

# FIVE FRONTS OF SOLUTION

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Thirty years ago a **perfect storm of change** took a once-proud city into a perfect storm of decline.

And today, that decline can only be solved by a **perfect storm of solution** only best accomplished by the next Mayor of Allentown.

The same issues that caused me to run for Mayor in 2001, 2005 and now 2017, are the same issues that, over the course of my current campaign for Mayor, citizens of all walks of life have shared with us at community meetings, at the door and on the phone, all across our city. Tellingly, they are the same issues that have been **untouched for decades**, crippling our progress on all fronts.

What we need is NOT a “band aid,” “shiny object,” “new program,” or “next initiative,” as has been offered by **administration after administration** and now **candidate after candidate**. What is needed is a true strategic, sweeping, immediate and lasting PERFECT STORM OF SOLUTION. That means going way beyond just the day-to-day work of running the city and its departments in an exceptionally transparent and citizen-friendly manner. It also means setting new standards for best political practices and transparency, being present at all City Council meetings and available to all citizens and their concerns through social media and direct contact, plus fulfilling all the other duties of the Mayor required in our existing City of Allentown Charter.

**A Bennett Administration would hold itself accountable for the final resolution of those core issues that most disturb Allentown** citizens and voters in the upcoming and vitally important municipal election on May 16, 2017.

As an outspoken advocate for term limits since my first run in 2001--I don't believe in “Mayor For Life”—I commit that from Day One of our administration, to the end of our First 100 Days, and all the way to the end of our first term, we will vigorously implement our **perfect storm of solution**. We will hold ourselves accountable to an aggressive timeline and make dramatic measurable improvement on all fronts. We will use the goal of winning our third All America City Award as the necessary means to bring all stakeholders at all levels to the solutions table. Bottom-line, a Bennett Administration’s contribution to Allentown in our first term as Mayor will be a dramatic and simultaneous turn around on all **five fronts** of this **perfect storm of solution**.

## **What are the Five Fronts of the PERFECT STORM that we will tackle?**

The five issues citizens from across the city say concern them most are Crime, Schools, the negative Perceptions of both, Blight and Taxes. The solutions to these concerns are interconnected, and only able to be solved simultaneously.

## **What caused this PERFECT STORM?**

1982. Billy Joel releases "Allentown" - Mayor Daddona gives him the keys to the city in December of that year after a performance in Stabler Arena. This still popular Top Billboard ranked song tells the world of a rust belt city on the decline.

1984. Allentown's Miller family sold The Morning Call to Times Mirror. The news of the city no longer husbanded by founding fathers, but subject to a far harsher corporate impartiality.

1980. The U.S. Census reports the first ever decline in population in Allentown's then almost 200-year history. Mayor Daddona forwards legislation allowing single-family units to be converted to multi-units and promotes Allentown as the "go to" community for low-income relocation.

By 1982, Allentown's beating heart Hess's - its store and founder once lauded as among the premier in the world - was accelerating towards a demise driven by a nearby Lehigh Valley Mall and suburban flight.

By 1984, with PA suburban flight in full swing - ranked among the most egregious in the nation, Tom Hylton wins his Pulitzer six years later describing it - I was advised by realtors not to live in Allentown as a newly arrived Muhlenberg faculty wife with husband and young children - "cause no one wants to live in Allentown" – due to its crime, poor schools, runaway taxes and blight. The very same issues citizens cite today in our surveys almost thirty years later.

## **What is at stake if we don't finally solve this PERFECT STORM that has been crippling us for over three decades?**

The **health of the whole Lehigh Valley is dependent on the success of Allentown**, its largest city by a wide margin, a county seat, and the third largest city in the state.

**Legion are the cities nationwide that have invested millions in their downtown, but because they ignored the systemic issues crippling their whole community, ended up with a blighted "doughnut" around their downtown**, Reading, Pa., a nearby example. Despite a downtown where millions upon millions was spent to revitalize, it now has one of the highest violent crime rates in the nation. We cannot afford to ignore our own core issues any longer.

Rather than letting Allentown become another Reading, Pa., a Bennett Administration will finally address the issues that affect all areas of the city with the goal of making it the next

Charleston, S.C., the #1 city in the nation, and now in the world, with a waterfront, same population, arts and historic infrastructure as Allentown.

