HOPE COMMISSION

A WILMINGTON PLAN

COMMISSION

THE WILMINGTON HOPE COMMISSION
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Table of Contents

Dedication 1

Executive Summary 2

Introduction 2

Wilmington: An Overview 4

Key Recommendations 7

Summary of the Report 8

Action Plan 1: "Community Policing" Works 17

Action Plan 2: Our Hope = Our Children 22

Action Plan 3: Building Hopeful Communities 27

Action Plan 4: Jobs and Economic Opportunities 31

Action Plan 5: Community Mobilization and Working the Streets 35

Action Plan 6: Bringing Hope through Faith 39

Action Plan 7: Making the Most of Second Chances 42

Action Plan 8: Spreading the Mission of Hope 47

Action Plan 9: Making Hope Part of the City Fabric 50

Acknowledgements 53

Dedication

This report is dedicated to the years of hard work that have gone into making Wilmington a strong City and a place that more and more people are calling their place of work, worship, recreation and most of all, home. This report is also a testament to the people who believe that more can be done to improve our quality of life.

This report praises the initiatives in Wilmington that are giving us hope, but also acknowledges what we as a community need to work on. It notes that there is a disparity of hope in some areas and for some residents. This report is dedicated to people living in the City who must deal with crime and poverty, more than others, and have lost loved ones to senseless acts of violence. Some residents must also deal with dilapidated houses, occupied by tenants who are in desperate need of drug and mental health counseling, but instead live in squalor. Some residents who once took pride in their blocks and their neighborhoods have either left or have given up hope. But hopefulness is a state of mind that can be restored, and that is why this report is dedicated to actions that will strive to make Wilmington safe, livable, affordable and vibrant for everyone.

This report is also for the young people who represent the future of our City. For some, drugs and crime have become a way of life and there is seemingly no way out. Without a strong moral compass (i.e., family and community life), educational and/or economic opportunities, some turn to the streets, where drug dealers and gangs are ready to offer them a substitute for family and money, and a taste of the fast life. Some young people who pick up guns believe that violence is the only way to gain power and respect on their block; while others view a gun as protection. As both criminals and their victims get younger and younger, youth are losing their childhood and we are in danger of losing part of the next generation. The action that hopefully will result from this report will create a city that will help youth to grow up healthy, feel connected to positive influences, make positive contributions to their community, and feel a sense of hope for the future.

While we can't reach everyone, this report can provide the foundation for better days and tangible improvement for many City residents. This report is dedicated to empowering the residents of the City to make Wilmington stronger than ever before.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

On May 12, 2005, the Honorable James M. Baker, Mayor of the City of Wilmington, signed Executive Order 2005-2 to establish the Wilmington Hope Commission. The charge to the Commission was to find "solutions to the serious societal issues facing the City [through] a concerted collaborative effort, involving the resources and expertise of the many levels of government, non-profit organizations, the business community, educational, religious, philanthropic, public safety, and community organizations and concerned citizens." The Mayor's action culminated four months of community meetings and initiatives of *The Coalition to Build a Safer Community*, a network of organizations and individuals dedicated to finding answers to the City's violence. The months-long dialogue on making Wilmington a safer City led to the *One Vision, One Community, One City Symposium* in April 2005.

Understanding the seriousness of the situation, the Mayor and other elected leaders, acted to make the Hope Commission a reality, with the goal of "develop[ing] a 'Wilmington Plan' to deliver…services and programs, in a more effective, comprehensive and targeted fashion, thereby improving coordination and cooperation, among the service providers and reducing the duplication of effort." Its recommendations would be part of an immediate and long-term restoration of Wilmington's vision as a City "To Be Somebody." With more than 100 community members representing the non-profit, faith-based, business, youth, public safety and political sectors, the Commission, led by the 27-member Executive Committee, divided into the following subcommittees:

- **Public Safety** – *This Committee's objective was to identify ways to increase cooperation and trust between public safety agencies and the communities they serve in the City, in finding solutions to reduce crime and enhance the quality of life.*

- **Economic Development** – *This Committee's objective was to make recommendations that would sustain economic growth and build opportunities throughout the City.*

- **Resource Development** – *This Committee's objective was to identify and develop financial resources to help fund programs that reduce violence and social problems in Wilmington.*

- **Community Services** – *This Committee's objective was to look at the availability and accessibility of social services for City residents.*

- **Education** – *This Committee's objective was to take a collaborative approach with educators and non-profit organizations in developing a strategy to improve the educational success of City youth.*

- **Faith-Based** – *This Committee's objective was to work with the various faith-based groups that serve City residents in order to encourage better planning and moral leadership in neighborhoods.*

- **Youth Leadership** – *This Committee's objective was to provide opportunities for youth to have a voice in resolving the issues facing their communities.*

The Hope Commission as a whole met for more than nine months, exchanging ideas and obtaining valuable insight from community residents, youth, business, political leaders, social service agencies, educators, law enforcement and other professionals both locally and nationally. While their backgrounds and philosophies were diverse, those involved with the Hope Commission understood the vital role they played in providing a blueprint for Wilmington's future. Recommendations in this report were developed from the work of the seven subcommittees; review of social, economic and crime data; focus group reports; research of best practices; surveys; presentations and most importantly, community voices. All of these give us ***Hope*** or in other words ***"the expectation that something good will happen."*** The Wilmington Hope Commission is recommending actions that we believe will give "hope" to all residents and make a great City, even better!

Wilmington: An Overview

History

Before one can assess the current dynamics in Wilmington, it's important to look at the City in a historical context. For more than 150 years, the City has been a vital port along the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic corridor serving as an important trade hub and as a prime location for manufacturing sites along the Delaware River. Wilmington has also established itself as one of the most business-friendly cities in the United States.

During the 1910s and 1920s, Wilmington enjoyed tremendous population growth, since European immigrants and migrating blacks came to the City for manufacturing jobs. Its location near major cities such as Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York and Washington, D.C. made Wilmington a destination, and by the early 1920s, the City's population had hit 110,000. By 1940, a small number of black families on the East Side and in South Wilmington enjoyed stable incomes and home ownership despite the ad hoc segregation they faced. The City had a sizable middle class and a significant presence of working professionals.

After the Great Depression and World War II, the City had to deal with the impact of suburbanization and the loss of wartime industry. By the 1960s, the City, like many in the Nation, tried to deal with the effects of urban decay by implementing an urban renewal plan. That initiative – which included putting Interstate-95 through the heart of the City and Interstate-495 by the East Side – had a severe impact on some of the City's thriving neighborhoods. In addition, an emerging Hispanic population began to grow in the Hilltop area of the City. The 1968 riots and the extended presence of the National Guard created a tense climate and also led to increased suburbanization, taking away a valuable tax base and many skilled professional workers.

For more than thirty years, the City has struggled to withstand suburbanization and the loss of manufacturing jobs. A series of well-intentioned public policies and programs have also had unintended negative consequences on the City and its neighborhoods. While Civil Rights advances in housing laws provided opportunities for African-Americans to move out of these neighborhoods, it also created areas of "hyper-segregation". Desegregation in the 1970s had the

result of eliminating neighborhood schools in the city. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the development of suburban and strip malls shifted customer traffic from downtown Wilmington to the suburban areas, resulting in reduced consumer activity and economic viability of small businesses in the City.

The "crack" epidemic hit the City of Wilmington in the late 1980s and along with it, a proliferation of guns, which brought a whole new level of violence and fear of crime to neighborhoods. The importation of crack cocaine exacerbated the deterioration and blight in some parts of neighborhoods like the East Side, Southbridge, Westside and Riverside; Wilmington also became an important stop along the I-95 corridor for heroin trafficking, drawing customers from surrounding suburban areas.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s the City faced the enormous task of economic revitalization while fighting a spreading drug epidemic. In the 1990s the City was able to attract many large corporate citizens and enjoyed an influx of new businesses.

The current state of Wilmington

Wilmington faces many of the same problems as other major cities, particularly along the East Coast. "The major loss of manufacturing jobs has been the most direct cause of poverty and low income for city residents. The cycle of poverty that results from lower wages, suburban flight and declining public dollars for vital services particularly in education leaves many of the residents unable to fit into the new service industry."[1] In the City's poorest communities, drug addiction, lack of education and job skills training has had a devastating impact on neighborhood stability.

Since the late 1990s, the revitalization of the Riverfront has brought residents and tourists to the City. At the same time, certain neighborhoods in City have only seen limited benefit from redevelopment plans. Some neighborhood groups have done great work in attempting to deal with local issues, but a lack of a comprehensive strategy and the complexity of the problems has made revitalization efforts extremely difficult.

[1] The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (2003) P. 35

In 2004, there were 95 shootings in the City, the highest since 1996, when there were 107. Though the number of shootings dropped to 82 in 2005, the community as a whole continues to press for stronger efforts at reducing the violence and improving the overall quality of life. Police suspect many of these shootings were drug-related. Regardless of motives, gun violence results in a senseless loss of life and negatively impacts the business climate of the City as well. All too many of our young people in the City lack hope and have little faith that their fortunes will get better. As a result the leaders of our community, businesses, faiths and city have recognized the need to partner in order to better connect with our youth.

