Let's talk about it.

## How about a great new neighborhood mini mall?

14. Create a City full of mini-malls in vacant Lots

15. Create a street mall between Horton St & the Creek on Barney St.

One of my favorite neighborhood haunts has always been the Barney Inn in the South Wilkes-Barre Section. Its tradition of great food and great refreshments is well known even as the ownership has changed over the years.

The current place, CrisNics is as good as it gets. With regular fare such as Lobster and great steaks, and as my friends Barbara and Dennis enjoyed just a short-time ago, Liver and Onions, and a Haddock platter. Dennis said "the Liver & Onions was as good as he had in his life," and Barbara felt that her fish dinner was almost as good as Lobster Tail.



I love the Chris Nics' Reuben's, Irish fare, and their pizza with light cheese, extra sauce and extra onions. Can't beat it! And their drinks are fine too.

So, in my dreams, I see this little section of Barney Street cut off from the world and made into a mini mall with wooden sidewalks, hitching rails, bannisters, bike

racks, and a few wooden canopies. CrisNics already has a huge parking lot, and its own great canopy which covers its "outdoor pavilion" in the rear. Why not invite some horse groomers in to take the kids on some pony rides in the summer? Where else in WB can we get this treat?. It does not all have to come back to Public Square. How about Barney Square as a name for the SWB mini-mall. ?

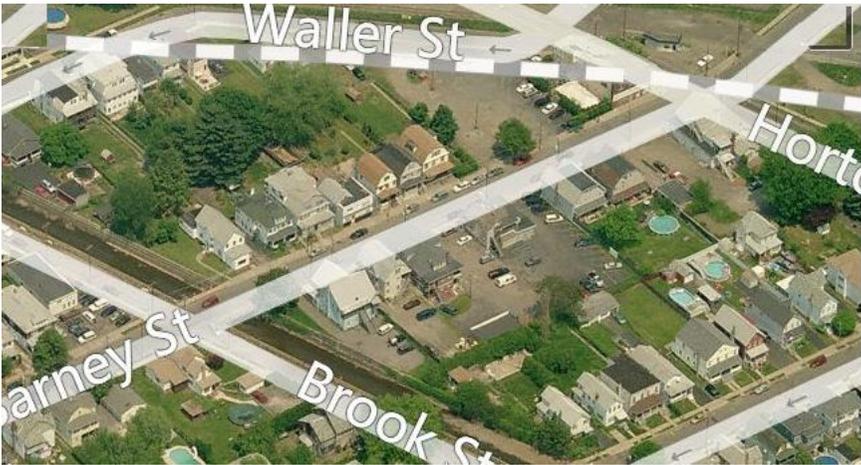
The “CrisNics” family is very supportive of Wilkes-Barre and I bet they would love to see their immense parking lot become a multi-story parkade, paid for by the efforts of guys with the same spirit as Frank Pasquini. There would be no traffic on this Barney Street block and the parkades would be accessible only from Waller or Regent Streets. It would take just a few steps to arrive at CrisNics or any other finery in the new Barney Square Mini-Mall.

I also am thinking about a back alley in between Regent Street and Barney to take the traffic over the new bridge. It would be a shame not to use that brand-new bridge. Perhaps some novel store can emerge by the creek and make use of the creek when it has enough water. I am not sure what—right now but my noggin is always cooking something up. How about a stocked fishing pond? How about kids fishing in Solomon’s Creek?

Abe's and the Barney Street Lunch are already in place as two of the best Hot Dog luncheonettes in the State, and they would fit in perfectly in this new Barney Mini-Mall.

Both have a ton of parking that the possible alley from Horton Street or from Regent Street could reach effectively. For big time parking availability, there is a huge vacant lot right now on the corner of Horton and Barney Streets caddy-corner to the CrisNics.

It is amazing what you can accomplish if you actually think it is possible. If you are not sure of what is possible, and what is not possible, that's where dreaming comes in. If you think Wilkes-Barre can afford none of this; that's where a great dreamer like Frank Pasquini comes in. All things are possible. By the way, as a reminder, the late and great Frank Pasquini did a great imitation of Congressman Dan Flood. And he smiled all the while.



There are also train tracks across from CrisNics, which might be a way to connect to the Public Square Choo Choo if that separate dream ever materializes. How about a quick way uptown and back down to Barney Street to CrisNics or Abe's, or the Barney Street Lunch or the new Barney Street Mini-Mall.

### **What about a SWB mini-hotel or bed and breakfast?**

Ah, c'mon Brian are you nuts? While we are building the Barney Square Mini-Mall, we would need to dress up the existing houses a bit with a common old-west or old-Wilkes-Barre theme as a façade or a real front-face. That's how I see it. CrisNics is already in-theme as is the Barney Street Lunch, but the irreplaceable Abe's might need a façade to make it look like the Abe's retro of yore.

Once we have the houses looking nice on the front, there may be those willing to sell to the site developer or make further changes to fit the business plan. I can envision craft stores in some of the houses or perhaps a Wawa or a multi-building hotel.

There are two or more large former bar and store buildings across Barney Street from CrisNics. One was once a store called Williams where as a kid, I window shopped and found lots of board games. They look like apartments now. If you live in one of those, or any home on this block on either side of Barney Street, fear not! My brother-in law, Bill says on the corner was a great place called Mahon's which sold beer by the bucket in the war years.

Success breeds success! Nothing happens overnight in Wilkes-Barre or Scranton so there would be plenty of time for your voices to be heard. Owners of these facilities would have as we would say in the olden days—"first dibs."



The look for Craft stores, bed & breakfast, & mini hotels

If the owners were amenable, the buildings could become the anchor for a nice multi-building hotel to include other homes that remain on the block. You would check in across the street from CrisNics and be assigned a room in one of the homes that were part of the "First Dibs Hotel Complex."

Obviously, this part would take a lot of planning; but can you envision how nice this would be? Why not? Again, benefactors and developers would be needed. The people left behind could not be left behind or this dream, almost reaching an idea, could never happen. Maybe they become owners, or their separation packages are so huge, they would not want to say "NO."

## **Show a vacant lot & I'll show a future mini-mall**

There are some pretty large vacant kits in our City in most sections and neighborhoods. Many of these are big enough to support a mini-mall. I am not talking about strip malls with big stores that often become rundown and unsightly. I am talking about attractive places

that might include a nice restaurant and/or a great specialty grocery store and/or a gourmet fish market as the anchor. Satellite Thrift stores run by churches or the Salvation Army can also serve as nice anchors in the mini malls.



A nice mini-mall with Thrift Shop in North Lake Tahoe

How about four to ten small stores like the mini Thrift shop above in the same area with parking or Tram Car or Push-Cart service close by. How about a restaurant with a bar etc.? How about a once a half-hour Cable Car gasoline vehicle can be made available that a few days a week take people from the High Rises to the mini-malls for shopping—and even brings them back!

**Think about it! With good design and planning we can do anything.**

There may be many other areas of the City in vacant spots of town or almost vacant spots, where rejuvenation and a return to prominence is practical, but the folks may have already given up. Another slogan and a reality check may be necessary: *“No giving up in Wilkes-Barre will be permitted.”*

I'd love to find the ghost of my buddy and John Anstett's good buddy Frank Pasquini to make a house call on anybody, who seems to have given up on anything, and he will bring his personal buddy "ole cheerios" Gus Genetti in to work to close the deal.

My message in this chapter of course has been that to *Make Wilkes-Barre over as a New Wilkes-Barre--it* all starts with a dream. Dreams become ideas when they seem practical; ideas are translated into plans, and then action is taken to implement the good things that are planned. We can do whatever we choose. If we dream and ultimately pick our best ideas, we might even be able to get a lot of them done. Wouldn't that be nice?

Who knows what the next great idea will be for Wilkes-Barre? I am waiting to hear the existing WB Official Administration or the next if need be, fire off a few affirmations or a few counter ideas to the ones I have discussed in this chapter. Whoever the Mayor may be in 2019, (We're hoping for George Brown) we should not care so much if he or she embraces the notion of thinking through dreams and ideas that can be worked one way or another to become winning action plans and implementations. Nothing that has never been proposed ever works. It can't. I know George Brown can do it for sure.

### **Think about this—Are these the ramblings of a mad man?**

Think of this covered, warm and heated passenger train on these tracks in winter, with its windows wide open to the world in the summer. It would need a number of stops, say four—one at each corner at least, to make it effective.

In my ideal dream, the train would be electric, which might convince Tom Streyer to invest in the dream. Additionally, if I had my way, there would be no charge to ride this train. However, if a ticket were issued and verified at some stores, a small percentage (less than one percent perhaps) of the purchase price could be passed back to the City in this electronic age to pay any expenses. These are just raw thoughts. It would be better if it were free.

I would not want any novel idea such as this to cost taxpayers as for sure the people in Wilkes-Barre, the County, and the School District are well overtaxed.

If this notion of a train circling Wilkes-Barre idea were made possible, it would surely be a remarkable accomplishment for Wilkes-Barre— don't you think? People would come far and wide to experience our experience as we took one big step towards returning Glory to our great City. We would be a model of a City that stepped up to meet its challenges.

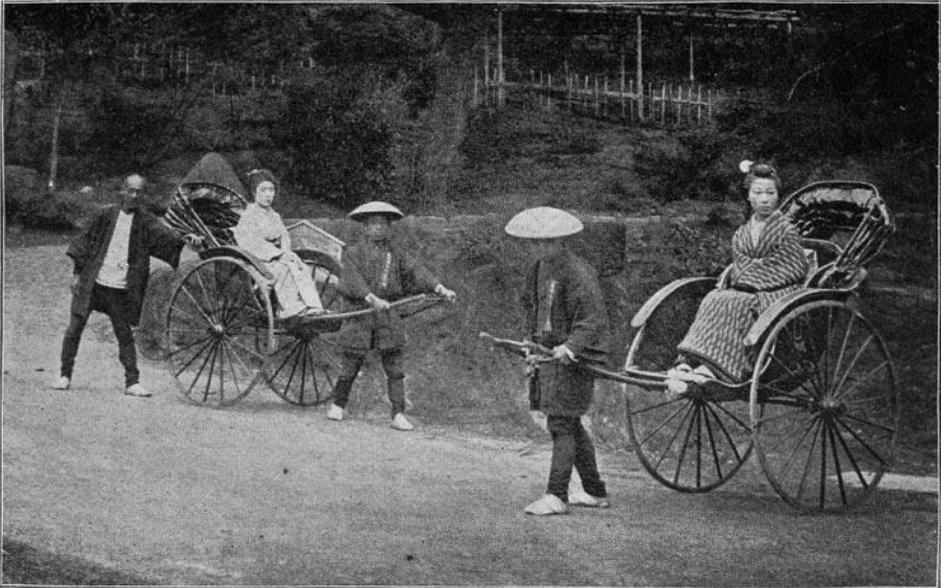
Our City would become a magnet for customers and patrons for our shopkeepers. It would spawn other industries and the job opportunities would benefit us all big time. Those living in this new City and this area of the State would smile each time they walked outside. After all, the success of our local businesses has a lot to do with our own success as a city.