### **What is the SOLUTION TO THIS PERFECT STORM?**

In that same year of 1982 in *The Atlantic*, Wilson and Kelling presented what came to be known as the "Broken Window Theory." It held that **blight drives crime.** As a 27-year-old, that idea inspired me to create Properties of Merit in 1984, which is still running today in my college town of Oneonta, N.Y. I still hold to the belief that a **cleaner city IS a safer city!**

Today in Allentown we must go one step further. Just as blight feeds crime, negative perceptions feed that very same blight. **Broken perception AND broken windows.** These are conditions interlocked in a **perfect storm** that can only be truly resolved if they are resolved simultaneously.

The Mayor has an absolutely irreplaceable role as **the only who can create the needed simultaneous multi-front problem solving** by communicating a strategic vision, and leading comprehensive collaboration among all stakeholders.

As Mayor, I would use **the goal of obtaining a third All-American City Award as a means to foster the required collaboration** among all stakeholders and citizens. When we succeed, Allentown will become **one of only 27 cities to have done so nationwide.** Besides aiding collaboration, winning the award will re-instill an evaporated self-esteem among citizens to this day still enormously proud of the All- American City Awards earned during Dadonna's and Gross's mayoral administrations.

The All-American City Award, the oldest community recognition program in the nation, was our campaign blueprint for conducting hundreds of All American Surveys to determine what citizens likely to vote in the upcoming 2017 municipal primary are most concerned about. The award recognizes communities whose 1) citizens work together to identify and then 2) tackle community wide challenges, and 3) then achieve uncommon results. It is perfectly suited to create the requisite deadline and the means to measure progress, while also getting absolutely everyone to the decision-making table. These are outcomes a Bennett Administration guarantees to deliver if elected.

### **HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR PERFECT STORM OF SOLUTION**

Because Allentown's problems and their solutions are mutually interdependent, it is essential that they be tackled simultaneously, but we will address them in the order that citizens shared with us as causing their highest levels of concern.

#### **CRIME**

Crime was the runaway first choice among likely municipal primary voters that we surveyed. The most important result citizens must receive for their city tax dollars is to **feel safe and be**

**safe.** Overwhelmingly, our city tax dollars go to public safety—50% of our city budget. Of those public safety dollars, 33% of the city budget funds the police department. But despite a highly professional police department, we are still missing the mark. Just the other day I conducted a survey on the phone with *Diane Merkel from Southside's Ward 19 Precinct 6. She is deeply disappointed that her daughter was fearful of crime in the city, and refused to live in Allentown despite her mother living here.*

**First**, crime more than any of our other strategic problems, will require a series of immediate, highly coordinated, sustained actions continuing throughout my first term, and making use of the inextricably bound reality of **blight and crime**. **A cleaner city truly is a safer city**. These strategies will employ Allentown's inherent strengths, like our national-caliber recycling department, exceptional ethnic diversity, density of invested non-profits, governmental entities and corporate stakeholders, together with our highly professional police department. Our strategies will be rooted in a "we aren't going to care who owns what" attitude. Bottom line, we will hold ourselves accountable to clean up every neighborhood throughout the city. Commencing Day One of a Bennett Administration, neighborhood cleanups will be conducted each Saturday with volunteers, stakeholders, residents and area schools. We will approach ASD and area colleges to offer some measure of extracurricular and/or academic credit to build within our youngest citizens not only the satisfaction of helping clean up, but also the sense of civic responsibility needed to keep our city safe and clean on an ongoing basis. *Larry Mikitz, of Mikitz Auto at Center City's Second and Gordon Street, Ward 1 – Precinct 1, bemoans the trash and litter around his business that he just can't keep up with no matter how many times he or his son Jim clean up. He worries just how much longer he can stay in business under these conditions.*

Mirroring my personal experience conducting such cleanups throughout the city over the past twenty years, *our campaign's recent 2017 Earth Day clean up behind St. Luke's Church on Seventh Street was conducted because of concerns expressed by the Eighth Ward Neighborhood Group on their All-American Survey.* Residents came out of their homes to assist and, as always, the city's recycling department was efficient and on time in gathering the hundreds of pounds of debris and garbage collected.