Through this understanding of Wilmington's current state, the City leadership and the Wilmington Hope Commission, are focused on finding remedies to the social and economic ills facing many neighborhoods, while developing a comprehensive action plan that will mobilize the entire community. The Wilmington Hope Commission Report is just the first step in achieving these goals.

Key Recommendations

1. **Expand the community policing philosophy as the department-wide approach to fighting and preventing crime.**

2. **Create a strong advocacy organization to improve the education of City children.**

3. **Establish Hope Zones.**

4. **Improve economic development opportunities for businesses to thrive and for residents Citywide.**

5. **Establish a network of community workers known as Hope Outreach Workers (youth and adults).**

6. **Coordinate the efforts of the faith-based community in education, youth outreach, violence prevention and ex-offender re-entry.**

7. **Strengthen ex-offender re-entry programs that promote positive reintegration into the community.**

8. **Embark on a Campaign of Hope for the City of Wilmington.**

9. **Create a permanent Hope Commission to ensure that the action plans in this report are implemented and sustained.**

Summary of the Report

The City of Wilmington has historically been and continues to be the economic and cultural hub of the State of Delaware. However, the challenges faced by the City affect the entire State.

Did you know?

- While we spend an average of $9,000 a year to educate a child in Delaware, we spend $60,000 to incarcerate a young person for 6 months.

- Youth who are incarcerated at Ferris and move to into the adult system cost the State $2 million (court costs, room and board, legal fees, etc.) over their lifetime.

- In 1990, there were 3,407 adult inmates statewide costing $67,165,200 a year; today there are 6,850 inmates costing $225,000,000 a year.

- While the median income in Wilmington is $35,116, in some areas of City, the median income is as low as $11,490. One in five Wilmington residents lives below the poverty level.

- While business leaders say today's jobs require high skill levels, in some areas of the City, less than a one third of its residents have a high school diploma.

- While home ownership creates stable communities and property values, only 50% of residents in Wilmington are home owners, compared to 72% statewide.

- While children benefit from the presence of a positive male role model in their lives, within certain areas of the City, the rate of female-headed households is as high as 75%.

- Between January 2005 and February 2006, more than 1,200 ex-offenders were released to zip codes 19801, 19802 and 19805.

- In 2004, Wilmington had 16 murders, the highest number of homicides in a decade. That number does not reflect the impact on the mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, friends, pastors, witnesses, victims and their families, and the broader community.

These statistics are reality. We know that Wilmington can do better. Conditions have worsened in many neighborhoods to a point where we as a community can no longer ignore or accept them. Even some well intentioned public policies have had unintended negative consequences. Mayor James Baker established the Hope Commission to conduct a community-wide self-examination and to create a plan of action to change these conditions. Our challenges are significant because the issues are complex – poverty, substance abuse, the remnants of segregation and institutional racism, lack of personal responsibility, educational failures, and a popular culture which glamorizes drugs, guns and sex, to name a few.

These recommendations are the consensus of Commission members who represented diverse backgrounds and often times, competing interests. The Commission can deliver no single "silver bullet" or definitive answer to issues much larger than any one city or state. What it can and has delivered is a comprehensive assessment of the City of Wilmington, as a community of people, and specific steps that Wilmington can take to improve conditions that contribute to a better quality of life.

One of the most important recommendations is that the community as a whole continues to focus, discuss and work on new strategies to effect real and lasting change. This may mean making the tough decisions to eliminate ineffective programs or policies and reallocating resources to efforts that have been proven to work. In sum, in order for positive change to occur, **we must first have hope that it can be achieved**. The commitment on the part of all – including those who live, work and are elected outside of Wilmington – must be for the long haul.

Summary of Key Recommendations

In an effort to develop a plan to improve the quality of life in the City, the Wilmington Hope Commission engaged more than three hundred people from various socio-economic and geopolitical backgrounds who work, live and serve the City of Wilmington. The varied voices of many people provided immense insight into the perceptions of Wilmington and beliefs about what will make the City a stronger, safer community. The Hope Commission and its subcommittees sponsored several focus groups, conducted informal surveys and interviews, held community meetings, and pursued research on best practices in other cities. The Commission reached out to various interest groups for feedback and candid discussion. Below is a summary of the key recommendations.

Expand community policing as the department-wide approach to fighting and preventing crime

The Wilmington Hope Commission found that based on research, committee deliberations, and voices from the community including residents, law enforcement, and elected officials, that the Wilmington Police Department should fully adopt a community policing philosophy department-wide.

Community policing means (1) an ongoing commitment to organizational and operational change, (2) building significant partnerships, and (3) an emphasis on community problem solving. The philosophy encourages all stakeholders to participate in the problem-solving process and empowers residents to fight crime in their neighborhoods and businesses. To be effective, community policing requires police to build trusting relationships with residents and businesses in the community and in turn, for residents to work with police to fight crime and improve quality of life – it is a two way street. We recommend that at every opportunity officers interact with community members.

Create a strong youth advocacy organization to improve the education of City children

This youth advocacy organization would fight for better educational opportunities for City children and would mobilize resources to improve achievement among all students. Advocating for youth at each stage of their development is instrumental in their long-term success. We recommend that the educational advocacy organization work closely with the local school districts, community groups and the faith-based community to set a short- and long-term agenda for raising student achievement, improving graduation rates, reducing violence, and enhancing prospects for success of City youth. Among the actions steps recommended in the report are: improving the quality of child care and pre-school programs for all City children; helping parents prepare their children for school; making professional development available for teachers who teach urban youth and making sure that more students graduate from high school.

Establish Hope Zones

The Hope Commission recommends a targeted comprehensive approach to creating peace and strengthening communities and calls for the establishment of Hope Zones. Hope Zones are selected neighborhoods with recognized identities. The first Hope Zone would be a testing ground for inter-agency collaboration, economic opportunities, human service programs, initiatives and strategies. By initially focusing on a limited area, implementation of the Hope Commission recommendations could be tested, evaluated and amended in a manageable environment. Lessons learned will then be used for replication of additional Hope Zones. Hope zones will focus on the physical appearance of neighborhoods as well as resident stability, home ownership, and enhancement of the community.

The Commission recommends that the City, in partnership with the community, should identify Hope Zones and determine a strategy for implementation. Selection of the Zone for initial implementation will include consideration of existing leadership and resources found in

neighborhoods. This process will build on the Wilmington Specifically Targeted Area Redevelopment (STAR) program, which focuses on adding new housing and redeveloping existing buildings. Although this effort will start with one Hope Zone, additional zones should be created as soon as is possible. The implementation strategy should include a plan, with timeframes, for developing additional Hope Zones.

The Commission believes a Hope Zone could decrease the fragmentation of services to community residents through a comprehensive delivery system. Such a service delivery system could become the model for other neighborhoods to be incorporated into the city-wide redevelopment strategy.

Improve economic development opportunities for businesses to thrive and for Residents Citywide

The Hope Commission recognizes that a strong and vibrant economy, are vital to the success of the City. The City must continue to be a magnet for new businesses and support existing employers. Therefore, we recommend City-wide economic development efforts and initiatives are continued and strengthened to attract and retain businesses which provide economic opportunity for residents. The Hope Commission further recommends targeting job training, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for residents in Hope Zones. This could include a one-stop shop (or enterprise centers) for young urban entrepreneurs, financial literacy training, an urban work-study program, and increased employment and training for ex-offenders.

We recommend the creation of a Hope Zone Development Corporation to fund, support, and sustain: (1) extensive neighborhood re-development; (2) business ventures; and (3) workforce development that leads to quality jobs.

Establish a network of community workers known as Hope Outreach Workers (youth and adults)

The Hope Commission recommends the hiring of Hope Outreach Workers -- trained individuals who live and work in the neighborhoods they serve. They will have the capacity to assess needs, plan, implement and evaluate neighborhood programs and serve as the "connective tissue" between City residents and their appropriately identified needs for service. The Hope Commission believes hiring and training Hope Outreach Workers in the selected Hope Zones would be the best way of implementing this recommendation and expanding it later.

Great care should be taken in the selection, training and supervision of Hope Outreach Workers. A training program should be created, leading to a certification as a Hope Outreach Worker.

The Hope Commission recommends that the City ensure the Hope Outreach Workers' safety in hot spots by giving them adequate transportation and communication to call for help from the police if needed. The goal is that Hope Outreach Workers will know that they are vital to the rejuvenation of their communities.

Coordinate the efforts of the faith-based community in youth outreach, violence prevention and ex-offender re-entry into the community

The Hope Commission recommends the creation of an Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives like those already established in twelve states. The Office would strengthen communication with government and among faith-based institutions; provide technical assistance in the areas of program design, implementation and evaluation; secure and provide funding; and build organizational capacity for faith-based organizations.

Today, more than ever, the city needs its religious groups to be its strength, offering moral guidance and making sure the lessons of peace and love are not limited to sermons. An active and engaged religious institution is especially important in the highest poverty and most

crime-ridden parts of the city, where some young people have lost touch with these moral institutions of the community. The City's faith-based community will be counted on to be leaders and co-partners in implementing the recommendations of the Hope Commission.