## **Stop the Tram Car, please!**

12. Run Tram cars downtown in warmer weather
13. Rickshaw and Rolling Chair like transportation downtown

## **Getting around the new Wilkes-Barre Shopping District.**

Between the four major perimeter train stops and Public Square, I can envision rechargeable battery powered electric tram cars carrying people from the various stops on the perimeter to the Square... just like at Disney World. Maybe Disney will give us a few of their Tram Cars to help us out! We'll have to ask a member of the Frank Pasquini clan about those possibilities.



Rickshaw



Rolling Chairs

There would be no need for a switching station at the Square for Tram Car transfers as each car would go the full route and hit all the streets and stop at every block within the perimeter in which an egress was made possible. It would be a nice ride unto itself. In my vision, this also would be no charge but perhaps we would ask for a donation, please. How many tram cars would we need? Thank you for the question. Answer: As many as we need!

As the big train stops at major Tram Car drop off points, there could also be entrepreneurs with push carts, like those on the Atlantic City Boardwalk or the Far East. Perhaps you've seen these clever vehicles on the Boardwalk recently. They seat about two if large people such as me are in the cart; three to four otherwise.

They have weather protection as you can see in the picture for short-distance travel on bad rainy days. With a strong push-man working to please passengers; expecting and getting his or her recompense (tips) for a job well done, the trip could be swift, full of great Wilkes-Barre sights, and a lot of fun.

These entrepreneurs would take their carts full of passengers over a smooth trail (provided by Wilkes-Barre engineers and craftsmen) to any destination within the perimeter, including another train stop. There would also be drop off rental bikes available as are now prevalent in major cities. Don't ask why! Instead, ask why not?

For a time as many recall several years ago, Wilkes-Barre had these rental bikes available at Gus Genetti's. Bikes would be permitted to go anywhere in the train or tram area. There could also be defined bike lanes for personally owned bikes to get to and from safely. How about some bike parking spots within this area. There would be very few if any cars, and those that were permitted on the uptown streets would be going very slowly. Of course a challenge for City officials would be to use the parking spaces in the City without creating a danger.

Challenges are welcome and all problems are solvable with the right attitude. If you like any of the ideas that are presented in this book, ask the official you plan to elect as Mayor what they think.

Always elect the right officials (George Brown, please) and voice your opinion to the leaders of the City to represent your line of thinking for a great start on returning Wilkes-Barre to a higher level of greatness one step at a time. If your leaders have no interest in you, perhaps they deserve a return favor.

There are naysayers in every project. You may know that it took about fifteen to twenty years for the beautiful Luzerne County Courthouse to be finally finished in 1909. But, the forebears of ours at least had a dream, then an idea, then a plan to make it happen eventually, and

they took the action to make sure this beautiful structure now graces the River Common and River Street. .



Luzerne County Courthouse in WB -- a monument to good planning 1909

Naysayers are good as long as they do not simply declare that Wilkes-Barre is not worth saving, and they move themselves and their belongings out of town. I would advise naysayers to stick around and see what Wilkes-Barre can do when we have a mind to.

I know it is easy to declare anybody like me with such dreams as a nut for putting such "out-of-box" solutions out there to be seen by the public. I am not running for office so there is no ulterior motive.

I would bet that since I know what I am doing in making these notions known, most psychologists would say that because I am coherent in that understanding, I am not nuts. Your opinion may differ but that is what life is about—honest debate before action.

But, then again, the final determination is yours. I think that if the Wilkes-Barre Project (The train and tram & people push carts, & bike paths and mini-malls, etc.) are not on your list of good ideas, please at least select officials that have an open mind about crime prevention

and a more inviting public infrastructure that is clean and overall a City that is affordable.

I do encourage all of those who still use their brains, to think independently of government. Government pushes its thoughts upon us all but when we wake up, we find a great crony of government taking his or her cash to the bank. Let's hold government accountable so that we, the citizens of the City can get the best we can from living in Wilkes-Barre with an honest *no favorites* government.

I would suggest that we all use those God-given minds of ours to come up with our own dreams for Wilkes-Barre—big and small dreams alike. We must all think for ourselves? What good is a City official who sits around waiting for another federal grant to pave a few streets or tear down a few more monuments or great homes or buildings? Our leaders must be like George Brown. They must come up with notions and ideas and goals and take action to achieve them. If a candidate does not want to serve the people, don't run for office, please!

I think we can even do a lot more than that, even if in the end, we cannot convince anybody to fund our Choo Choo train off and around Public Square. I sure am no Walt Disney, for sure, but can you imagine if the greatest Imagineer in America, was shut down simply because he chose to imagine?



# Chapter 11 Six Great Ideas for Wilkes-Barre

16. Facilitate Industrial Comeback -- 5 large mfgs. for new jobs in the City
17. Help Anthracite. Coal Industry In NEPA Come Back Some Day? -- for jobs
18. Target desirable small businesses such as micro-breweries for city
19. Find Downtown Developer for Sterling Property & the Annex.
20. Invite developers to offer a new Palm House by Courthouse
21. Create several adopt a street programs – 1 financially and 2 for anti-litter

## Bring back some big manufacturers

The huge Muskin Plant in Parsons/Miners Mills is still available as are other spots in the City for some heavy industry. We've got some good space for some nice manufacturing businesses. Back in its heyday, Wilkes-Barre proper had a lot of plants as did those areas just outside of the city. And, that is not including the mines.

16 Facilitate Industrial Comeback -- 5 large mfgs. for new jobs in the City

Would it not be great if Wilkes-Barre with the help of the Chamber of Commerce and others were able to attract businesses of consequence right into a great spot in the City.

## Wilkes-Barre once had lots of industry

Story by Brian Kelly

I can remember even as a kid, many manufacturing and distribution industry plants and factories right here in Wilkes-Barre, PA. When I was in my early twenties working with IBM, there was still a lot of industry here. Did local policies and union favoritism cause these industries to bail to other industry favorable states?

Ask the one-time owners of Muskin Corporation in Miners Mills their opinion of that? Did all of Wilkes-Barre and our politics contribute to Muskin choosing Midway Georgia over Miners Mills in Wilkes-Barre? I was the IT consultant for Muskin in Miners Mills and then for a year or so later helping them in Midway Georgia. I know the answer. I do

not remember any top officials in Wilkes-Barre offering to mediate a resolution. It may have been able to be stopped if somebody tried.

For many years in NEPA, I worked with IBM Marketing Representatives, who other companies would call salesmen. My job was to assure the installation of some of the biggest computers in the larger businesses in Wilkes-Barre and surrounds. IBM knew Wilkes-Barre had potential and its businesses responded to the new computer revolution by spending a minimum \$100,000 at the time to become technologically more capable.

You may remember Klein Candy and the Key Stores, in the 1950's on the first or second block from the Square. My dad would stop at one of those places with me in the Christmas season to buy good candy at the lowest price possible.

Klein engaged in other endeavors such as distributing convenience store products such as candy, canned soup, lettuce and vegetables, cigarettes and soda.

Klein's customers were anybody in business that would buy what they were selling. They even found gas stations who otherwise would not be interested in anything, but gas and oil, proceed to sign up with Klein for convenience goods.

Pantry Quick's, Quick Mart's, Orloski's and the like were all served from Klein's huge warehouse in Wilkes-Barre. These stores most often sold gasoline in most cases and they still do.

Klein eventually bought the old Economy Store Warehouse in Hanover Township, just outside of Wilkes-Barre and they continued growing as a company. They expanded their business and became a billion-dollar enterprise operating in eight states. Wilkes-Barre was their home base. They were doing business in about eight states in the East when they had to sell the business because of financial reasons. Before this, they felt that they were invincible.

Unfortunately, for a lot of professionals who worked for Klein in technology and accounting, the company could not make it as it approached invincibility, and they had to sell the business. This all

happened in the last ten years. Perhaps it was bad management? Perhaps it was too much debt? I choose not to judge.

The new Canadian-based company, Core Mark, though not American, is doing quite well in the same location, but without a lot of the excellent NEPA jobs that were once here. Core-Mark brought the big jobs back to Canada. It was another big loss for Wilkes-Barre and Hanover Township.

So, even Klein Candy, a very successful enterprise found they could not make it because they grabbed too hard at being big. So, with their huge debt, they were still able to sell the whole deal to a Canadian Company, Core-Mark for a profit.

Core-Mark as most businesses cared about one thing—the ability to sustain the business at the least possible cost. Therefore, as one of their first actions, they fired just about all of the professional people. As a side show, they got rid of their huge IBM computers and they hooked themselves up to their home office in Western Canada. The home base was using the same IBM technology as Klein, so the adaptation was less costly.

The Phone bill had to have been enormous, but they got rid of a lot of US workers, who lived mostly in Wilkes-Barre. That's what we in the US, call competition, but in this case, Wilkes-Barre and Hanover Township lost while the Klein owners and Core-Mark gained.

Maybe tomorrow, these same people will consider lending a helping hand to Wilkes-Barre in one way or another. Perhaps establishing a business in Wilkes-Barre can once again become a good idea.

Unfortunately for Wilkes-Barre, the Klein story has been repeated in one way or another for far too long in Wilkes-Barre and throughout the Wyoming Valley. How could our officials let a billion dollar company with major roots in Wilkes-Barre get away without trying to get them to change their thinking?

Let's look at another major company, Kay Wholesale Drug. They were originally located just outside of the City right next to the former Leslie Faye building. Leslie Faye of course is another story. When Kay got bigger, they were too big for the Route 315 facility, so they moved

to the former Alta Footwear plant on the Sans Souci Highway right outside of Wilkes-Barre on the other side. They had grown their business from \$10 million to \$300 million by using IBM technology properly.

When larger competitors began to invest even more in their technology infrastructures and their marketing teams, Kay was taking in some profits for the owners, and so they fell behind their competition. When they could no longer sustain the business, they were \$50,000,000 in debt.

After work on September 27, 1994, 121 otherwise happy Kay Wholesale Drug Co. employees chipped in for an "it's-all-over" party, and afterwards, they all went home for good. The 54-year-old firm, which sold drugs at wholesale prices to pharmacies in an expanding number of states, shut down and began a liquidation process.

I have seen far too many endings like this in the greater Wilkes-Barre job market. Kraft Associates on Scott Street was another. Where is a countervailing force to help companies like these stay in business? We need to create an industry support group to help companies come here and be successful, and we need them to stay successful.

The George Brown Administration is one that will understand business. When we elect George Mayor, we will be on our way to an industrial comeback.