Research shows that removing graffiti within 24 to 48 hours of an occurrence results in a nearly zero rate of reoccurrence. Engaging and empowering residents so they are alert and prepared post-cleanup to immediately address trash problems, and empowering them to alert our volunteer cleanup squads and recycling, will go a long way to ensure that neighborhoods once cleaned up, stay that way.

**Second**, decreasing crime must have a **strong, proactive, citywide component, especially "avoidable" crime**. Supporting our current Crime Watch and Neighborhood Groups, and growing them to past levels in our city, is extremely important. These groups are our first eyes and ears on the ground to assist police officers in solving offenses and educating residents on how to avoid crime—simple acts of locking cars, homes, and not leaving purses and other valuables in sight will go a long way toward reducing the incidence of crime in the city. Not only will a Bennett Administration support the continued presence of Police Captains at monthly Crime Watch meetings citywide to educate and inform citizens, we will strongly encourage ASD Central Administration Staff also to be present – it is striking the impact that otherwise well

behaved students have on littering and other quality of life problems - and will guarantee that at least one member of our Administration would be present at each meeting. We will rotate our staff team so that as Mayor I can also be present at each meeting at least twice a year.

**Third**, beyond the immediate requirement of making our city cleaner and, therefore, safer; educating citizens about avoidable crime; providing law enforcement with more eyes and ears “on the ground,” it is critically important that we work closely and positively with City Council and the Police Union to enact benchmarked legislation to **ensure that in the foreseeable future our largely white police force (93% white reported in 2014) “look like” our largely “minority majority” residents (42.8% Latino; 15.2% African-American, according to the 2010 U.S. Census).** With the fastest growing Latino community in Pennsylvania, and by some measures in the nation, this over-due diversification is essential. A key means to accomplish this would be not only to replace retiring and departing officers via standard national minority recruitment, but also to encourage the more than 10,000 minority youths in our school district—the third largest in the state—to consider a career in law enforcement in our city. We could especially recruit among the nationally elite Junior Naval and Air Force ROTCs at our high schools—youth that I have had the honor to mentor over the past twenty years as a former ROTC Ranger myself.

Outcomes will also be only improved if our **officers once again live in the neighborhoods they serve**, which was once a requirement that was relegated to the cutting room floor during police union negotiations during the Heydt Mayoral Administration. A Bennett Administration will heavily, heavily, heavily incentivize the acquisition, renovation, ownership and de-conversion of homes through long-term city tax abatement for city employees, interested young families, including Allentown Police Officers and other public safety employees. This strategy will go a long way in restoring a healthy mix of incomes citywide in our neighborhoods—a proven key component to safe and healthy communities.

Finally, we must add to our current extensive Police Officer training, deep and ongoing racial bias training. Research shows that officers of all ethnicities assume that a youth of color is reaching for a gun, while assuming a white youth executing the same bodily action, is not. **We must settle for nothing less than Allentown becoming a national leader in proactive, deep, ongoing racial bias training. In addition to officer recruitment from among our home-grown youth of color, and a high percentage of its police force living in the city they serve.** In this way, Allentown will be regarded as a model city in delivering excellence of service and safety to all its citizens regardless of their income or ethnicity.

## **SCHOOLS**

**The Allentown School District (ASD) for most of its history has been regarded as one of the finest in the state despite its current challenges.** As recently as 2005, William Allen High School was ranked by *Newsweek* as the 9th best public high school in Pennsylvania, and the 924th best in the nation. Acclaimed for its exceptional gifted and honors programs, arts and science education, up until the 1980’s there were students from the surrounding suburbs paying tuition to attend ASD schools. So why are citizens so concerned?

With the 1980's cocktail of suburban flight fueled by concerns about Allentown taxes and its swiftly growing Latino community, plus lost tax revenue from the departure of corporations like Mack Truck, **ASD found itself grappling with sudden and significant challenges.** These were coupled with the decision of ASD leadership in the 1970s not consolidate with the growing suburbs as did the Bethlehem and Easton School Districts, which were able to benefit from additional suburban tax revenue and the higher socio-demographic of families living outside the center cities. Add to ASD's problems, Pennsylvania currently ranks as the state with the most inequitable school funding in the nation. Suburban "rich" school districts like Saucon Valley have almost \$20,000 a year to spend per student, compared with urban "poor" school districts like Allentown, with only \$10,000 per student. A combination of many factors has raised Allentown City's overall poverty level to 34%, more than double that of the national average (14.9%). It comes as no surprise that today the Allentown School District has the second highest poverty demographic in the nation—second only to Reading, Pa.