Strengthen ex-offender re-entry programs that promote positive reintegration into the community

The Hope Commission urges the State, City and the Faith Community to evaluate the current outcomes of re-entry programs and work together to make sure ex-offenders who go back to their neighborhoods are provided greater support and do not pose a threat to the community. The Commission recommends the expansion of successful existing job training, substance abuse/mental health counseling and housing placement programs for released ex-offenders. Community and faith-based organizations should be engaged to make these programs more effective.

The Commission recommends that an analysis be done on the needs of released ex-offenders to the City and that funding be sought to meet those needs. We further recommend an enhancement of programs to provide released ex-offenders with assistance to earn a GED or high school diploma to increase the likelihood of successful re-entry into the community.

Embark on a Campaign of Hope for Wilmington

The Hope Commission recommends a Campaign of Hope for Wilmington that would be a multi-media public awareness and action campaign to instill a spirit of hope throughout the city and to mobilize people and businesses to embark on individual personal acts of hope that will cumulatively generate a momentum of positive change for Wilmington. The *Campaign of Hope* would be designed to replace pessimism with a spirit of hope and confidence, while still facing the realities of the challenges that will have to be met along the way.

We recommend that this *Campaign of Hope*, be a multi-tiered communications campaign that packages key components of this report in ways that resonate with community members, community organization leaders, business leaders, policy makers, funders, and other stakeholders and moves them to action. We recommend partnering with the business community on collaborative sponsorships of the *Campaign of Hope*, including financial support for launching and sustaining this Campaign within the city and/or state.

From this report must come a groundswell of popular belief in positive changes for the City. In order to prompt people to take action, they need to understand that their individual actions and attitudes will make a difference. We hope to set in motion a new determination to overcome economic, cultural, and societal obstacles that have stifled individual and collective efforts to reduce violence and build community character. We want to mobilize members of the community with a common resolve to action.

Create a permanent Hope Commission
to ensure that the action plans in this report are implemented and sustained

The Hope Commission would be a permanent entity with the responsibility of advocating and implementing the recommendations of the Commission. The Commission would be made up of members representing a broad spectrum of the community, under strong chair leadership, appointed by the Governor and / or Mayor. The Governor, the County Executive and the Mayor of the City of Wilmington would appoint members of the Commission. Membership should include the chairs of the United Way, the Community Foundation and the Delaware Public Policy Institute. Membership should also include representatives of the Business Roundtable, the Faith Community, the non-profit sector, and the community at large. The new Commission could be created by Executive Order of the Governor or the Mayor. Our hope would be that it would be endorsed by resolutions of the General Assembly, New Castle County Council and Wilmington City Council.

The Commission would need staffing in order to maintain contact with community groups, existing programs, policy makers and public officials so that it would remain relevant and effective. The Commission would also need funding, which could come initially from the City, County or State or from corporate or foundation sources. The Commission would report twice a year to the Governor, the County Executive and Mayor, along with the City Council, New Castle County Council and the General Assembly.

Action Plan 1: "Community Policing" Works

Recommendation – *Expand community policing as the department-wide approach to fighting and preventing crime.*

The Wilmington Hope Commission found that based on research, committee deliberations, and voices from the community including residents, law enforcement, and elected officials, that the Wilmington Police Department should fully adopt a community policing philosophy department-wide.

Community policing means (1) an ongoing commitment to organizational and operational change, (2) building significant partnerships, and (3) an emphasis on community problem solving. It involves other State and City government departments, such as License and Inspection, health and welfare agencies, and housing. The philosophy encourages all stakeholders to participate in the problem solving process and empowers residents to fight crime in their neighborhoods and businesses. To be effective, community policing requires police to build trusting relationships with residents and businesses in the community and in turn, for residents to work with police to fight crime and improve quality of life – it is a two way street.

Action steps:

- The Wilmington Hope Commission recommends that the Administration identify and implement accredited training for community policing throughout the Wilmington Police Department. In keeping with national best practices, in addition to police, other government agencies and community members should be included in training.

- We recommend that the City hire additional police officers to more effectively implement community policing.

- We recommend enhancement of police information systems to allow greater analysis of crime data and trends.

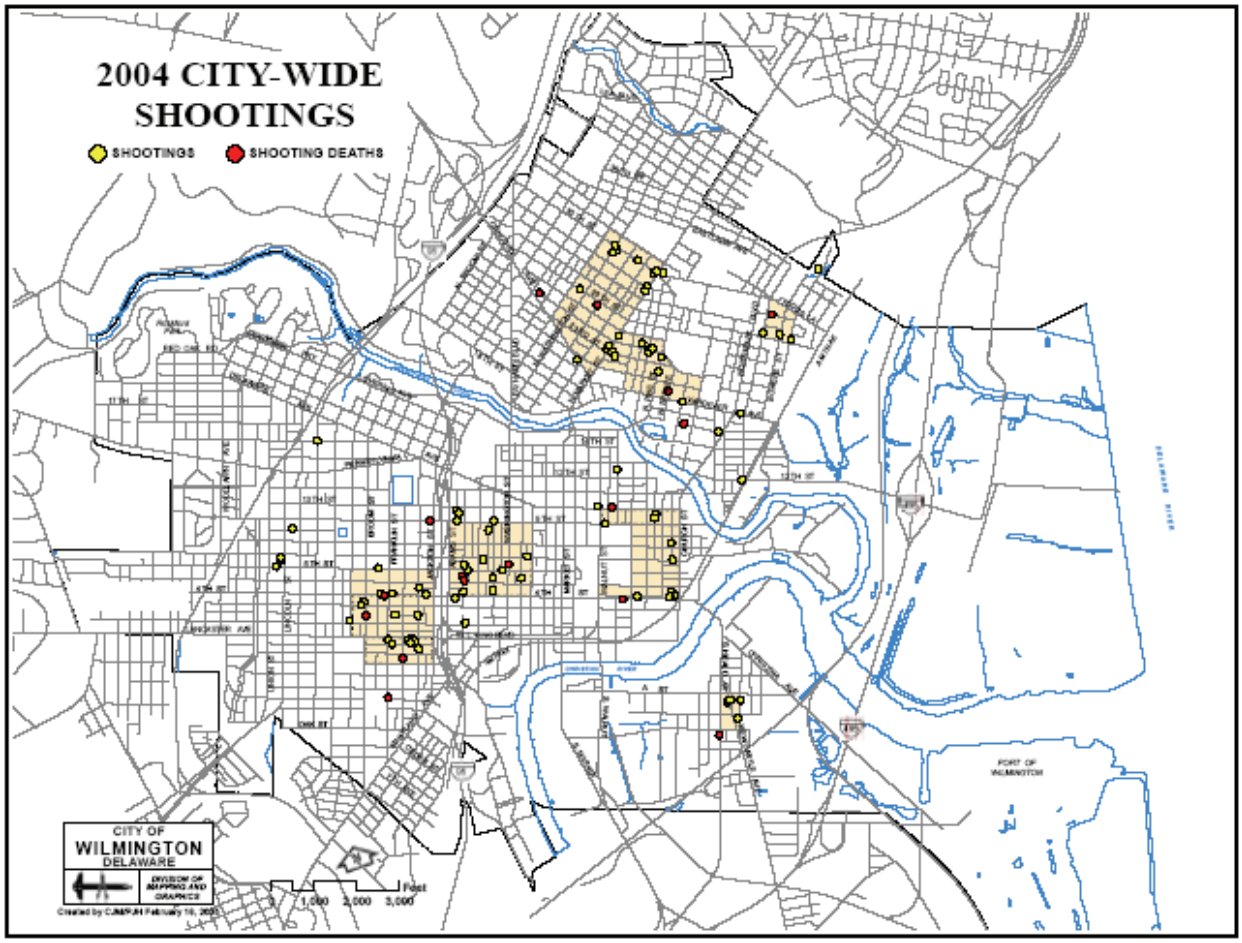
- Police outreach is critical to community policing. We recommend that at every opportunity officers interact with community members. Officers should work with the community at all levels. For example, expand police youth outreach with such programs as Explorer Post, mentoring and increased utilization of the Police Athletic League (P.A.L.) center within the City. The Commission endorses the newly implemented Child Development-Community Policing program and recommends the identification of long-term funding.

- The City should strengthen its public safety advisory councils among public safety officials, residents and businesses to enhance communication and cooperation.

- The Commission recommends the development of a comprehensive strategy to diversify the Police Department to better reflect the population that its serves. The Department should conduct department-wide training on cultural competency and special populations such as, those with language barriers, mental illness and youth, to keep pace with the City's changing demographics.

Why we need this:

Though Wilmington's crime problems are not comparable to other larger cities in the region, drugs and violence have had a profound impact historically on Hilltop, West Center City, Riverside, Price's Run, the Ninth Ward and the East Side. Today the problems of drugs, crime and violence have expanded to other parts of city, county and state. In some areas, drug trafficking has attracted transient addicts, chased away some home owners and fostered a sense of hopelessness among some residents unable to leave. The Criminal Justice Council finds that street drug crime and non-drug-related robberies are the primary causes of violence in the City. The Wilmington Police Department has also acknowledged that many of the 95 shootings in the City in 2004 were drug related. The map below shows the locations of shootings and resulting homicides in the City of Wilmington in 2004.