## **We need an industrial comeback**

When I was in my teens, people would walk or take the bus to work or even ride a bike to work in most months of the year. Stegmaier Brewery, Gibbons Brewery (still open under a new name Lion, Inc.), Carter Rubber aka Carter Footwear, Craft Associates, who made fancy furniture were among the many Wilkes-Barre plants that hired hundreds and thousands of residents. Other than Lion, Inc., they are all gone. Now, for all intents and purposes, Klein is gone, and Kay wholesale is off the radar. Hundreds of jobs are gone for Wilkes-Barre and surrounds. With so many lost businesses and jobs, can we not begin a comeback? We still have a lot of plants that are ready for a comeback.

There are remnants of possibilities but try to get a job in manufacturing in Wilkes-Barre. I dare you. Try to find some place in Wilkes-Barre that makes something other than a pizza or a pie or a cup-cake. Even the 18-store Old River Road Bakery, and its successor, Boulevard Bakery, as well as the Barney Street Bakery, Kornblatts, and Keystate, are all gone. They were great, but it did not matter. Did Wilkes-Barre officials ever figure out why? George Brown will figure out why and change our City to bring business back.

The major industry in all of Wyoming Valley in the 1970s was garment manufacturing. These shops made ladies dresses, pants, suits etc. Leslie Faye, originally just outside of Wilkes-Barre by Miners Mills had a billion dollar company headquartered right there on Highway 315 that went south sometime in the 1990's with hundreds of employees displaced. The company survived and moved what was left to the Hanover Industrial Complex, but then what? Was any of this good for the garment worker? No sirree Bob!

On May 6, 1995, Leslie Fay closed its last U.S. plant. Saying it was no longer possible to make dresses profitably in the United States. Leslie Fay Cos. said in its last hurrah that it would close its only domestic plant at the end of July 2018 and eliminate 600 jobs. Now Leslie Faye is gone, gone, gone.

There were literally hundreds of small *cut and sew shops* in NEPA. There were also other big-time apparel manufacturing companies such as Rex Industries and Carter Rubber. There was a huge Silk Mill on high street making textiles and just down Blackman Street a bit was the Atwater Throwing Company, who also made textiles. So, what happened?

Planters Peanuts and the infamous Peanut Man were also a big part of the landscape. They of course were bought out and were moved from Wilkes-Barre. There was a time when all you had to do is want to work, and there was a nice job.



This job more than likely was in Wilkes-Barre and it was probably fun, and it paid well, just waiting for you to want it.

Additionally, the milkmen not only existed; they competed. Purvin and Woodlawn Dairies—Dolly Madison ice Cream, were in town also and they all contributed to the economy,

and their employees were tickled for their paychecks. Yes, they enjoyed working there!

There were also lots of lumber houses and there were lots of building of buildings and homes though much of the action was in the suburbs of Wilkes-Barre. There are many homes in need of repair in Wilkes-Barre so a local lumber company that could compete with Lowes and Home Depot ought to be able to make it—especially if they had a team of craftsmen to build (Put together) what they sold.

Places such as Wickes, Ryman Lumber, Scouton-Lee Lumber, Franks Lumber, and others had their day in the sun. And, of course there was International Color Corporation, and the Sunday Independent helping the newspaper industry.

Mining had its great days here for years headquartered by the Glen Alden and the Lehigh Valley Coal Companies. Miners worked in the Red Ash Mine, Prospect Colliery, Pine Ridge Breaker, Stanton Colliery, and the South Wilkes-Barre Colliery. Other industries

included General Cigar Company, Penn Tobacco Company, and E. A. Roos, etc.

The Railroads were here big time in Wilkes-Barre with the Wilkes-Barre and Eastern Railroad and the Delaware and Hudson. Coal always needed rails for shipping.

Sports figures made a few bucks in Wilkes-Barre. Eddie White may be the only sports industrialist that I know about. In addition to entertainment, the sports teams such as the Baseball Wilkes-Barre Barons, and the Basketball Wilkes-Barre Barons were sports employers in our area until they disappeared. It was lots easier in the former glory days to get a good job—even in sports. Remember, not all employees in sports enterprises are athletes.

You may have heard of the Vulcan Iron Works. They were instrumental in the war effort. Big time industry. They were a big-time manufacturer and employed lots of people and when the war broke out, they were very busy during the war years. They were right in the middle of South Wilkes-Barre. They were not into small stuff. They made train locomotives. They were a nationally known manufacturer of railway locomotives from 1849 to 1954. We're ready for more of the same.

The Delaware & Hudson RR Freight Station, its Round House, etc. Wilkes-Barre Coal Company, Wilkes-Barre Stove Factory. Selltex Factors , Hazard Iron Works, Wilkes-Barre Carriage Company, Ma's Old Fashioned Bottling Company, Eagle Bottling Works, John Zubris Sr.'s Star Beverage, and many others. People worked there and they got a fair wage in Wilkes-Barre's glory days. They are all gone.

So, how do we ever get back to those days? My best answer is that we take it up as a goal and every goal has a shot at being achieved. We dream; we come up with ideas; we plan; and then we take action. We never give up despite the corpses of huge companies that lay in Wilkes-Barre's wake. The wake shows us the task will not be easy.

Please do not elect slouches who simply want a piece of glory and are happy to take money from the people without giving back. We want the best leaders possible in place and we will follow the best elected leaders to a victory for a new Wilkes-Barre.

All things are possible but not when none of them are on anybody's agenda. Let's put the return to glory days of Wilkes-Barre on all our to-do lists. Know please that I endorse George Brown as the best person to get the job done.

Let's all stop saying "NO" to everything just simply because we live in Wilkes-Barre. Let's start by saying a big "YES" to everything simply because we live in Wilkes-Barre. When we think that we can, our return to glory will be right around the corner. Let's change the rise and fall of Wilkes-Barre, to the fall and rise of Wilkes-Barre. It's time. Yes, we can and then some. But we have to believe! Tom Leighton's saying from way back is true today. Nobody can work miracles but George C. Brown can get us off the dime for sure.

17. **Help Anthracite. Coal Industry in NEPA Come Back Some Day? -- for jobs**
18. **Target desirable small businesses such as micro-breweries for city**
19. **Find Downtown Developer for Sterling Property & the Annex.**
20. **Invite developers to offer a new Palm House by Courthouse**

## **Help Coal Prosper**

Besides several needed designer positions, the City needs a good person on the team, preferably funded by donors or outsiders who can work with the businesses we have – even the Anthracite Coal Companies in our areas to help keep them here and get them interested in hiring people from Wilkes-Barre.

## **Micro-Brewery**

This same person can work to find other businesses that would fit in our mini malls or in available plant space. How about a nice micro-brewery in a new WB mini-mall ?

## **Big Hotel in the Sterling Complex on top of big parkade**

I know there are downtown hotel projects that have gone south and there are some sparks about the Sterling Annex and there was even some work done there recently. Somehow, the Annex project and the Sterling lot itself remain doubtful no matter how much hype is given them.

We need to find somebody who loves Wilkes-Barre to help us find a way to make these properties work for Wilkes-Barre. Why not a big Trump hotel?. Why not ask Michael Bloomberg to come do something in Wilkes-Barre. How about a Bloom hotel? As a city, let's get reduced postage and let's start sending out the cards and letters and never stop. When somebody adopts Wilkes-Barre and gets their name shared with the name Wilkes-Barre, the doors will open to us.

I bet there are some people who love flower gardens who might be interested in being the Miffintiff of a great flowery opportunity by the Courthouse in Wilkes-Barre's River Street. Look at these beautiful pictures of the Palm House the way it was in Wilkes-Barre's golden years. It can be yours to rent from the City. Look at these pictures to show you how you can put in a beautiful greenhouse with the finest horticultural array ever seen in the Northeast.

There must be a bunch of great gardeners out there who have Wilkes-Barre ties who would love to create a beautiful spot to visit to see their wares. Plus, why not put some exotic vegetables in this masterful greenhouse. Somebody must want to bring this back. The Palm House was so beautiful. It can be again.



In the background, the Coal Company Building became King's College-- a great perspective.

How beautiful it can again be!



## How about “owning” a street in Wilkes-Barre?

21 Create several adopt a street programs – 1 financially and 2 for anti-litter

Looking for ways to improve neighborhoods? Well, I am pleased to say that other cities have found great opportunities to do exactly that with what they call *adopt a street programs*. There are two opportunities to adopt a street. One is for a well-to-do person who would like to help in a small way rather than adopt the whole city. The other is to engage in anti-litter and street beautification projects that do not cost a million dollars.

Neighbors on the street could join the cohort and recommend things that could be done to freshen and beautify a particular City street and / or build some small homes in vacant lots or a mini mall or eliminate eyesores. This would cost somebody some money.

Then, of course the street can be adopted to assure it remains clean. These residents should have permission to call upon the big city sweepers and the Public Works crew right after they have an effective anti-litter campaign.

In cities such as Charlotte for example, volunteers join in to keep Charlotte streets litter-free. There are many active volunteer groups who clean up hundreds of miles of city streets across the country. Neighborhoods, businesses, families, and individuals can make a difference in their community by adopting a City street through this grassroots litter removal program.

As an Adopt-a-Street volunteer in Charlotte for example, you would receive:

- Two "adoption" signs with your name installed along the adopted route
- Clean up supplies (litter pickers, gloves & safety vests loaned for the duration of volunteer service)

Volunteers must submit a report after each clean up. Minimum of three annual cleanups required / 2-year commitment. Volunteers are asked to remove illegal signs along the roadway during each clean up. Additional opportunities include storm drain marking and graffiti spotting

Overall, Adopt-A-Street is thus a program that empowers volunteer groups to keep their neighborhoods litter-free one street at a time. To date, more than 19,000 volunteers from 20 cities have removed over 211,000 pounds of litter from adopted streets!

How does participation benefit neighborhoods?

- Increases property values
- Reduces litter-removal costs
- Fosters pride (people litter less in clean neighborhoods)
- Frees up maintenance crews to perform other tasks



## Chapter 12 Ask for Help, Please

22. Hire a Grant Writer / New Business Coordinator Paid for by outside funding
24. Hire a City Designer for building / infrastructure projects Paid by outside
26. Hire a designer / coordinator for smaller special projects artists Paid by outside
28. Create Major Funding / Donation Opportunities for the City
29. Write letter to NY Times: Adopt WB cost \$100 million for RR & mini malls
30. Change City charter and all signs to say this city adopted by [name]
31. Create programs for former well-to-do locals , donate & help startup businesses



Most of these notions are self-explanatory and so in this chapter, we will not elaborate on these notions. They reflect the fact, that Wilkes-Barre is like a small poor southern town that was spoiled by a major coal boom in the 1800s. Jobs were once plentiful, and wages were once higher than most. Now neither is true.

Yet, there are graduates of WB High Schools and alums of Wilkes-Barre itself who have gone on to be very successful. None of these fine people want to see another person in Wilkes-Barre have to lose their home just to survive. So, we must ask for help beyond the poor tax base of this City.