So, what is a Mayor to do? Because of the decision not to incorporate with its surrounding districts, ASD and the City of Allentown, very unusually, share almost contiguous boundaries. As I have said over the past 15 years, **"so goes the school district, so goes the city."** The problems of one are the problems of both. Therefore, the first and most important task of the Bennett Administration will be to **forge and maintain strong collaboration between the Mayor's and ASD Superintendent's Offices.** We will strive to do the same with leadership of all the stakeholders who have a deep, vested interest in Allentown and ASD success: PPL, Lehigh Valley Hospital, NIZ Developers like JB Reilly, BBT Bank, Allentown Art Museum, Miller Symphony Hall, Civic Theatre, and other for-profit and nonprofit corporations; Trexler, Rider Pool and Century Trusts, and other charitable organizations; Lehigh County and other governmental entities. As Mayor, I will strive to ensure that all leadership "sings from the same sheet of music" in order to greatly improve all outcomes. My decades of success in collaboration at the local, state and national levels make me exceptionally qualified to deliver this important outcome.

Given that the school district's budget and tax base are three times that of the city's, ASD dramatically impacts on citizens' fifth issue "Taxes," which will be discussed in more detail at the end of this document. Given the state's funding challenges and the inherent poverty challenges mentioned earlier, our next Mayor must have a proven track record in **securing urgently needed funds for ASD and city departments from new, innovative non-tax sources.** I have broad experience helping create non-tax dollar streams of funding from creating the nationally innovative William Allen Construction Company in order to restore the historic high school without using ASD tax dollars, to co-founding and obtaining \$400,000 in funding for Allentown's Freedom Memorial, the only one in the world featuring both Martin Luther and Coretta Scott King.

The Mayor can play a vital role in contributing to **ASD's programmatic and academic excellence.** As a founding Board Member of the exceptional William Allen Academy of the Arts, I and my administration will **champion and support resumption of Academies to help stop the ASD budget bleed to Charter Schools, and to re-position ASD once again as a**

**statewide leader in the arts and sciences.** Here are some other examples of initiatives that I will encourage:

- Hold **Report Card Days** throughout the city, with free donuts, coffee and hamburgers for the family of every student who brings in a report card. This would be a four-times-a-year event, aligning churches and service clubs to all participate.
- Create an **ASD Booster Club** of retirees, service club members, retiree organizations, such as Mack Trucks and ASD, to attend our home games so that the nationally esteemed stands of the Birney Crum Stadium are once again filled with spectators, and I'm no longer one of the only parents cheering in the stands at football games.
- Institute a **City of Allentown Urban Fellowship program**, which will be discussed later in this document, as a way to generate social media and other communication channels to correct Issue #4, which is the misperceptions of the Crime and ASD. –
- Finally, as the Mayor of PA's third largest city with the second highest poverty demographic in the nation, I would be an **unrelenting champion to end the unintentional, but criminal negligence of our Commonwealth's funding of education,** which disproportionately impacts ASD over virtually every other district in the state and the nation.

## **PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME AND SCHOOLS**

Citizens rank the need to correct misperceptions of Allentown Crime and ASD schools as their third most important issue. I would contend that the widespread misperception of both have become bigger issues than the issues themselves. **The immediate, creative and collaborative correction of both misperceptions would arguably have a bigger positive impact than efforts aimed at any of the other five issues citizens cite.** These simple, but crippling misperceptions have slowed our progress for decades, and threaten to hollow out the neighborhoods around our reviving downtown.

For example, in terms of Allentown's historic diversity we are truly the "city of tomorrow," but we have allowed that very diversity to become a reason to doubt the safety of our city and the caliber of our school system. This, in turn, has accelerated a suburban flight that has helped decimate the financial stability of our city. This must be immediately addressed, and in its first year, A Bennett Administration would work tirelessly to make dramatic progress in correcting the crippling misperceptions.