Various community members have expressed concerns about aggressive police tactics. As a result, some young people, who already have limited positive role models in their communities come to view the police as adversaries. The goal of community policing is to develop trusting relationships, which over the long term should decrease these negative viewpoints of the police and ultimately reduce crime.

Community members overwhelmingly agreed public safety is a significant issue and law enforcement alone can't solve the problem of crime. Though Wilmington is safer than most cities, there is a perception among some residents and many people outside of the city that safety is a problem. According to research conducted by the Hope Commission, shootings occur more often in neighborhoods where the median income is below $28,000 and where unemployment is as high as 50 percent. Community members endorsed community policing as a means to deepen police-community partnerships to reduce the fear and incident of crime, address neighborhood

issues, and improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Many expressed the desire for police officers to have more direct and intimate involvement with the communities they serve. Community residents want police presence and safe communities but they also desire to have officers who understand and respect them in their interactions. Others made clear that community policing needs to have community involvement and cooperation. Collaboration, cooperation and mutual assistance are keys to community problem solving. It is with this background that the Hope Commission recommends the continued expansion and full implementation of community policing in the City. The Wilmington Police Department has been working with community leaders and social service agencies to implement the Child Development-Community Policing program to provide emotional assistance and support when they have witnessed a traumatic and/or violent act. The Hope Commission endorses the Child-Development Community Policing program. The public safety committee also discussed ways that the Wilmington Police Department could revise its deployment strategies to address community "hot spots."

Reasons for Hope:

The City has already embraced elements of community policing as a better route to crime prevention. Thanks to a grant from New Castle County, the Wilmington Police have partnered with the Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth and their Families', Division of Child Mental Health to begin the Child Development-Community Policing (CD-CP) program. The CD-CP, which started at Yale University in New Haven, Conn., provides assistance to children and families in crime-ridden areas by offering stress and trauma counseling, police intervention and parent training. Public health experts at Yale introduced CD-CP as a way to deal with the difficulties of living in high-crime, high-risk areas from a child's perspective. The Wilmington Police Department plans to apply for additional funds from other government sources to help sustain the program.

There are other strong examples. In 1995, the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention worked with the City's Austin neighborhood to develop a block-by-block stabilization plan. The community groups, working with the Chicago Police Department, began a massive public education campaign, using leaflets, posters and guest speakers to emphasize the importance of

public safety. Soon, the program expanded to the City's Logan Square and Grand Boulevard communities. As the program found success in strengthening block areas and reducing crime, community groups received money to hire a full-time violence prevention manager in each neighborhood. The City also formed a steering committee to use the block-by-block model as a way to improve public safety Citywide. The violence prevention effort won the support of state and federal agencies, thanks to the project coordinators' ability to frame the violence as a critical public health issue. The Violence Prevention Project – which is co-chaired by Mayor Richard Daley and Francis Cardinal George, the Archbishop of Chicago – now enjoys support from various public safety and public health organizations, including the noted Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in Princeton.

Boston has developed a similar program called Operation CeaseFire. The City works with churches and the ex-offender population to identify at-risk youth and help alter their behavior. The program emphasizes the role of community centers as havens from violence, allowing youth from broken homes or violent backgrounds to channel their energies in more constructive activities. Police also aid in this effort with weekly meetings, with neighborhood and community leaders, to make sure youth who have been steered into Operation CeaseFire remain off the streets. Community leaders and media outlets have praised the effort as an example of City and neighborhood groups working together to find alternatives to reactive policing.

In Cincinnati, where race riots erupted in 2001 following police shootings of several unarmed black men over a six-month period, the police department worked with the National Conference for Community and Justice of Greater Cincinnati to help improve community relations.[2] Cincinnati-based companies Procter & Gamble and Federated Department Stores funded this trust-building initiative, including a quarterly *Report to the Community* sent to City residents. This support demonstrates that corporations are also willing to invest money in improving police-community relations, particularly if it creates safer neighborhoods in which they are located and where their employees might live.

[2] *Report to the Community*. The Cincinnati Police Department. Fall 2005.

Action Plan 2: Our Hope = Our Children

Recommendation: *Create a strong youth advocacy organization to improve the education of City children.*

This youth advocacy organization would fight for better educational opportunities for City children and would mobilize resources to improve achievement among all students. Advocating for youth at each stage of their development is instrumental in their long-term success. This group could initially function under the auspices of the Wilmington Hope Commission's successor (see recommendation 8).

Action steps:

- We recommend that the educational advocacy organization work closely with the local school districts, community groups and the faith-based community to set a short and long-term agendas for raising student achievement, improving graduation rates, reducing violence, and enhancing prospects for success of City youth. The agendas should include:
  - Improving the quality of child care and pre-school programs for all City children
  - Helping parents prepare their children for school
  - Making professional development available for teachers who teach urban youth
  - Working with the State's colleges and universities to improve the preparation of teachers for the challenges of teaching urban youth
  - Focusing on early literacy and math skills in middle schools as the building blocks of future success
  - Creating partnerships among school districts, community centers and religious institutions to ensure effective after school programs and tutoring for students in their own communities
  - Reducing school truancy
  - Making sure that more students graduate from high school
  - Implementing the recommendations of the Neighborhood Schools Commission as well as the City of Wilmington Neighborhood Schools Recommending Report and the Hope Commission's Education Committee's report

- To be effective in establishing and sustaining an agenda for children, this organization must have: a clear and defined mission and authority; support from the State, City and private sector; financial capacity (the ability to draw private and public funds for investment in changing the basic quality of schools) or the ability to affect the distribution of public resources and funding; the ability to create bottom-up, school-level leadership and advocacy that can influence school-specific relationships, plans and visions, and have input into the use of discretionary funds; managerial capacity to provide day-to-day leadership and continuously draw together and recruit leadership from the public, private, community, and non-profit sectors to sustain focus on improvement; and help from universities and non-profits to implement the vision for improving public education.

- The organization should establish a set of measurable outcomes in classroom performance and hold accountable individual groups charged with meeting those results; as well as advocate for incentives to reward success.

Why we need this:

Education provides hope. More than ever, education is the ticket to success. As our world becomes more knowledge-based, there are fewer opportunities for those with limited education. The consequences of a poor education are growing more severe. Workers with only a high school diploma can expect to earn a little over half as much as college graduates. Two-thirds of jobs available in Delaware will require at least some postsecondary education by 2010. Right now, only half of African-Americans and Hispanics in Delaware complete the 9th through 12th grades in four years.

It's not just in the workplace that education matters more today than ever. Raising children, being an active citizen, or doing just about anything else requires increasing levels of literacy. Studies also show that crime and poverty are directly connected to a lack of education.

There is a glaring need for educational advocacy, especially when it comes to classroom performance and bridging the achievement gap between minority and white students in the City. According to the Department of Education, almost two-thirds of low-income 8th graders (most of who were black or Latino) scored a 1 – the lowest performance level -- on the Delaware Student Testing Program.

The Hope Commission recommends that this new organization focus on increasing cooperation among schools, the government, education advocacy groups and private philanthropists. Educational advocacy means more than improving class attendance and performance; it is about changing the behavior and cultural norms that pervade in neighborhoods, especially those that de-emphasize the role of school in developing a young person.

Community members expressed strong concerns about the state of education for City youth. Many claimed that the system is highly bureaucratic and insensitive to the needs and desires of City youth and their parents. Research on successful community educational programs makes clear that support for urban youth, educationally, starts at birth and continues *through* college graduation.

Effective improvement in education for City children requires that this advocacy group transcend political cycles, cut across lines of race and income, and simultaneously demand the attention and effort of policy makers. Reform efforts often arise but collapse, partly because leaders are unable to craft effective political coalitions that would commit community resources to a concrete policy agenda. Working to build bridges within and between communities is critical to developing a successful and sustainable public advocacy organization.

The organization would create a system of supports that are protective of the children of Wilmington so they might become strong and resilient learners resistant to violence. These supports must provide many layers of protection in the form of stronger families, effective early childhood education, responsive school systems supported by coordinated community-based programs. Leaders of this advocacy effort must be able to secure resources and the attention of others, and have the passion and commitment to overcome obstacles, while building consensus on

the right thing to do. More importantly, they must have the courage and commitment necessary to speak clearly as one on behalf of the many children.
The Hope Commission believes an advocacy organization is critical to improving the overall quality of education and educational opportunities for City youth.