Some who have done well in life and moved on may blame this City for holding them back while others may credit Wilkes-Barre—perhaps a neighbor, a teacher, a grocer, a businessman, who helped them know that the world was theirs to conquer. If those people were made aware

that Wilkes-Barre now needed help to begin to become the town it was when they first became successful, I would bet that this town with George Brown as its leader would be able to make the finest comeback.

George C. Brown has adopted the Wilkes-Barre Plan from this book, and it is designed to bring this City back better than any city in distress in America could ever do. We need to reach the people who have benefitted from Wilkes-Barre and now would be pleased to return the favor.

So, it is not just good police for crime fighting that we need or good firemen for home protection, it is also some bright people from the community that we can hire to help represent our city in talking to the people out there who might be willing to help us in any number of ways.

A novel idea is that Wilkes-Barre as a city in distress would put itself up for adoption. I would not let the city be adopted cheaply. Instead, I am thinking about \$100 million dollars. We can take it from one donor or a consortium of people who want to have a definable accomplishment to top their bucket list. Ten wealthy people who want to help Wilkes-Barre and become lawful adopters of this city would be able to meet the \$100 adoption fee and know for time eternal that they helped a one-time great city when it was down.

Whoever adopts the City will always have the best seat at any Wilkes-Barre event for sure from the parades to the Kirby center for major events with our thanks for sure. Additionally, in the signs that would typically say George Brown, Mayor of Wilkes-Barre, there would be an addendum to the sign which says adopted by so and so on such a date as a kind benefactor to help this city provide for its people – a better writer might come up with a better catch phrase.

To make this offer, I would suggest that Wilkes-Barre officials pen a letter to the Wall Street journal and/or the New York times advertising that Wilkes-Barre is looking to be adopted.

I think it will happen if we ask.

Remember the words,

If you build it, they will come.

In our case, if you come, we will be able to build it is more appropriate. I think offers for adoption of the City and for funding of special projects will come out of the woodwork. Don't you?

Besides the adoption program, it would be good for a person from the City to maintain contact with those who would like to help the city in any meaningful way. In this regard, I am thinking about creating programs in which former locals who have made it in life, are asked to donate and help to start businesses and help startup businesses.

They would feel good and our City would herald their efforts and thank them profusely.



## Chapter 13 Help for Elderly to Pay taxes / avoid foreclosure

31 Form Committee for private donations to help poverty-stricken citizens avoid foreclosure



Say you've lived in Wilkes-Barre all your life and you never earned a lot, but you were able to buy a house way back when everything was inexpensive and everybody seemed to be able to make ends meet. So now, you retire and since your earnings were never high, your Social Security check is minimal and since you never had a job for more than ten years, your multiple pensions do not amount to much.

Yet, somehow for years even after retirement, you have been able to get along—until about ten years ago. Then you found property taxes from the school district and the county and even the 26% property tax increase from the Leighton Administration making it tougher to afford the basics. With a 350% and growing poverty rate, there is not much money in Wilkes-Barre to go around. More and more people in Wilkes-Barre and across the state and are having to give up on their

homes despite how long it took to pay them off. Taxes are now so high, they have made it seem to poverty-stricken home owners that they are again paying rent. The big difference of course is that landlords would have them out on their ear if after one month, they were overdue on their rent.

The new landlords, City, County, and School District let them go three years without paying by adding unpaid penalties. But nobody bugs them like a landlord. So, after three years, they figure, they don't have to pay the taxes and it helps them survive.

Then, out of nowhere, they get registered letters. The new landlords who never bugged them their friendly local governments go ahead and put an ad in the paper that their homes of many years are being sold at a tax sale. Then it is all over for the dignity of owning one's own home and these once proud Wilkes-Barre citizens become wards of the state, dependent on the state for crumbs to sustain their lives. of life. Some adjust to life in a one-room flat, others despair and soon die. It is a casualty of property tax and social security payments that just don't match expenses.

It's not just Wilkes-Barre. It is a nationwide epidemic and it is a scourge against the elderly and disabled no matter how you look at it.

New Jersey has a story about a 90-year old lady named Gloria Turano. Like most people who buy home, she thought she'd be living on Skillman Avenue when she died, in the ranch home her late husband Louis built for them in 1953. She never wanted to leave it, and the decades of memories of raising a family it holds for her. "I thought the undertaker would take me out of here," the 90-year-old Turano said with a smile recently, sitting on a couch in the home's den. But as she spoke being interviewed, the house was not hers anymore.

The house now belongs to Fannie Mae, the government-sponsored mortgage company, which bought it for \$100 at a sheriff's sale last year after a reverse mortgage company foreclosed on it - shutting down a loan Turano took in 2004. The sorrowful, tear-jerking stories about foreclosures on the elderly and the handicapped could fill an encyclopedia, yet they go on.

Is there a way Wilkes-Barre could eliminate property taxes? Probably not but there are a few other communities that have been able to do so, but the replacement dollars have to come from someplace.

Property taxes are typically based on a certain dollar figure per \$1,000 of a property's assessed valuation —are how American cities and towns fund the vast majorities of their respective local budgets. One town that eliminated its property tax is Dewey Beach. Some of you may have vacationed there in the summertime.

Dewey Beach does not have a conventional form of taxation. The town has no property tax, and so it gets its revenue through fees and permits imposed on the homeowners and businesses. It is annoying but there is no property tax. If a home owner wants to cut down a tree in Dewey Beach, they have to pay the town for a permit, and if a restaurant wants to push some tables out of the way and make a dance floor for one night, they have to pay the town for a permit.”

Yes, homeowners are nagged by regular fees and permits as well. A group called DelawareRight.com claims that it ends up being “the business owners who pay the lion's share of the cost for running the town and providing the services that all citizens benefit from. Wilkes-Barre has had a long term problem with businesses leaving town so at least for now, this is not the solution for us.

Stafford, Texas has no property taxes either. So how does Stafford do it? The Texas city, which is reportedly the largest of about a dozen municipalities in Texas without property taxes. They get their revenue through sales taxes, franchise taxes and permit fees. In Texas, the statewide sales tax is 6.25 percent, and local communities can then add on a maximum of another 2 percent. These are all novel ideas and worth examining but the bottom line is Wilkes-Barre must do its best to reduce its expenses overall while at the same time keeping the city safe, clean, and affordable..

The folks from The Pennsylvania Coalition of Taxpayer Associations PCTA, has been moving forward on property tax for a number of years. They say that for school districts there is no “Holy Grail” of property tax reform. Any property tax reform measure involves shifting the tax levy from one type of tax to another – there's no free

ride. But there are ways to fund our schools and to ensure a better education for our children that are fairer and more effective than property taxes. We wish them well and support them 100%

To the extent that this group and the PA State Lawmakers are able to gain tax relief for the huge burden of school taxes on the elderly and disabled and the poverty-stricken, the more money is available for families to meet their needs and expenses, even if cities such as Wilkes-Barre cannot reduce property taxes by much.

We have demonstrated that many Pennsylvanians, including far too many from Wilkes-Barre lose their homes and a lifetime's work to sheriff's sales each year because they can no longer afford to pay their property taxes. Senior citizens on fixed incomes are increasingly forced to sell their homes because of unrelenting increases in their tax burden. Young families cannot afford to purchase a home because the per-month property tax escrow is simply too high.

Job losses, outmigration, and abysmal state economic performance caused by burdensome property taxes are devastating Pennsylvania's economy. Property tax relief is needed for sure.

HB 76 and SB 76, the Property Tax Independence Act, is supported by the Pennsylvania Coalition of Taxpayer Associations.

## **An Answer on Tax help for Wilkes-Barre**

People are foreclosed upon for two reasons related to unpaid debts. One is they don't pay their mortgage and two, they don't pay their real estate taxes. Either of these will cause you to lose your home. Neither is a good thing. The sorrowful stories about foreclose based on a mortgage default or a tax default are very similar. In the Ilyce Gink story about crowdfunding below, her example is about a mortgage, but the same crowdfunding notion would apply for a situation involving real estate taxes.

How can Wilkes-Barre help the elderly, indigent, disabled, and poverty stricken?

Back in 2013, on July 30, Ilyce Glink wrote a compelling article for MoneyWatch about people helping people. It is still relevant. Her article title is very novel, but it makes the point.

## **Can a crowd save a house?**

I thank MoneyWatch for my being able to print this article below.

### **Homeowners fight foreclosure through crowdfunding**

Homeowners facing foreclosure certainly hope so. Struggling borrowers are turning to new crowdfunding sites to raise money from friends, family and even strangers to keep up with their mortgage /tax payments.

Ruth Caspary, 45, has launched a crowdfunding campaign on GoFundMe after losing her job in 2009 as a visual effects artist. Finding a new job was tough, so instead she joined her husband's dance instruction business, "Salsa with Juan," as a marketing manager and dance instructor.

Although her new career reduced her income, the two made ends meet for a while through the business and various side jobs. But late last year they started falling behind on the mortgage payments for their three-bedroom Oakland home.

This spring, Caspary received a letter that her home would fall into foreclosure on August 3 unless she could catch up on her mortgage payments, totaling \$15,000. The couple tried working with their lender, but to little avail. So last month, Caspary and her husband, Juan Gil, decided to ask for help.

"I just figured we'd reach out to our community and sort of bare our souls," Caspary said.

She's not alone. Listings asking donors to "Help save my children's home" and "Help avoid foreclosure" are popping up across dozens of fundraising websites like GoFundMe, Indiegogo, FundRazr and GiveForward. Unlike Kickstarter, the popular crowdfunding site known mostly as a place where artists, inventors and

entrepreneurs can raise funds for creative projects, these sites allow people to request funds for any purpose. The site then takes a cut of the donations ranging from 4 to 10 percent.

Most of these crowdfunding sites were established for people who needed a platform to help them organize fundraising for a specific cause, whether for an athlete raising money to compete in a national competition or a family asking for help paying off medical bills after an emergency.

"Some of the earliest campaigns were split in half," GoFundMe CEO Brad Damphousse said. "On one side you had life's most exciting chapters: weddings and honeymoons and youth sports and education and travel -- the fun stuff. On the other you had the really challenging times: an accident or an illness and associated medical expenses. It really was split from the get-go, and we've seen that trend continue."

In contrast to a health crisis, and fairly or not, foreclosures are often regarded as an avoidable crisis. That may explain why homeowners so far are struggling to raise money. In the 100 or so campaigns on GoFundMe, less than 1 percent have been successful. On other sites like Indiegogo and FundRazr, not a single home has been saved.

Caspary said she has detected some skepticism regarding her fundraising campaign, with one friend calling it "trust fund" and others pointedly refusing to donate. Yet her campaign is one of the most successful, having raised more than \$7,500 and passing the halfway mark of the couple's fundraising goal.