Instituting the low-cost, alternatively funded **City of Allentown Urban Fellowship Program**, mentioned earlier, would become one of the lynchpins of generating a massive increase in positive information about crime and ASD for remarkably little financial investment. Social media today is a remarkable tool available to help us accomplish this goal, across all platforms. Yes, we have crime and educational challenges, but we must be unrelenting in telling the good news to ourselves and the world. We must be constant in communicating with all partners and stakeholders, especially realtors, about our strengths:

- Historic, remarkable and nationally ranked diversity
- A rich past imbedded in the history of our nation

- A remarkable and nationally ranked arts infrastructure from Symphony Hall to Baum Art School to Allentown Art Museum to 19<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre and exceptional outdoor art throughout the city
- Nationally unparalleled medical and historic infrastructure
- A walkable city with a powerfully positive environmental footprint
- The aggressive revitalization of downtown
- An unmatched parks system

The City of Allentown Urban Fellowship Program in City Hall will at first involve undergraduates from area colleges, with a view to expanding involvement to Allentown students of all ages, academic performance and ethnicities. The benefits to students is that it will help them build both their resumes and their job experience. This program is intended not only to provide the manpower and talent needed to correct misperceptions about crime and ASD, but also we want this to **be the program where Allentown's next Mayors, Fire Fighters and Police Officers of the future are inspired and developed.**

With sweeping and extensive social media, plus traditional media as our tools, we will be able to correct decades of crime and ASD misperceptions on a “person-to-person” basis, with the ASD Boosters Club mentioned earlier, awards programs like Properties of Merit, growing our Crime Watch Groups city wide, and fostering William-Allen-Construction-like companies in all our schools. Simultaneously, we will communicate relentlessly to both our “citizen residents and the world,” working closely and collaboratively with **all stakeholders so that we all speak about our accomplishments and our challenges with one voice—amplifying all.**

## **BLIGHT**

We have extensively discussed the importance of blight, identified by citizens as Issue #4, and its unique interdependence with both misperception and crime. In addition to the weekly neighborhood cleanups discussed under crime, a Bennett Administration will add **monthly block- by-block “barn raisings,”** following behind our weekly cleanups in Allentown’s most blighted neighborhoods. I have had terrific success for more than two decades partnering with home improvement corporations like Home Depot for cash and in-kind donations to do painting, landscaping and minor repairs in neighborhoods. Working with building trades apprentices and out-of-work tradesmen, students from LCTI and interested citizens, plus corporate and other volunteers, a Bennett Administration will begin by systematically conducting monthly neighborhood-by-neighborhood de-blighting of the street-facing building exteriors in our most challenged neighborhoods.

**Blight has been fueled in part by Allentown’s runaway multi-unit conversions,** which are the result of legislation that allows single units to be chopped up into multi-units—legislation that has never been curtailed. This, in turn, has created an ever-increasing percentage of the city that is non-owner occupied. By some measures non-owned residences are as high as 62%. There has also been a burgeoning of Allentown landlord baron, property owners with 50 units or more. A Bennett Administration will work collaboratively with City Council to **curtail all future de-conversions, and create a credits system** where only by purchasing credits from a



homeowner who has de-converted their home from a multi-unit can a new multi-unit conversion or new unit be built. Additionally, a Bennett Administration will work to further **de-incentivize landlord barons by examining all city and ASD taxing mechanisms** to make sure all multi-units are paying taxes proportional to the additional city services (EMS, Fire, Police, Trash and Recycling), as well as ASD educational support (additional students in the system) that they use relative to what a single-unit homeowner would use.

In the second year of a Bennett Administration, the City of Allentown Urban Fellowship will add to its assigned tasks, under the leadership of retired former Code Enforcement and other departments, a **block-by-block, web-based photographic inventory** that is specially designed to inventory blight and the overall condition of housing and building stock throughout the city. This project would be designed, first, to **assist in the woefully poor enforcement of existing legislation requiring inspection of multi-units**, and, second, to be instrumental in prioritizing street-facing blocks and neighborhoods for weekly cleanups and monthly “barn raisings.”