Reasons for Hope:
State and Federal school accountability frameworks require a focus on narrowing the achievement gap. Efforts resulting from these requirements have already led to a decrease in the gaps that exist in Delaware. Recent data has shown that African-American testing scores are climbing while the dropout rate is decreasing. Last year, the African-American dropout rate was down 1.2 percent from the previous year, and the Hispanic dropout rate was down 2.3 percent.[3]

The Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League (MWUL), among other community, advocacy and education groups, has already been involved in promoting educational improvement in Delaware. The MWUL is now embarking on an Achievement Matters campaign. The goals of the campaign are (1) encourage parents and youth to believe in the value of education, (2) recruit and train parent/advocates, (3) recruit new teachers of color and provide professional development and cultural competency training for existing teachers and (4) offer after-school and summer enrichment programs.

The Business Roundtable, the Rodel Foundation, the Department of Education, the State Chamber of Commerce, and the MWUL, among others, have joined together to kick-off *Vision 2015*, which seeks to create a blueprint to strengthen public education in the state. The effort has a stated goal of preparing every student for higher education, the work place, and responsible citizenship in a world that is increasingly interdependent and competitive.

The Harlem Children's Zone (see Recommendation 4) has established a best practice model for measuring youth achievement, though their formula for success has required significant

[3] Delaware Department of Education. "Dropout Statistics." February 2006.

resources. Harlem Children's Zone CEO Geoffrey Canada notes that "best practice programs for child development can't be done on the cheap and significant investment will require significant accountability."

Action Plan 3: Building Hopeful Communities

Recommendation – *Establish Hope Zones.*

The Hope Commission recommends a targeted comprehensive approach to strengthen communities and calls for the establishment of Hope Zones. Hope Zones are selected neighborhoods with recognized identities. The first Hope Zone would be a testing ground for inter-agency collaboration, economic opportunities, home ownership, human service programs, initiatives and strategies. By initially focusing on a limited area, implementation of the Hope Commission recommendations could be tested, evaluated and amended in a manageable environment. Lessons learned will then be used for replication of additional Hope Zones.

Action steps:

- The Hope Commission recommends that a Hope Zone be established in partnership with community service agencies. This would be a coordinated effort involving various services including employment assistance and training, substance abuse prevention and treatment, family support services, re-entry programming, and the utilization of Hope Outreach workers (see recommendation 5).

- Service coordination and collaboration will be critical to success in an environment of scarce resources. Therefore, each Hope Zone should have a "Community Services Collaborative." This group would be made up of representatives from public and private organizations working to address the problem of violent crime in the Hope Zone. Important partners in this collaborative would include: police, probation and parole, Hope Outreach Workers , social workers, community centers, state agencies, service providers, rehabilitated ex-offenders, youth, parents, crime victims and neighborhood associations. The Collaborative would also help to determine community needs, identify community resources and strengths, and help to coordinate efforts to solve identified problems.

- The Commission recommends that the City, in partnership with the community, should identify Hope Zones and determine a strategy for implementation. Selection of the Zone

for initial implementation will include consideration of existing leadership and resources found in neighborhoods. This process will build on the Wilmington Specifically Targeted Area Redevelopment (STAR) program, which focuses on adding new housing and redeveloping existing buildings. Although this effort will start with one Hope Zone, additional zones should be created as soon as is possible. The implementation strategy should include a plan, with timeframes, for developing additional Hope Zones. In addition, Hope Zones will focus on the physical appearance of neighborhoods, including removal of trash, compliance with zoning and licensing requirements, and improved lighting, as well as resident stability, home ownership and enhancement of community. In some cases the plan will include the installation of additional street cameras to monitor criminal activity.

- The Hope Commission recommends that Hope Zones be targeted for home ownership initiatives and investments, including Community Reinvestment Act funds from banks. Using affordable housing and mixed-income projects, we can rehabilitate blighted areas and help City residents to own the homes they live in.

- The Hope Commission recommends that the faith community have a part in the planning and the implementation of services in the Hope Zone.

- The Hope Commission recommends that each Zone have a Youth Leadership Council to provide advice and direction on programs and services that are relevant. Members of the Youth Leadership Council may also work with the Hope Outreach Workers and social workers and be a part of the "connective tissue" in communities. These youth can play an important role in reaching out to their peers. In addition, we recommend area colleges and universities assist by hosting youth leadership council meetings, which will expose young people to higher education.

- The Hope Commission recommends that data be utilized in the selection of Hope Zones from reports such as *Kids Count, Communities Count* and the Hope Commission companion research report.

Why we need this:

As Geoffrey Canada, CEO of the renowned Harlem Children's Zone notes: "A lot of people say it takes a village to raise the child. What if the village isn't functioning?" Rebuilding hope is a difficult, neighborhood-by-neighborhood process, and establishing a Hope Zone will give us a model by which we can restore stability and positive direction in other neighborhoods.

As noted in the other recommendations, crime is linked with poverty, lack of education and neighborhood instability. This feeds into a culture of hopelessness, often making residents in the poorer neighborhoods focus on short-term survival instead of long-term success.

A Hope Zone could decrease the fragmentation of services to community residents through a comprehensive delivery system. Such a service delivery system could become the model for other neighborhoods to be incorporated into the city-wide redevelopment strategy.

Reasons for Hope:

The Chicago Project for Violence Prevention established a successful model for a block-by-block approach to community redevelopment by turning the Austin neighborhood into a type of hope zone. By focusing on social services and linking service providers with residents in need, the Chicago project made sure that everyone in the community had access to services. Then, by working on a community policing plan with the Chicago Police and neighborhood residents, they ensured a public safety approach that emphasized community involvement and a strong partnership with the police. By transforming one block, they took the momentum to the next block, which became the steppingstone for the next. This approach allowed for measurable success.

The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) is widely regarded as the best practice model for community empowerment and education. It is more than 10 years old, and it offers hope and lessons for new initiatives. These include the selection of a targeted geographic area, a strong organizational infrastructure, adequate resources to meet desired goals and objectives, a business plan, and the ability to measure success. Geoffrey Canada explained that once the Children's Zone

implemented programming that succeeded other residents saw results and got behind the initiatives.

The HCZ offers child development programs from toddlers (Baby College) through the age of 23 (college support). The Harlem Children's Zone asserts that all children from poor communities are at-risk until they graduate college. By establishing safe havens in Harlem, the HCZ has been able to create an environment conducive to educational success and positive conditioning among young people.

Wilmington has already laid the groundwork for establishing Hope Zones in several neighborhoods. The construction of the Village at Eastlake in the Riverside neighborhood is an example of housing redevelopment. The Village at Eastlake emphasizes home ownership. Wilmington officials and community planners have praised the Village at Eastlake as an example of making quality housing affordable. Other housing and commercial developments in Southbridge and West Center City have provided hope to area residents. These Hope Zone models are a great example of economic investment that builds social capital.

Action Plan 4: Jobs and Economic Opportunities

Recommendation: *Improve economic development opportunities for businesses to thrive and for Residents Citywide.*

The Hope Commission recognizes that a strong and vibrant economy, is vital to the success of the City. The City must continue to be a magnet for new businesses and support existing employers. Therefore, we recommend City-wide economic development efforts and initiatives are continued and strengthened to attract and retain businesses which provide economic opportunity for residents. The Hope Commission further recommends targeting job training, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for residents in Hope Zones. This could include a one-stop shop (or enterprise centers) for young urban entrepreneurs, financial literacy training, an urban work-study program, and increased employment and training for ex-offenders.

Action Step:

- We recommend the creation of a Hope Zone Development Corporation to fund, support, and sustain: (1) extensive neighborhood re-development; (2) business ventures; and (3) workforce development that leads to quality jobs.

- The Commission also recommends the City implement the strategies and tasks contained in the *City of Wilmington – Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)* and the *Wilmington Consolidated Five Year Plan for Housing and Community Development*.

  These two plans propose various strategies that the Hope Commission endorses, including:

  1. Increasing small-business assistance to help 'home-grown' businesses survive and expand.

  2. Identifying potential growth clusters that could benefit from a Wilmington location.

3. Identifying tracts of land that are suitable for commercial activity.

4. Preparing vacant land and Brownfields for development.

5. Identifying resources to assist the establishment of businesses in these locations.

6. Preparing the appropriate infrastructure for development.

7. Increasing workforce development activities, particularly those that involve both employers and skill-seeking residents.

8. Improving transportation to allow residents access to job location.

- We recommend that a formal study be conducted to identify the key elements a business would require of the City when considering relocation within city limits. The study should determine where Wilmington falls short of such elements, i.e., tax abatements, mass transit, availability of developable land, skilled workforce, etc. and establish a strategy to address the shortcomings.

- The Hope Commission recommends that the *US Conference of Mayors Report: Putting America to Work: Highlighting Innovations of the Public Workforce System* be used to identify best practices in the area promoting economic opportunity for low – income and low skilled workers.

- The Hope Commission supports the establishment of Neighborhood Youth Employment Networks to connect youth to resources and provide access to job training programs, apprenticeship programs and employment opportunities. These networks would be established within the selected Hope Zones.

- We support the development of Urban Entrepreneurial Resource Centers within existing community centers, to connect potential entrepreneurs to the resources needed to start and build their businesses, for example, financing and procurement opportunities.

- The Commission supports the enhanced partnership between with Public Safety and License and Inspections officials to ensure more responsiveness to complaints of blight, trash, crime, lighting and other issues which impact a business-friendly environment and community development.