Indeed, Caspary is far from discouraged, even as the time ticks down for her to send the money to the bank. The community has rallied around them, offering emotional support and help with promoting the business and finding them more work, she said. "It's just nice to me that people acknowledging what we're going through, and also that they're willing to help us grow," Caspary said. "If you've been good to your community, they will be good to you."

First published on July 30, 2013 / 1:04 PM © 2013 CBS Interactive Inc.. All Rights Reserved.

Ilyce Glink



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## **A Wilkes-Barre Committee for helping poverty-stricken citizens of the City**

31. Form Committee for private donations to help poverty-stricken citizens avoid foreclosure

We can and we must address this as a City administration. First of all, we need a committee of volunteers working with the City. We need an effective chair person. We need a procedure whereby somebody in tax trouble and in danger of foreclosure can approach the committee and meet with them. A second and very important part is to have donors contribute what they can through an on-line mechanism or through checks to the committee / City which can be stored in a separate account. Perhaps the committee can orchestrate its own crowdfunding.

For those approved to receive some forbearance from their taxes through this mechanism, the city would receive funds from this account and the individuals would be placed on solid footing thus avoiding foreclosure. Wyoming Valley for years has been *The Valley with a heart*. Wilkes-Barre must be a *City with a heart*.



# Chapter 14 Nineteen Other Great Ideas for the City to Mull Over



## All Part of George C. Browns Wilkes-Barre Plan

These ideas are all part of the George C. Brown for Mayor Platform. All of these notions will be given major weight in the Brown Administration. The other thirty-one points in the platform are in the prior chapters.

This chapter begins with a list of the 19 platform points so they can all be seen at once. They are numbered 32 to 50. Following the points being revealed below, the next part of the chapter shows the details behind these 19 platform points.

32. Programs for affluent former residents, donate & help startup businesses
33. Use WB Public Square even more effectively – local concerts, speeches
34. Support candidates for office – Use City Hall Council Chambers
35. Create Seniors Transportation Committee
36. Create Youth Activity Committee – such as CYC dances etc.

37. Continually explore recreation opportunities
38. Build / Rehabilitate Swimming pools for City Residents
39. Make better use of bike trails in Kirby Park – other side of dike
40. Bring back Charles Miner Memorial with flowers
41. Keep reading tips like those in article to make city more attractive :- 101 small ways you can improve your city--  
<https://www.curbed.com/2016/9/22/13019420/urban-design-community-building-placemaking>
42. Invite Artists to decorate bus stops
43. Redesign crosswalks... Artists go to town with signature work & donors
44. Make designer seat benches in city spots --parking meters / bike rack.
45. Fight crime with neon.
46. Foster a guerrilla garden uprising-- permission for gardens in vacant lots--
47. Seed donations for gardens
48. Encourage amazing block parties in neighborhoods throughout the City.
49. Add the public libraries to the bus routes
50. Make some creative bicycle parking spots

## **Director of Development**

Story by Brian Kelly

32. Programs for affluent former residents, donate & help startup businesses

The City should hire a person to help bring in funding from various sources to help Wilkes-Barre in its goals of revitalizing the city.

Whether this needs to be a full-time position or perhaps somebody working for the City Administrator should be determined shortly after the new Mayor (I endorse George C. Brown) takes office.

## **Public Square is a gift from city planners**

Story by Brian Kelly

33. Use WB Public Square even more effectively – local concerts, speeches

Those who study history know that our City, Wilkes-Barre, was founded in 1769 by John Durkee and a number of colonists from Connecticut. The City originally was known as Wyoming. Later, it was renamed in honor of two British members of parliament, John Wilkes and Col. Isaac Barre, who had defended the American colonies in parliamentary debates. The founders of Wilkes-Barre were smart as they laid out the downtown in a way to accommodate public and business uses. Their design works today.

Wilkes-Barre nicknamed the “Diamond City,” was laid out in 1770 by the Connecticut settlers in what is known as typical New England fashion. They set aside two public spaces: common land along the riverfront (known today as the River Common), and a central civic square (known today as Public Square). The boundaries of the original town plan encompass most of today’s Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

The Public Square was always a busy place. After all it was the deemed center of town as well as the actual center of town. Its uses in the early period was as a spot for the Luzerne county Courthouse and a fact not bragged about in recent times, Wilkes-Barre had gallows on Public Square where they performed hangings for serious crimes.

On September 25, 1786, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed a resolution which created Luzerne County. They took a hunk of a larger Northumberland County and named our county after Chevalier de la Luzerne, a French soldier and diplomat during the 18th century. Wilkes-Barre became the seat of government for the new territory. For years, until 1909, the Courthouse was located on Public Square.

We are blessed with our Public Square For all the good work that was done in making the City beautiful, there were always those who, for their own reasons, did not care as much about its beauty and wanted beautiful areas to be replaced for commercial reasons. Over the years, Public Square Park for example was always at risk of being ripped out and replaced with roads and buildings.

### **How about no Public Square?**

In 1930, for example, The Wilkes-Barre Almanac documents the attempts of City Councilman John Nobel to extend Main and Market Streets through Public Square. At the time G.A.R. Members had been proposing a monument to be built where Nobel wanted the new road to go.

Thankfully more insightful minds than Nobel's were making the decision though Council did entertain destroying the Square for this purpose. Without the criticism of the G. A.R. members and veterans of many wars, today, there might not be a Public Square.

For years, the downtown was built around public square and with a population approaching 90,000 Wilkes-Barre was quite a city. WB Transit Buses and Martz Busses once saturated the Square bringing shoppers to a great downtown. In 1972 after the Flood, things went downhill and many of the historic buildings were taken down. Wilkes-Barre has not fully recovered but we can for sure.

In our recovery, it would help to find another prominent role for Public Square and the downtown area. Public Square is a major Wilkes-Barre asset in its uniqueness. Surely, the fountain should not be in a state of disrepair.

Besides small concerts and fiestas, and such, and the Farmer's Market, it would be good to permit the Square' use as a spot in which major issues can be discussed and speeches can be given on a regular (weekly basis) when the weather is acceptable.

Speakers and performers can be invited, or they may petition to be included in weekly day-long sessions that are both entertaining and informative. Those running for office for example, should be invited to give ½ hour speeches on the designated day of the week that Wilkes-Barre opens up the Square for discussions.

The Square should always be a discussion point and at Council meetings and in other business meetings of the city, the potential public uses of such a magnificent area should frequently be discussed.

## **Make it easier for WB citizens to run for office**

### **34. Support candidates for office – Use City Hall Council Chambers**

When Brian Kelly ran for office he asked Mayor Leighton for use of Council Chambers to have small public meetings. Ideally the City should permit and sponsor such events to keep the citizen talent alive and fresh for a job in public service.



Wilkes-Barre Council Chambers

## Seniors – vital part of transportation routes

### 35. Create Seniors Transportation Committee

Seniors, especially those in high rises, without public transportation like to get out of the confines in which they are “trapped,” more often than city planners might think. Committees of seniors and others with an interest would more than likely be pleased to offer input to the planning of LCTA or other City run transportation on their behalf.

## Need strong public committees – *youth activity*

### 36. Create Youth Activity Committee – such as CYC dances etc.

Nobody knows what they youth need or want more than the youth. And so, committees can be formed in the high schools to help guide city planners with recreational opportunities and others that would gain buy-in from the youth in our communities..

## Wilkes-Barre needs public swimming

Story by Brian Kelly

### 37. Continually explore recreation opportunities

### 38. Build / Rehabilitate Swimming pools for City Residents

We must work to continually explore recreational opportunities so that our children can enjoy healthy lives in Wilkes-Barre

## **Sports, Swimming Pools, Games & Theatres**

Besides the great restaurants and other eateries that have always been part of Wilkes-Barre, there were many other places that catered to teenagers who had a buck or two to spend, in the “olden days.” There were many great opportunities to do neat things in Wilkes-Barre. Many of the places I mentioned in my Wilkes-Barre book are now gone or are smaller in size; and their absence and/or right sizing has taken away much of the good feeling of our town. I think we need to bring them back as soon as we can. Swimming pools for the public more than likely top the list of needed fun things to bring back.

*KIDS DEFY OLD MAN WEATHER AT GRIFFITH SWIMMING POOL ON HEIGHTS*



**COURTESY OF THE WILKES-BARRE PRESERVATION SOCIETY** On July 8, 1936, 5,000 kids broke the attendance record at the Griffith Pool in the Heights on the hottest day of that summer.

Look at the fun they were having. Why not today?

There was a time in which a boy or a girl could play hardball, softball, whiffle ball, basketball, or football at Eyerman Park off Gilligan and Andover Streets; the Company Yard on High Street by Parish, Espy

Park by Espy St. Parsons, Scott Street & WB Blvd, Huber Park in the Mayflower, Miner Park on Old River Road and Hanover Street, Pine Ridge in Parsons, Coal Street Park off Coal Street. Kirby and Nesbitt Parks across the Susquehanna

There were a host of places across the city to play organized sports such as Little League, Teeners' League, and Senior Teeners' leagues. Soccer eventually came to Wilkes-Barre, but it is a recent phenomenon. Most importantly, there were vacant lots upon which homes had never been built, such as the one by the Homestead Tavern on Brown Street and the one by Mamary's Funeral home on Parish before Mamary's was even there. There was vacant-lot football a-plenty. Every Neighborhood had its places.

And because there was not always a field or a vacant lot available, there was always the street where tag football, whiffle ball, and basketball were played from morning to night. And, of course there were the night time games—Hide and Seek, Relievio, Statue of Liberty and others that made early evening life in Wilkes-Barre's “olden days,” , worth waiting for the sun to go down.

It was as nice as it could be. Nobody was poor because we all had Wilkes-Barre to make things better. Maybe neighborhoods would be closer and friendlier and safer today if we could bring some of these notions back. Maybe WB officials can fulfill a promise and make Wilkes-Barre safe, clean, and affordable. That would go a long way to accomplishing lots of other great things.

This nice article about Swimming pools in Wilkes-Barre was written by the Citizens Voice' Sarah Scinto Staff Writer and it was published JULY 2, 2017



A boy goes off the diving board where the Kingston pool was packed Friday afternoon. Mark Morancv02poolsp3



**Kingston still has a nice pool.**

Before the flood of 1972, there was the flood of 1936. It was very early in the year and the City got the Griffith pool operational after the flood of 1936.

## Sarah Scinto's article follows:

On the hottest day in 1936, 5,000 children spent the day splashing and swimming in the Griffith Park Pool.

According to Wilkes-Barre city councilman and historian Tony Brooks, that hot July 8 day marked the highest attendance the pool had seen since it opened as the city's first public pool in 1917.

"Can you imagine that, 5,000 kids in the pool?" he said. "If that was still the case all these pools would still be open."