Finally, the **unwavering protection and restoration of Allentown’s remarkably intact but hugely threatened historic architecture, would be a core blight fighting strategy** of a Mayoral Bennett Administration. This would include, but not be limited to increasing the number of historic districts citywide; incentivizing historic restoration through prudent tax abatements; and supporting our Allentown Preservation League and giving them sharper legislative teeth to protect our precious and irreplaceable historic architecture. Research shows properties in historic districts increase in value at higher levels, and communities like previously cited #1 city Charleston, S.C. that do an exceptional job of historic preservation benefit from much higher levels of quality of life. I have deep experience in this area. Not only have I restored one of Allentown’s most important landmark properties, The Historic Benner Mansion, from boarded up to Allentown’s first and still only B&B, I was one of co-leaders in the establishment of West Park Historic District.

As blight is corrected city wide in an unrelenting manner, perceptions of the city will improve, especially perceptions of crime and the overall livability of the city.

## **TAXES**

Taxes are the final consistent issue in likely voter concerns in this upcoming municipal election. At the heart of this issue is the **undo burden City of Allentown residents pay, especially in ASD taxes** due to the previously mentioned constellation of problems: lack of an area school district that would generate urgently needed suburban tax revenue to ASD, Pennsylvania’s vastly inequitable educational funding mechanisms, suburban flight of businesses and higher socio-demographic residents fueled by deep misperceptions of crime and ASD, depressed housing values and tax revenues at every turn. What’s can our next Mayor do?

One, ensure that the **Neighborhood Improvement Zone (NIZ), our most important tool in creating new revenue, especially for ASD, remains healthy** throughout the course of its legislated 40-year life span. The cloud of concern generated by the ongoing FBI investigation of the current administration has by all reports brought ongoing momentum to a grinding halt, which is deadly to the long-term success of the NIZ, the only such initiative in the state.

Arguably, any new Mayor, by merit of not being in the current administration, would end that NIZ-crippling cloud, but it is essential that our new Mayor possess a current positive professional relationship with the Governor's Office, Harrisburg and, if possible, Washington, D.C., to ensure that our NIZ maximizes its potential on Day One of a new Mayoral Administration. These are relationships our current Mayor **does not have**. I am the only candidate in this race that can deliver this important goal.

To ensure that relocating businesses and residents have the information they need, we will work extremely closely with **realtors to make sure they had not only all the complete picture about crime and ASD, we would also work to make sure they had accurate information about City of Allentown's taxes relative to nearby communities and the benefits residents receive for those taxes**, such as exceptional public safety response times.

Small businesses contribute almost 50% of our nation's gross national product (GDP), and most recent Small Business Administration figures reveal that they employ 30% of all employees nationally. Yet, due to decades-old misperceptions of crime in particular, but also of our school system, small business growth in Allentown, especially outside the new NIZ zone, has lagged behind. As the state's top interviewer for the Department of Economic and Community Development "Team PA" project, I interviewed owners, principals and CEOs of businesses within Allentown zip codes. During those conversations, the stark reality of Allentown's relatively inhospitable climate for small business was driven home. The good news? The situation is easily corrected. A Bennett Administration will align City of Allentown departments to be exceptionally business friendly, and will work positively with City Council to ensure that legislation protects both the needs of residents and the requirements of being a small-business-friendly community. **A Bennett Administration will hold itself accountable for dramatic growth in small business throughout the City, not just in the NIZ.**

## **IN SUMMARY**

Crime, Schools, Perception of both crime and schools, Blight and Taxes are the top five concerns of citizens - likely to participate in the upcoming 2017 Mayoral primary - documented in hundreds of All American Surveys conducted over the past six months. These same issues, unaddressed for decades, are what motivated me to run for Mayor in 2001, 2005 and now 2017. These are best solved simultaneously and interdependently, something only a Mayor can effectively accomplish. What we need is NOT a "band aid," "shiny object," "new program," or "next initiative," as have been offered by **administration after administration** and now **candidate after candidate**. But rather a true strategic, sweeping, immediate and lasting **perfect storm of solution**. A Bennett Mayoral Administration is not only best equipped to provide that solution, but is committed to delivering real results to the citizens of our great city in its first term in office.