- We support the continued development and implementation of the Wilmington "Prison to Work" initiative which encourages public and private organizations to work with existing programs within the Department of Labor, the Department of Corrections and Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services. This initiative must include a communication strategy to raise employers' awareness of the services available to them, such as bonding programs, and the capabilities of ex-offenders available to join their workforce.

Why we need this:

As leaders in our community, the Commission understands that the stability of our neighborhoods is closely tied to economic growth and prosperity in the city. Public safety is essential to a strong economic climate. Businesses will locate only where their employees and customers feel safe. It is our hope and shared vision that the proposed strategies will foster an economic climate which will nurture and support business development and growth of jobs that provide workforce development and job training opportunities for city residents, particularly those in neighborhoods most affected by crime and violence.

Reasons for Hope:

The City of Wilmington has dedicated much time and resources to develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and a Five Year Plan for Housing and Community Development (Consolidated Plan). The CEDS plan is pending inclusion in the State of Delaware CEDS submission in the summer of 2006 to the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

The Consolidated Housing Plan is pending approval from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Aspects of both efforts can be implemented to bring together existing resources that maximize effectiveness and generate additional resources to fund and sustain efforts similar to the Riverfront Development Corporation.

The US Conference of Mayors, Workforce Development Council recently released a recommendation for ***Putting America to Work*** which highlights best practices in the area of workforce development. In addition, the City has an opportunity to take full advantage of the Wilmington Job Corp Center to improve the academic and vocational skills for out of school youth (16- 24 years) and to build upon the ***Summer of Hope Youth Empowerment Initiative*** for youth age 14-18.

Action Plan 5: Community Mobilization and Working the Streets

Recommendation: *Establish a network of community workers and Social Workers known as Hope Outreach Workers (youth and adults).*

The Hope Commission recommends the hiring of Hope Outreach Workers -- trained individuals who live and work in or near neighborhoods they serve. They will have the capacity to assess needs, plan, implement and evaluate neighborhood programs and serve as the "connective tissue" between City residents and their appropriately identified needs for service. The Hope Commission believes hiring and training Hope Outreach Workers in the selected Hope Zones would be the best way of implementing this recommendation and expanding it later. This implementation strategy will allow for an evaluation of what works and what does not.

Action Steps:

- We recommend that great care be taken in the selection, training and supervision of Hope Outreach Workers. It would be expected that these individuals would work non-traditional hours including evenings, late nights and weekends. This work will require a great dedication to community improvement and an absolute commitment to making the City a safer and better place. Simply being from the neighborhood is not the only qualification for this job.

- We recommend the creation of a training program, leading to a certification as a Hope Outreach Worker. This process would require individuals to have proper experience and training before being certified as an outreach worker and allowed to work in the community. A variety of training resources, including the higher education community should be tapped to provide some of the training needed for the Hope Outreach Worker and social worker program.

- We recommend that the services described above, both Hope Outreach Workers and social workers, be provided through a competitive bidding process. These individuals

will be individuals who are part of the community and are envisioned to be people who will work without an official government designation. Additionally, it is important that the bidding process be designed so as not to exclude grass roots community organizations from participation in this process. The Commission believes empowering communities and neighborhoods is part of the long-term solution to the problem of violent crime. To this end, it is very important that the people addressing this problem are a part of the community. Selection of provider organizations and individual workers should keep this objective in mind.

- The Hope Commission believes existing community centers are valuable resources which can be part of a comprehensive approach to service delivery. Community centers are possible focal points for Hope Outreach Workers and Social Workers. Therefore, if the community centers are interested, they will participate and help provide resources (office space, meeting rooms) for Hope Outreach Workers and Social Workers. This will also benefit the community centers reaffirming their importance in the neighborhood.

- The Hope Commission recommends that Hope Outreach Workers have the ability to approach City and community leaders with the confidence that their concerns, and those of their neighbors, are heard. The goal is that Hope Outreach Workers will know that they are vital to the rejuvenation of their communities.

- The Hope Commission recommends that the City ensure the Hope Outreach Workers' safety in hot spots by giving them adequate transportation and communication equipment to call for help from the police if needed.

Why we need this:

Many City residents are in need of social services. Successful delivery of these services will directly address some of the root causes of violent crime. A variety of services already exist in Wilmington. Some services are provided by large, traditional non-profit agencies and some services are provided by small, grassroots organizations. In many cases, people do not know

about the availability of services. The programs offered are in a constant state of change. It is very difficult for anyone to keep current regarding the availability of all services. Therefore, the connection between people in need and the services they require is a constant challenge.

To meet this challenge a network of community workers, to be known as Hope Outreach Workers, and social workers should be established. The Hope Outreach Workers would serve as the "connective tissue" between people in need and the services necessary to address these needs. These workers should represent and come from the communities they serve. After appropriate training, the role of the Hope Outreach Workers should be to find hard-to-reach, at risk populations. Hope Outreach Workers will engage these individuals in an effort to help them with issues of employment, substance abuse, housing, and other needs. The Hope Outreach Workers should have the ability to relate to the most at risk populations and serve as information and referral specialists. The workers should also have the ability to relate to law enforcement officials and serve as a partner to the police. In addition, street workers should be able to measure the pulse and temperature of communities and intervene to de-escalate situations before they reach a point of violence.

In addition to the Hope Outreach Workers, another level of staff is needed to work in the community. A network of trained, professional social workers should be established. These individuals would also be expected to work in neighborhoods. We believe that it is also critical to provide support services for families – this includes a range of programs and services to help families stressed by poverty and other social issues. Accessibility and availability are important ingredients for these services. Front line "social workers" who are able to work with families at-risk right in the neighborhoods, can also help bridge the gap between the streets and social service agencies. These social workers will consult with Community advocates to locate at-risk families and individuals and assist in coordinating the multiple service needs facing them. Services provided should include parent education, conflict resolution, mentoring, self esteem building, life skills, and anger management. Trained professionals using evidence based and culturally relevant methods should deliver these services.

Reasons for Hope:

In Boston, outreach workers have strived to pre-empt violence by reaching out to youth and directing them to programs and community centers in the area. They also act as crisis mediators when needed, especially in domestic arguments that could lead to violence. To aid this effort, Zipcar – a car-sharing service – has provided outreach workers free transportation to get from one hot spot to another. This is another important example of how businesses understand the importance of public safety to the overall quality of life in a City.

Boston also has a model for the proposed social workers program. This service would be patterned after the Youth Service Providers Network in Boston. This group of Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) is employed by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston and work with the police.

Cincinnati has followed Boston's model and the street worker team includes a rap group that preaches positive interaction among City youth. Cincinnati officials and community members praise the street worker program for easing tensions in neighborhoods and providing on-site crisis counseling to youth.

Action Plan 6: Bringing Hope through Faith

Recommendation: *Coordinate the efforts of the faith-based community in youth outreach, violence prevention and ex-offender re-entry into the community.*

Action steps:

- We recommend faith-based groups representing diverse beliefs meet regularly to develop, advocate and seek funding for effective and innovative programs for youth.

- The Hope Commission recommends the creation of an Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives similar to those already established in twelve states. The Office would strengthen communication with government and among faith-based institutions; provide technical assistance in the areas of program design, implementation and evaluation; secure funding; and build organizational capacity for faith-based organizations.

- We endorse current efforts by the faith community to partner with each other on comprehensive prison to community re-entry services.

- In partnership with the Hope Commission, members of the faith community have developed a Covenant of Hope establishing unifying principles and goals. We recommend that all members of the faith community review and sign on to the Covenant.

Why we need this:

Today, more than ever, the city needs its religious groups to be its strength, offering moral guidance and making sure the lessons of peace and love are not limited to Sunday morning sermons. An active and engaged church is especially important in the highest poverty and most crime-ridden parts of the city, where some young people have lost touch with these moral institutions of the community.

Wilmington is a city of churches, mosques and synagogues. Though the majority of the city is Christian, Wilmington has a proportionally large Muslim population and an active Jewish

community. The City's religious diversity is as old and celebrated as Wilmington itself. However, years of competing agendas, religious and personal politics, geographic parochialism, detachment from contemporary issues and adversarial relationships with the City have diluted the power of the faith community. When asked about the importance of religious institutions and their role in their lives, some inmates at Ferris said that there was nothing that churches had to offer. Others felt that church and mosque leaders did not relate well to the daily problems of youth, making the sermons less relevant to disaffected young people.

Faith-based groups have sometimes taken a reactive approach to violence and struggle to proactively address crime in their neighborhoods. Although crime must be addressed by law enforcement, the long-term approach to crime must include the design and implementation of intervention and prevention programs in which faith-based organizations can have a role.

Many faith organizations and churches across the City are working on a daily basis to meet the physical, social, educational and economic needs of the community. Now is the time to create a unified effort among government, nonprofit, business and religious groups to address the myriad of problems. While some faith-based community leaders understand this need, the entire faith-based community must be engaged in reaching beyond congregational, religious, geographic and political boundaries. The goal of uplifting the community can be achieved through a united effort among groups with different beliefs and perspectives who not only proclaim a moral message but also offer services such as counseling, job training and education.