[Tony or the next Mayor (George Brown is my choice): It can be a bit like this once again so kids can socialize more in the summer. Kingston has managed to keep their pool going and it is doing well. What do they know what Wilkes-Barre doesn't? ]

The Griffith Park Pool, like many others that once dotted the city, no longer exists, and as summer temperatures climb, publicly funded ways to keep cool have steadily declined in the area. Where Wilkes-Barre once had as many as five public pools in various city parks, lack of attendance and maintenance costs have left the city with only one public water attraction — the splash pad at the Coal Street complex.

The City has followed a county-wide trend. This summer, Kingston borough's pool is open, but the borough administrator said they may be the only one in Luzerne County other than a pool at Frances Slocum State Park.

"The last pool we had that was marginally functional was Coal Street," Butch Frati, director of operations for the City said. "It had a lot of issues."

[Butch: everything has issues especially when it is not cared for and maintained well. Nothing is free!]

Frati said maintenance costs and issues like leaks and availability of lifeguards prompted the city to close that last pool and open the splash pad that stands on the site today.

“It’s a quarter of the cost,” he said. “You have to maintain a pool, that takes care of itself. It chlorinates itself, it’s a pretty self-contained unit.”

Brooks recalled swimming in the Coal Street Park Pool as a child — even when it was an “aquadome,” a heated, covered pool open year round.

“The Aquadome came down maybe in 1980 because of expenses,” he said. “They converted it for just the summertime.”

[Poor leadership lets things get run down and then blames the fact that they are run-down on nobody taking care of maintenance... Dah!]<sup>e</sup>

At one time, Wilkes-Barre residents enjoyed pools at Griffith Park, Miner Park, Hollenback Park and on Parrish Street or they could visit smaller, wading pools at Scouten Lee Park and Eyerman Park, Brooks said.

“Each one of them closed for lack of use over time,” he said. “It was part expense and lack of use that each of these pools declined over time.”

Forty Fort’s 81-year-old pool did open for the season, but an expensive leak forced officials to close the pool to seek repairs. “We were open for just a few days,” said borough manager Bonnie Arnone. “We were losing 40,000 gallons of water every day. Between the water and chemical loss it was \$500 a day we were losing.”

Arnone said Forty Fort values providing a community pool for residents, but this year, the borough’s financial responsibility to the taxpayers had to outweigh the value of recreation.

“You have a fiduciary responsibility ... to spend tax dollars wisely and you have to say, ‘Is this the wisest choice?’” she said. Arnone has a specialist coming in to look at the pool and see if it can be repaired, but she’s prepared for the possibility of bad news. “It may have outlived its lifetime,” she said.

The pool had become a financial burden on the borough in recent years. Arnone said between lifeguard wages, chemicals, repairs, maintenance, water, electricity and other factors, the pool costs between \$40,000 and \$50,000 to run each summer.

“It’s hard to make that money back,” she said. “We’ve taken a loss on the pool for as many years as I’ve been here, which is seven.” Council always budgets for the pool, Arnone said, because of the value it adds to the community.

“It’s a community gem,” she said. “It offers somewhere for kids to go during the summer.”

But with pools popping up in backyards throughout the community, attendance and membership has dropped. Arnone said the borough even lowered membership and day pass fees last year in the hope of generating more attendance.

...

“It’s very important to the community and it’s always been,” he said.

Kingston officials secured a \$750,000 grant and poured some borough funds into the pool to complete a \$1.4 million renovation that debuted last year.

“There was too much history and value in that pool to not keep it going,” he said. “It made sense for us to invest ... to turn over the pool for the upcoming generation.”

Attendance at the Kingston pool broke borough records in 2016, and Keating said the lack of other pools in the area will likely keep those numbers high.

“Last year was a very, very good year,” he said. “We ended the year, I believe, with about \$16,000 in our checking account and roughly \$13,000 in a money market account. I expect to do much better this year.”

Anyone from the area can use the Kingston pool, Keating said, provided anyone over the age of 18 signs a liability waiver and provides some form of identification for staff to keep on file.

...

Fрати said while a public pool is “off the radar” in Wilkes-Barre for the time being, city officials will look out for grants that might help bring residents more ways to keep cool in the summer.

“I do feel there’s a need for the pool, at least one pool,” he said.

[What a shame that Kingston and Forty Fort can maintain their pools but a much bigger City with a \$50 million budget has to punt on the people. Remember that when you vote people. Wilkes-Barre can spend more wisely than having 53 different job titles budgeted for overtime!]

George Brown can and make Wilkes-Barre a better place to live.

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## **Pools bring communities together.**

Old fart politicians are why Wilkes-Barre has no swimming pools. I apologize for the effect that sentence may have had on your olfactory senses...but it is true. I’d get rid of the politicians before the pools. With a 2018 budget of almost \$50 million, it is hard to believe that there was not enough budget to keep a couple pools alive in a City as large as Wilkes-Barre. Our politicians somehow have little pride in their City and it sure bugs the heck out of me.

That’s why I ran for Mayor a few years back. Poor politicians and officials equal poor results. We have had that for sure for a long time in Wilkes-Barre. I am glad that George C. Brown is running for Mayor and I hope to help in any way I can.

If you think like me, make sure you watch who you vote for. Forty Fort and Kingston are not forcing our leaders on us so they can look good. We do it to ourselves. We have a chance to make a change for the better. That is why George Brown is running for Mayor.

Somehow the ice skating rink charges \$8.00 and \$4.00 for skates and they make it. Remember, at one time everybody in WB had to buy a patch for their bathing suit. Our current politicians have lost their concern for the people of Wilkes-Barre. Folks, that is why we need George Brown more than ever.

We are told that everybody has a pool today. Well, maybe people with some money have a pool but the poverty rate in Wilkes-Barre is 35%. We can do much better as a city but we have to choose our officials wisely. Make sure those for whom you vote think like you do.

### **Pools were all there was in the 1950's**

Swimming pools are near and dear to my heart. My sister Nancy is 3 ½ years older than me. She and my brother Ed (mostly just Nancy) would walk me to Miner Park Pool almost every day in every summer that I can remember. The beautiful shade trees where Kistler School is now were the perfect venue for eating a jelly and peanut butter sandwich for lunch and washing it down with an orange drink or milk. Arriving early in the morning often we would often find George Jones, the maestro of City pools past, chlorinating the pool perfectly before letting anybody get in.

Miner Park Pool was a testimony to good planning in Wilke-Barre . It was round with a big pool and a little pool and a catwalk in between. It was huge. It had a ten-foot board and two small diving boards. The Charles Miner family had donated the land on which the pool and the park were built to the City for public recreation. The pool had a magnificent shower/fountain in the middle of the little pool that was very refreshing for all but very scary and a little over my head. I recall being scared when I was about five years old frolicking in the pool by the fountain.

It was a big trek from the Rolling Mill Hill to Miner Park, but well worth it. Thanks Nancy and thanks Ed for taking me.

### Miner Park Swimming Pool South Wilkes-Barre See Fountain in Middle



Hollenback Swimming Pool also built by the Feds with WPA money had been around forever and then it too disappeared. Back in 1938, there was a debate about the pool's filtering system. Some urged that hard coal would make a better filter than sand for the Hollenback swimming pool. Why is there no Hollenback Pool? If our grandparents who made little pay could afford a pool, why not us?

I have a friend who one time was my manager at IBM before we both retired. After living in beautiful Burlington Vermont and seeing how the well-to-do took care of things for everybody without raising taxes, he was amazed at his observations of Northeastern PA.

## Hollenback Pool Parsons Wilkes-Barre – A Fun Place



Surely the Miner family, mentioned often in Wilkes-Barre's yearly almanacs, along with the Kirby family are few and far between. For their own altruism, they have really helped and always seem to help whenever they can.

By the way, about Burlington Vermont. It should be a place that our public officials ought to try to emulate. It actually comes as no surprise to me that Burlington VT recently caught national attention for its quality of living. They were ranked #2 in Kiplinger's 2013 "10 Great Places to Live" Without dreams, there are no ideas; there are no plans; and there are no positive actions. If those running for the office of Mayor cannot identify goals that the City's residents agree are important, why should we elect them?

George Brown has labeled the 50 platform points in this book as The Wilkes-Barre Plan, and he intends to do his best to make it happen.

## Revitalize Kirby & Nesbitt Park bike trails

Story by Brian Kelly

### 39. Make better use of bike trails in Kirby Park – other side of dike

From the time I was seventeen until my twenties I had a small Honda or a moped or a bigger Honda trail bike. I loved the bikes over the years. I even had two helmets. I took my motor bikes out to the other side of the dike quite often even after the flood of 1972. I think motor bikes were not permitted so eventually I began to obey the law.



Kirby Park Zoo Bears during the 1936 Flood, "Lest We Forget: Wyoming Valley Flood of 1936"—Luzerne County Historical Society Collection

Many people are still unaware that Wilkes-Barre owns the river frontage on the Kingston side of the dike all the way down to North Street. So, we both Kirby Park and Nesbitt Park are part of Wilkes-Barre. Wilkes-Barre needs to make these parks nice again and make them safe as undesirables now frequent (way too frequently) these one-time great areas.

As a kid, my brother Ed, who is six years older than I, would take me over to the other side of the Kirby Park dike and he would find these *bike or walking trails*. They all seemed to have great dips and turns. That area of the park on the other side of the dike close by the river shore had one time been a zoo before being wiped out in the 1936 flood –at a time when there was no dike. It was a great place to ride a bike. I took my kids there when I was a new parent. I brought the whole

neighborhood on bicycles and we were careful on the Wilkes-Barre side traversing the streets with our bikes.

We must do a lot more with this area as well as Kirby Park and Nesbitt Park to enhance recreational opportunities for the City. I might recommend joining in a joint project with Kingston in Nesbitt Park and building a great big, indestructible pool. We can do anything we choose.

## **The Charles Miner Memorial**

Story by Brian Kelly

40. Bring back Charles Miner Memorial with flowers

When I was five years old, my father paid one dollar to a bright kid across the street for a bike he had made for me. His name was Carly Blaine. He and Joe Pahler made bikes on High Street mostly for themselves. This one was for me. It had no chain guard or fenders and the pedals were iffy but when I put it in the gutter, the nine-inch curb in front of my house was enough for me to mount the bike and take off. I always had to dismount at the curb or a high spot some place in town. I was five years old at the time, but I got bigger eventually.

Every year I noticed I could throw a baseball and a football further. We played hardball where Mamary's funeral home now is in a field that looked huge at the time. When the neighbors and I got to be ten years old, we were going to Miner Park a lot to play ball and eventually we joined the little league. It was a long ride from the Rolling Mill hill but my trusty 26" bike got me to Miner Park no sweat.

I loved baseball and would travel wherever I could to get a game. I can recall one Memorial Day after all the morning festivities with the boat blowing up in the river, etc. and the big celebration going to Miner Park for a pick-up game. I saw a man that I knew as Corbett hitting golf balls from one end of the park to another. He hit a ton and then he would walk to the other end and hit them again. He had his own driving range.