The City's faith-based community will be counted on to be leaders and co-partners in implementing the recommendations of the Hope Commission. Religious groups, working together, can bring moral standards back to the city and become active in violence prevention.

Reasons for Hope:

During the Wilmington Hope Commission process, leaders of Wilmington's diverse faith-based organizations came to understand the importance of cooperation and creating a unified message that re-established faith as a necessity for hope. Groups such as the Interdenominational

Ministers Action Council (IMAC), the Interfaith Coalition: Building Blocks for Wilmington and others have taken lead roles in creating peace in our City.

In an effort to create a unified message and enhance collaboration, area church, mosque and synagogue leaders created a Wilmington Covenant of Hope, which, among other things decreed "restored relationships, increased dialogue and aiding the spiritual, political and economic empowerment of the broader community." The covenant is a call to action for faith leaders, urging them to be proactive in community uplift and cooperative in pursuit of a common cause – a better Wilmington for everyone.

The Covenant of Hope is not the first such effort to unite the goals of faith-based organizations. In Chicago, 122 clergy leaders – led by Archbishop Francis Cardinal George – signed the Covenant for Peace in Action to ensure the faith community's participation in violence prevention and community empowerment measures. Signatories agreed to preach for peace and against violence every month; urge their congregations to take a more active role in peacekeeping efforts; provide a stronger street presence to make sure youth had positive figures in their neighborhoods at all times; and develop "safe havens" for young people in crime and drug-plagued communities.

Faith groups partnered with the government, business and non-profit sectors to ensure the citywide success of the anti-violence campaign. With the success that Chicago has had in dealing with violence as a collaborative, community-oriented approach, we can see the significant impact the faith community can have in Wilmington.

Action Plan 7: Making the most out of second chances

Recommendation – *Strengthen ex-offender re-entry programs that promote positive reintegration into the community.*

The Hope Commission urges the State, City and the Faith Community to evaluate the current outcomes of re-entry programs and work together to make sure ex-offenders who go back to their neighborhoods are provided greater support and do not pose a threat to the community.

Action steps:

- The Commission recommends the expansion of successful existing job training, substance abuse/mental health counseling and housing placement programs for released ex-offenders. Community and faith-based organizations should be engaged to make these programs more effective.

- The Commission recommends that an analysis be done on the needs of released ex-offenders to the City. We recommend that government and community organizations – including the faith community – seek funding for the development of new programs for job training, substance abuse/mental health counseling and housing placement for released ex-offenders.

- We recommend an enhancement of programs to provide released ex-offenders with assistance to earn a GED or high school diploma to increase the likelihood of successful re-entry.

- The Commission recommends strengthening the Wilmington "Prison to Work" initiative that encourages public and private organizations to work with existing programs within the Department of Labor and the Department of Corrections and Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services. Develop and

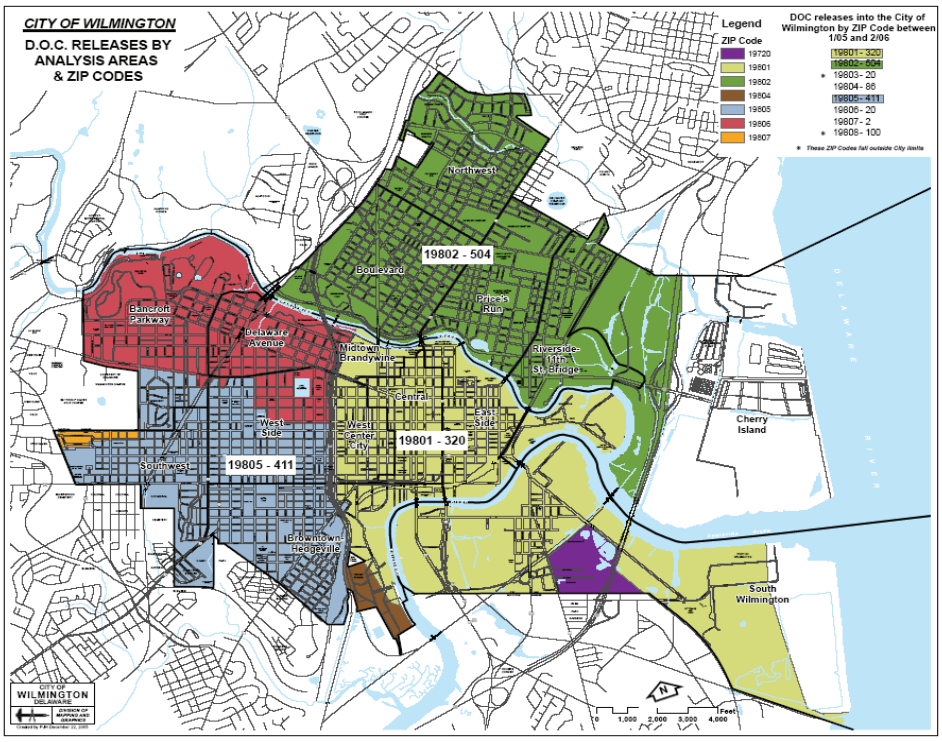
implement a communication strategy to raise employers' awareness of the capabilities of ex-offenders available to join the workforce.

- Community groups and law enforcement must work together to maintain contact with ex-offenders once they are released.

- Re-entry planning must continue to be developed for youth returning from the Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services and prevention programs for youth at-risk. These programs should be gender specific.

Why we need this:

Services are needed in order to bolster the preparedness of ex-offenders returning to their communities and to promote the safety and stability of neighborhoods that have a disproportionate number of ex-offenders. As shown by the table below, more than 1,200 ex-offenders have returned to the zip codes 19801, 19802 and 19805 in the past twelve months. Correction officials note that most inmates who are released have served significant prison time – some have spent much of their lives in and out of the criminal justice system. They note that for some ex-offenders, prison is the only stable life they know. Without adequate preparation for life after prison, ex-offenders – many lacking the education and skills necessary to hold a steady job – revert to crime. That has a direct impact on the neighborhoods they live in and has the potential to destabilize communities.



Ex-offender re-entry obstacles are partly personal and partly systemic. Some individuals simply do not want to change. They find that life outside of prison allows them to continue making "incorrect" decisions such as drug use and

criminal activity. However, many ex-offenders, who do try to change are unable to find jobs because of employment hurdles (barriers such as, business license and statutory prohibitions), lack of education and job skills and an environment that often hinders successful re-adjustment to life outside of prison.

The Wilmington Hope Commission conducted various interviews with public safety officials, members of the Judiciary, community leaders and young people. Some of those interviewed suggested that the State is spending too much time on incarcerating hardened ex-offenders and not enough time addressing juvenile delinquency. The incarceration rate of City youth is about 128 per 1,000 compared to the 72 per 1,000 in New Castle County and 93 per 1,000 Statewide. Criminal justice officials suggested that the Wilmington Hope Commission take a more holistic look at youth development in order to identify and support at-risk youth before they turn to a life of crime and become repeat ex-offenders. Such steps have already been taken by the Wilmington Police Department through its Child Development-Community Policing program conducted in partnership with the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families', Divisions of Youth Rehabilitative Services and Child Mental Health.

While correction officials and community members agree on the importance of long-term planning with youth, they have differing opinions on the impact of ex-offenders who are now returning to the neighborhoods. Community members continue to voice concerns about the destabilizing impact of having unemployed or under-skilled ex-offenders in their neighborhoods. Community leaders and criminal justice leaders agreed that the faith community has a vital role in promoting the positive integration of ex-offenders back into the community. For example, ex-offenders who convert to Islam in prison must be connected with Muslim support groups in the community. It was noted during interviews that support services for ex-offenders may not be available in the neighborhoods to which they return. Others noted that adjustment outside of prison is such a complex process that the ex-offender must start preparation for re-entry the moment he/she is incarcerated. State prison officials and community counseling groups must perform risk assessments to make sure that an inmate is ready to successfully re-integrate into the community and does not pose a risk to return to crime. Such evaluations are critical in reducing the rate of recidivism among ex-offenders.

Reasons for Hope:

Other cities have recognized the importance of effective re-entry programs as a key component of improving the quality of life. The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department in Boston has launched the Ex-offender Re-entry Program in collaboration with Bunker Hill Community College. This initiative helps inmates adjust to life outside of prison, and case workers offer comprehensive follow-up for six months after release. The case workers become counselors and help ex-offenders get jobs, housing and attain other personal goals. The Boston Re-entry Initiative – a joint effort among the Boston Police Department, Suffolk County Sheriff's Department and Massachusetts Department of Corrections -- helps the 3,000 inmates released annually to get re-adjusted immediately after release. According to federal statistics, *the first 24 hours after release are crucial* to the ex-offender avoiding a return to a life of crime. The initiative focuses on mentoring inmates and maintaining one-on-one relationships with counselors after release. City officials credit this program with reducing the rate of recidivism among ex-offenders.