We did not talk. I went everywhere looking for a kid to play catch with or to get a game. There was nobody. At the time, there was a pool called Miner Park Pool and I think it was closed for the holiday also. What a bummer.

What I remember about that day is that I stopped for the first time on the way out of the park. The end of Hanover Street was across Old River Road from the major Miner Park entrance. There was a monument there that I had never paid attention to. It was for Charles Miner who had donated the Park to the City for recreation. I suspect many kids like me had never taken the time to look at it.

It had some nice words to say about Mr. Miner. I recall thinking that it was swell that he gave so many kids such a lift in life having so many ballparks – teeners' league, little league, softball and even tennis courts. There were red ash mini roads in the park, which were great for big riding.

I looked around the monument and noticed the absolutely magnificent array of flowers of all kinds. It was like a botanical garden, but I did not know what a botanical garden was. There were zinnias and impatiens, and marigolds of all sizes all arranged to make the whole area appear sculpted in flowers. Somebody had spent a lot of time making that monument beautiful. I always noticed the monument whenever I went to Miner Park after that day.

One day after the '72 flood I was there and there no longer was a pool. Instead there was a school, a beautiful School for sure—Kistler Elementary. The monument and all of its flowers were gone. It was disappointing. I wondered if the Miner family had given permission? I still wonder

I would ask the City to find out what happened to the monument and the flowers and the trust fund that paid for the flowers. I would love to see this put back where it was for kids like I was back then to enjoy. Maybe that's why today I appreciate how special flowers are.

Perhaps one day in the future the city can locate a picture of the monument in full bloom in its archives or perhaps the Times Leader might have it. It would be nice to see it restored for sure but even a picture of it would be nice.

## Look for new, creative ideas everywhere

41. Keep reading tips like those in the article in the URL below to make our City more attractive :- 101 small ways you can improve your city--<https://www.curbed.com/2016/9/22/13019420/urban-design-community-building-placemaking>

There are lots of ideas in books, magazines and the Internet about creative undertakings for Wilkes-Barre City. Those that follow came from the articles referenced above. There is no reason why, with a little Cush built by kind donors and supporters of our city that we can't make a few lists for creative genius before George Brown leaves office after we all elect him to get our big projects done. Thank you for your consideration.

## Artists can create beautiful bus -stops

42. Invite Artists to decorate bus stops

Get your easels, get your paints, get your other necessary supplies. See if the City has extra. It's time to fix up your favorite neighborhood bus stop. We don't always think of our own bus-stops here in Wilkes-Barre but if we built a new one tomorrow it would present just as bland and boring a seat as a typical urban bus stop. It would be a functional, feckless box of plastic and not much more.

It does not have to be that way . Bus stops are a key part of any urban infrastructure—even Wilkes-Barre. All bus-stops need immediate upgrades and there are people around the world who right now are taking action. So can we.

We just need the right community groups to meet and make a call to action with sharp redesigns. You can see examples by heading out on an Internet journey to Bus Stop Moves in Cleveland, which covers station walls with fitness instructions, or you can sneak off to Ride,

# Rally, Ride in Memphis,



## Artists beautifying crosswalks

43. Redesign crosswalks... Artists go to town with signature work & donors

With a few artistic tools, the creative among us can redesign a crosswalk. Wilkes-Barre will support your effort with donated materials. This notion is not new; but it is not old either. In 2015, for example, a handful of Seattle streets were reborn when a rogue designer painted colorful new crosswalks. Instead of wiping them away, the city made them a permanent part of the landscape, and even appropriated the idea, setting up a community crosswalk program so other neighborhoods could create their own colorful street art. Great idea!

George Brown who I sure hope is your next Mayor and mine loves creative ideas. Between promoting community pride and increasing pedestrian visibility and safety, it's a quick, colorful step forward. For those interested, type in redesign crosswalks and you'll find other examples in Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Santa Monica. Mayor Brown would love to add Wilkes-Barre to that list. Then the sentence would look like the following when the next city is talking about it:

For those interested, type in redesign crosswalks and you'll find other examples in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Santa Monica, and Wilkes-Barre. Looks kind of good there, doesn't it?



## Build Attractive Benches

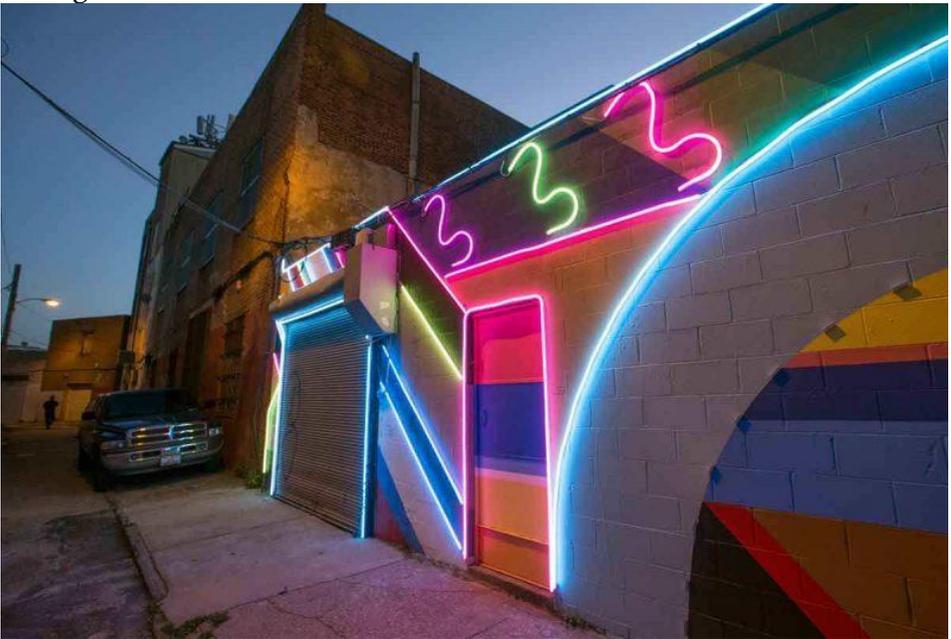
44. Make designer seat benches in city spots --parking meters / bike rack.

A nice thing that carpenters and craftsmen can do for their City is build an attractive bench and place it where it's needed. The older I get the more I appreciate a seat in the mall or a store while my wife shops. They say there is an urban seating deficit the world over and more and more cities are building their own street seats. Wilkes-Barre is the perfect city with a lot of artists and crafts-people and carpenters to help put their mark on the city and help a few people around town who could use some time off their feet. Here are two examples:



## We can fight crime with neon paint

45. Fight crime with neon.



Why not try to brighten up City areas and fight crime with neon. Especially in a city strapped for cash, streetlights are always low on the priority list as they're expensive to install, maintain, and keep powered. But they've also been proven to deter crime so when you can light up, light up with a lamppost and a bulb if possible. But short of that you can take advantage of moonlight and car-light. T

Two Philadelphia artists recently took it upon themselves to brighten a dangerous South Philly block with a "neon mural." The illuminated work of art is now a social-media destination after dark, putting eyes on the street at a time when the neighborhood needs it most. No criminal likes to do their trade in full view of the world.

## Wilkes-Barre flower & vegetable gardens galore

46. Foster a guerrilla garden uprising-- permission for gardens in vacant lots--

47. Seed donations for gardens

### *Guerilla gardening: a horticultural revolution*

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If you like to create a raucous, how about trying on a guerrilla garden uprising. Even when you are not there, your garden will keep your presence alive. Green thumbs in neighborhoods most often have private plots and backyards in which to grow. This is good. As folks get older, they may not be as spry in being able to till their gardens, plant their seeds, and harvest their crops. But, chances are if there were a program that would permit neighborhood kids or adults to volunteer, a lot of special people would have the muscle to maintain their gardens. The City can sponsor such activities.

Additionally, there are a lot of vacant lots that will remain weedy and unkempt without a lot of work during the growing season. Why not

put them on the front lines of a guerrilla garden uprising. This would involve surreptitiously filling in unkempt lots or small patches of untended land with plants and flowers or tossing a "seed-bomb" at a hard to reach patch of land. The City can create signs where such Community gardening is permitted FIFO and can publish a list of t of known gardeners willing to help the neophytes . This can turn lost space into lush greenery.

You won't be the only guerilla in the garden. Guerrilla gardening is now an international movement with a small, completely unorganized contingent in the United States. The concept - to take a bare or neglected public or quasi-public space and introduce an element of gardening there - is open to interpretation and constantly changing. Guerrilla gardens are public-spirited, jaunty, but sometimes ragtag expressions of the power of a flower. They are a little bit radical, but more than anything, guerrilla gardens suggest very gently to those who notice that flowers and gardens make the world a better place.

A gentleman named Richard Reynolds, one of the leaders of the movement, maintains a blog with invaluable tips on how to reclaim "unloved public spaces." Type Richard Reynolds into your browser to learn more.

## Seed Donations

### 47. Seed donations for gardens

The City can facilitate the distribution of free seeds for guerilla gardens and victory gardens and whatever we choose. We have that big public works facility which can accommodate a lot of seed bags which Wilkes-Barre citizens can use on their properties or in vacant lots signed for that purpose. I love the idea of seed-bombs with wild flowers and other goodies to brighten up even the most unreachable ugly terrain. Identifying seed-bomb targets would be a great adventure for scouts or neighborhood groups.

## Throw a great block party for your neighbors

Story by Brian Kelly

48. Encourage amazing block parties in neighborhoods throughout the City.

## **Albert Peters threw the best block Party Wilkes-Barre ever had**

Go ahead folks, Call City Hall and tell them what you are doing. Maybe they'll give you the loan of a flatbed trailer or the John Jacob Sauer bandshell so you can have your own entertainment.

Butchie Peters, the current proprietor of the Peters' Stores in Wilkes-Barre, and his brother Thunsie Peters the current consiglieri of the business, know what a great man their dad Albert Peters always was. Many neighborhood people would not have made it through the depression or the war without their orange "tick" books that were as good as cash at Peters'.

I know that Mr. Peters could never have been repaid for all he provided for people without the money to buy groceries, during their tough times during the depression and the war. He was our High Street neighborhood's savior for many. My dad loved him. He gave us credit and my dad paid from the book every week when he got paid by the Stegmaier Brewery.

Butchie Peters respected the work of his dad and he shared with me that his dad propped up a lot of needy people in the depression era and during the war and other times. I know that is true because everybody loved him. He was one of a kind. I suspect in other neighborhoods in the City, there are many other local merchants who were heroes during these tough times—the depression and then WWII. The Supermarket store had not really yet arrived, and because mostly everybody walked everywhere, everybody in the neighborhoods knew each other.

My father told me a great true story—they're the best kind—that happened at the end of World War II. Albert Peters called all the neighbors together to celebrate the US victory and the fact that the "boys" would be coming home. His own son Thunsie was still over in Europe at the time engaged in mop-up operations. The celebration event happened in the middle of High Street in this area of the City. It was a neighborhood block party of the finest kind.

Mr. Peters bought the main ingredient -- a big keg of local beer and he put it in the middle of High Street, tapped it and provided

all that was needed for the neighborhood people to come out to celebrate this historic event in US history. It was all on Mr. Albert Peters. He provided everything for the celebration. It was a reason to celebrate and a great man and Wilkes-Barre hero to many, Albert Peters made sure everybody had a great time. I am proud to have been Mr. Peters' Wilkes-Barre Record morning paper boy in his home on Blackman Street for seven years.

In 2015 when Peters Ice Cream on the corner of Parish and Blackman sold my book, *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory*, I stopped by to see how things were going and to drop off some more books. At the same time, I gave Thunsie his own copy of the book. I had worked for Thunsie in my youth selling Ice Cream cakes and shoveling his sidewalk and whatever else he asked. That's how I got the money to buy my first train.

When I saw Thunsie and Butchie Peters and Johnnie Hyder in the store, I asked if I could read a few passages from the book. Thunsie could not see as well as when he was bowling nothing but strikes at the Wilkes-Barre Republic's six-lane Bowling Alley on Blackman Street before the fire in 1980. I was often his pinboy. They all agreed to permit me to read a passage.

I read the story of their dad and what a great a man he was and how he put on the famed WWII block party celebration on High Street. Thunsie noticed that he was not in any of the passages that I had read, and he told me why. He was still in the war that was in mop-up operations overseas after the US declared victory. In the 2015 book, I did not know this, so it did not make it to that book until the update.

I now take the opportunity to thank Mr. Thunsie Peters for his great service in the war and I hope he lasts forever. I was his boy Friday in many ways at the time. I was too young to mind the store, but he found lots of other work for me to do for many years.

He made ice cream on Blackman and Brown for what seems like a million years and it was the best of the best. He is a good man, and he was a good boss. I always thought the best of him and still do. He is a man with a great sense of humor. Though I am 71 years old now as I write these words, he still treats me like a ten-

year old kid – not exactly -- but I figure his demeanor towards me is just in case he needs the snow removed from the sidewalks in the future and the other “kids” are not available.

OK, I no longer have to shovel the sidewalks at Blackman and Brown, but I do remember. It helped me be a better man. Thank you Thunsie. God bless you forever. Sorry I missed you in the last book. When this book is printed, I will be up the store looking for you with your very own copy. Yes, I will bring Butchie a copy also.

Now, I am sure the Peters family would not mind somebody commemorating Albert Peters’ block party. Who’ll be the first?

## **Make libraries more accessible**

49. Make portable libraries and add the public libraries to the bus routes

Even as the definition of libraries changes and evolves, to many of us, there is a great pleasure in the joy of reading a book. It remains a constant. In Dallas, for example, they have a project called the Little Free Libraries Project. What they did was help construct and decorate makeshift shelves positioned across the community.

This was part of a wider community literacy project and it was inspired by the wider Little Free Libraries movement. It is all about creating a real-life literary community on city streets to the extent possible

For Wilkes-Barre, the libraries such as the Osterhaut or the King’s or Wilkes libraries can create portable shelving and/or a truck and have library days in various neighborhoods. Another idea is to invite the people in the high-rises to come use the library free and add these building s to the spots where the busses come and stop regularly.

## **Make additional bike parking.**

50. Make some creative bicycle parking spots

Artful bike racks and bikeshare stations are sprouting up everywhere in the country. Even with this, popular roadways and sidewalks can still become overcrowded with riders angling to anchor a U-Lock. Small businesses can help make a difference by placing some DIY rack-space out front to make the bicycle parking situation more bearable at no charge to taxpayers.

Thank you folks for your attention.

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**Don't forget to vote George C. Brown for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. You won't regret it!**



## Other Books by Brian W. Kelly: (amazon.com, and Kindle)

[The Cowardly Congress](#). Whatever happened to Congress doing the work of the people?  
[Help for Mayor George and Next Mayor of Wilkes-Barre](#) How to vote for the next Mayor Council abbreviated  
[Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future](#): Spirit's advice for residents about how to pick the next Mayor and Council  
[Great Players in Air Force Football: Air Force's best players of all time](#)  
[Great Coaches in Air Force Football: From Coach 1 to Coach Troy Calhoun](#)  
[Great Moments in Air Force Football: From day 1 to today!](#)  
[Great Players in Navy Football: Navy's best including Bellino & Staubach](#)  
[Great Coaches in Navy Football: From Coach 1 to Coach #39 Ken Niumatalolo](#)  
[Great Moments in Navy Football: From day 1 to coach Ken Niumatalolo 1](#)  
[No Tree! No Toys! No Toot!](#) Heartwarming story. Christmas gone while 19 month old napped  
[How to End DACA, Sanctuary Cities, & Resident Illegal Aliens](#). best solution to wipe shadows in America.  
[Government Must Stop Ripping Off Seniors' Social Security!](#): Hey buddy, seniors can no longer spare a dime?  
[Special Report: Solving America's Student Debt Crisis!](#): The only real solution to the \$1.52 Trillion debt  
[How to End DACA, Sanctuary Cities, & Resident Illegal Aliens](#). best solution to wipe shadows in America.  
[The Winning Political Platform for America](#) Unique winning approach to solve the big problems in America.  
[Lou Barletta v Bob Casey for US Senate](#) Barletta's unique approach to solving the big problems in America.  
[John Chrin v Matt Cartwright for Congress](#) Chrin has a unique approach to solving big problems in America.  
[The Cure for Hate !!!](#) Can the cure be any worse than this disease that is crippling America?  
[Andrew Cuomo's Time to Go? "He Was Never that Great!"](#): Cuomo says America never that great  
[White People Are Bad! Bad! Bad!](#) Whoever thought a popular slogan in 2018 would be *It's OK to be White!*  
[The Fake News Media Is Also Corrupt !!!](#): Fake press / media today is not worthy to be 4<sup>th</sup> Estate.  
[God Gave US Donald Trump?](#) Trump was sent from God as the people's answer  
[Millennials Say America Was "Never That Great"](#): Too many pleased days of political chumps not over!  
[White People Are Bad! Bad! Bad!](#) In 2018, too many people find race as a non-equalizer.  
[It's Time for The John Doe Party...](#) Don't you think? By Elephants.  
[Great Players in Florida Gators Football...](#) Tim Tebow and a ton of other great players  
[Great Coaches in Florida Gators Football...](#) The best coaches in Gator history.  
[The Constitution by Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, et al.](#) The Real Constitution  
[The Constitution Companion](#). Will help you learn and understand the Constitution  
[Great Coaches in Clemson Football](#) The best Clemson Coaches right to Dabo Swinney  
[Great Players in Clemson Football](#) The best Clemson players in history  
[Winning Back America](#). America's been stolen and can be won back completely  
[The Founding of America...](#) Great book to pick up a lot of great facts  
[Defeating America's Career Politicians](#). The scoundrels need to go.  
[Midnight Mass by Jack Lammers...](#) You remember what it was like Great story  
[The Bike by Jack Lammers...](#) Great heartwarming Story by Jack  
[Wipe Out All Student Loan Debt--Now!](#) Watch the economy go boom!  
[No Free Lunch Pay Back Welfare!](#) Why not pay it back?  
[Deport All Millennials Now!!!](#) Why they deserve to be deported and/or saved  
[DELETE the EPA, Please!](#) The worst decisions to hurt America  
[Taxation Without Representation 4<sup>th</sup> Edition](#) Should we throw the TEA overboard again?  
[Four Great Political Essays by Thomas Dawson](#)  
[Top Ten Political Books for 2018...](#) Cliffnotes Version of 10 Political Books  
[Top Six Patriotic Books for 2018...](#) Cliffnotes version of 6 Patriotic Books  
[Why Trump Got Elected!..](#) It's great to hear about a great milestone in America!  
[The Day the Free Press Died](#). Corrupt Press Lives on!  
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[Solved II \(Obamacare, Social Security, Student Debt\)](#) Check it out; They're solved.  
[Great Moments in Pittsburgh Steelers Football...](#) Six Super Bowls and more.  
[Great Players in Pittsburgh Steelers Football ...](#), Chuck Noll, Bill Cowher, Mike Tomlin, etc.  
[Great Coaches in New England Patriots Football...](#), Bill Belichick the one and only plus others  
[Great Players in New England Patriots Football...](#) Tom Brady, Drew Bledsoe et al.  
[Great Coaches in Philadelphia Eagles Football...](#) Andy Reid, Doug Pederson & Lots more  
[Great Players in Philadelphia Eagles Football](#) Great players such as Sonny Jurgenson  
[Great Coaches in Syracuse Football](#) All the greats including Ben Schwartzwalder  
[Great Players in Syracuse Football](#). Highlights best players such as Jim Brown & Donovan McNabb  
[Millennials are People Too !!!](#) Give US millennials help to live American Dream  
[Brian Kelly for the United States Senate from PA](#): Fresh Face for US Senate  
[The Candidate's Bible](#). Don't pray for your campaign without this bible  
[Rush Limbaugh's Platform for Americans...](#) Rush will love it  
[Sean Hannity's Platform for Americans...](#) Sean will love it  
[Donald Trump's New Platform for Americans](#), Make Trump unbeatable in 2020  
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[A Boy, A Bike, A Train, and a Christmas Miracle](#) A Christmas story that will melt your heart

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[The Constitution Companion](#). A Guide to Reading and Comprehending the Constitution

[The Constitution by Hamilton, Jefferson, & Madison](#) \_ Big type and in English

[PATERNO: The Dark Days After Win # 409](#). Sky began to fall within days of win # 409.

[JoePa 409 Victories: Say No More! Winningest Division I-A football coach ever](#)

[American College Football: The Beginning](#) From before day one football was played.

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[Great Coaches in Penn State Football](#) the Best Coaches in PSU's football program

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[WineDiets.Com Presents The Wine Diet](#) Learn how to lose weight while having fun.

[Wilkes-Barre, PA: Return to Glory](#) Wilkes-Barre City's return to glory

[Geoffrey Parsons' Epoch... The Land of Fair Play](#) Better than the original.

[The Bill of Rights 4 Dummies!](#) This is the best book to learn about your rights.

[Sol Bloom's Epoch ...Story of the Constitution](#) The best book to learn the Constitution

[America 4 Dummies!](#) All Americans should read to learn about this great country.

[The Electoral College 4 Dummies!](#) How does it really work?

[The All-Everything Machine](#) Story about IBM's finest computer server.

[ThankYou IBM!](#) This book explains how IBM was beaten in the computer marketplace by neophytes

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Brian W. Kelly has written 194 books including this one.

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