Boston has also combined public safety and economic development by hiring ex-offenders as outreach ambassadors to at-risk youth. Funded by Operation CeaseFire, these ex-offenders have become vital in curbing gang violence that has plagued Boston in recent years. Using their experiences as ex-offenders and inmates, the ex-offenders give a strong reality check to at-risk youth while providing positive reinforcement as mentors and interventional specialists. Operation CeaseFire has been recognized nationally as a model for using ex-offenders to promote peace and safety.

In Akron, Ohio, the United Way of Summit County spearheaded a coalition of community and business groups to help find gainful employment for ex-offenders. They surveyed local businesses for job opportunities and the kinds of ex-offenders they are able to hire. As a result, many of the 1,500 ex-offenders released back into Summit County in 2004 were provided resources to re-start their lives. Using this as an example, non-profit groups in Wilmington and New Castle County can work with local businesses and the Department of Correction on risk assessment of ex-offenders, thereby helping to place recently released ex-offenders in occupations that will help them grow.

In Winooski, Vermont, the Winooski Community Justice Center established the Ex-offender Reentry Program in 2005. The program matches up an ex-offender with a re-entry panel comprising two Winooski community members, a mentor, a police officer, a victim advocate, a parole officer and a program coordinator. The panel works with the ex-offender to address his/her reintegration needs, making a positive connection to the community and helping to repair the harm he/she caused prior to imprisonment. Such a path is consistent with the mission of hope and redemption in our faith-based communities.

The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice recently completed a report on prisoner re-entry, urging the state Department of Corrections, law enforcement and community groups to begin the re-entry process at the point of entry; implement effective transition management; removing barriers (legal, regulatory) that are barriers to successful re-entry; offer logistical support for neighborhoods and families of ex-offenders; cut costs by reducing return rates among "technical" parole violators; develop different strategies for juvenile re-entry; and address the racial and ethnic disparity among ex-offenders. The institute recommended practical measures that could be evaluated as desired outcomes of re-entry. The full report can be read at www.njisj.org/reports/cominghome_report.html.

These are practical examples of successful re-entry and second chance initiatives that Wilmington can use as guides for its own re-entry program. The community will embrace any opportunity that allows an ex-offender to re-enter his/her neighborhood without harming the quality of life in that neighborhood.

Action Plan 8: A *Campaign of Hope*

Recommendation: *Embark on a Campaign of Hope for Wilmington*

The Hope Commission recommends a *Campaign of Hope* for Wilmington that is a multi-media public awareness and action campaign to instill a spirit of hope throughout the city and to mobilize people and businesses to embark on individual personal acts of hope that will cumulatively generate a momentum of positive change for Wilmington.

The *Campaign of Hope* would be designed to replace pessimism with a spirit of hope and confidence, while still facing the realities of the challenges that will have to be met along the way.

Action steps:

- We recommend establishing a comprehensive communications strategy that informs and inspires people about the specific actions of hope that the City will undertake.

- We recommend a *Campaign of Hope*, a multi-tiered communications campaign that packages key components of this report in ways that resonate with community members, community organization leaders, business leaders, policy makers, funders, and other stakeholders and moves them to action.

- We recommend a multi-faceted effort that includes a neighborhood campaign and a broad-based marketing campaign. Components of the campaign might include window signs, buttons, banners, t-shirts, brochures, transit advertising, as well as special events (community gatherings, picnics, rallies). The items would help make the *Campaign of Hope* visible and create a sense of shared vision. Events that bring people together would help build common bonds of encouragement.

- *Campaign of Hope* activities could include themes of:

- Hope for each individual
- Hope for each community
- Hope for reducing crime
- Hope for a better quality of life
- Hope for Wilmington

- In order to ensure broad understanding and appeal, we recommend enlisting professional marketing assistance for strategic planning and implementation of the *Campaign of Hope*.

- We recommend partnering with the business community on collaborative sponsorships of the *Campaign of Hope*, including financial support for launching and sustaining this Campaign within the City and/or State.

- We recommend building on the www.wilmingtonhopecommission.org web site to develop an interactive site that would foster communication, information-sharing and collaborative action among community members and other interested parties.

- We recommend a toll-free telephone number for the *Campaign of Hope*, in order to allow for as much feedback and input as possible.

Why we need this:

From this report must come a groundswell of popular belief in positive changes for the City. In order to prompt people to take action, they need to understand that their individual actions and attitudes will make a difference. We want to set in motion a new determination to overcome economic, cultural, and societal obstacles that have stifled individual and collective efforts to reduce violence and build community character. We want to mobilize members of the community with a common resolve to action.

Reasons for Hope:

In an effort to promote community involvement in crime and drug prevention, the City of Baltimore embarked on a Baltimore Believe ad campaign designed to promote solidarity against drugs and violence. The main component of the campaign was a four minute movie depicting the realities of drug life in Baltimore through the eyes of a ten year old African-American young boy. The movie was aired in commercial segments on television and radio stations throughout the Greater Baltimore region. The campaign includes a website with signed "believers" – people who have committed to helping fight drugs and crime in the city. The Baltimore Believe campaign also uses a BelieveMobile, a 28 foot mobile performance stage that goes from neighborhood to neighborhood promoting the spirit of Baltimore Believe. Much of the campaign is supported by local businesses, giving the "Spirit of Hope" campaign a valuable best practice in spreading the word.

Action Plan 9: Making Hope a Part of the City Fabric

Recommendation: *Make a Wilmington Hope Commission permanent to ensure that the action plans in this report are implemented and sustained.*

The Hope Commission would be a permanent entity with the responsibility of advocating and implementing the recommendations of the Commission. The Commission would be made up of members representing a broad spectrum of the community, under strong chair leadership, appointed by the Governor and/or Mayor. The Governor, the County Executive and the Mayor of the City of Wilmington would appoint members to the Commission. Membership should include the heads of the United Way, the Community Foundation and the Delaware Public Policy Institute. Membership should also include representatives of the Business Roundtable, the Faith Community, the non-profit sector, and most importantly, the community at large.

Action Steps:

- The new Commission could be created by Executive Order of the Governor or the Mayor. Our hope would be that it would be endorsed by resolutions of the General Assembly, New Castle County Council and Wilmington City Council.

- The Commission would need staffing in order to maintain contact with community groups, existing programs, policy makers and public officials so that it would remain relevant and effective.

- The Commission would also need funding, which could come initially from the City, County or State or from corporate or foundation sources.

- The Commission would provide status reports twice a year to the Governor, the County Executive and Mayor, along with the City Council, New Castle County Council and the General Assembly.

- The Commission could help establish the Youth Leadership Council by working with existing education and community service groups and the City to identify youth in targeted Hope Zones.

- Once established, the Wilmington Hope Commission could assess the City's short-term needs and develop plans to hire a full-time grant writer, help secure long-term funding for community policing and help coordinate the service efforts of the faith-based community.

Why we need this:

To ensure that we build on the momentum of the Wilmington Hope Commission and continue to develop action plans for Wilmington's future success. This would require a coordinated effort to obtain all the resources available to address the underlying issues of poverty and hopelessness in the affected communities. A permanent Wilmington Hope Commission's main functions would be to monitor the implementation of the Commission's recommendations, to advocate for the resources and actions necessary to achieve its goals, and to coordinate, when necessary, the activities of public and private efforts.

The Wilmington Hope Commission is recommending a structure be in place to follow-up on the implementation of the action plans in this report. In education, the entity would develop priorities and advocate on behalf of City children with the school districts and Department of Education. In public safety, the entity would monitor the implementation of community policing and be a vehicle for communication between the City and the community. In community services, the entity would monitor the creation of Hope Zones in Wilmington neighborhoods.

Another important aspect in creating a follow-up commission is the idea of permanence. Many reports come and go, with often little to show for months of hard work. Wilmington Hope Commission members and residents who participated in the process from all over Wilmington have spent considerable time and energy developing approaches to the City's most difficult problems. Strengthening Wilmington's social infrastructure will not happen overnight. It will take time and a dedicated and coordinated effort by many to change conditions in Wilmington's most violent neighborhoods.

The new commission will work with government, nonprofit and community groups to secure the necessary resources to implement the recommendations of this report. It will also serve as a link among organizations, fostering a sense of cooperation and collaboration among service providers. The new commission will not compete with other community agencies for resources; rather, the center will work with those agencies to maximize the resources needed.

Reasons for Hope:

Other cities have successfully created policy advisory groups to follow-up on action plans. In Chicago, the success of the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention has led to the creation of a permanent steering committee in which the Mayor, clergy leaders, business representatives and others help continue crime reduction efforts. The steering committee has substantial input in the Chicago Project's efforts to stop violence and is an example of government and clergy working together. The Chicago clergy have even signed the Covenant for Peace in Action, a commitment by faith-based groups to be active in reducing violence in their communities. The cooperative spirit of the faith community has been a driving force in making the steering committee a strong policy advising entity. Similarly, the recent Covenant of Hope signed by Wilmington's faith community is a sign that church, mosque, and synagogue leaders in the City are ready to back the long-term work of the Wilmington Hope Commission.

There is widespread interest in the work of the Wilmington Hope Commission making us confident that capable and willing leaders will step forward to serve on the new commission. We believe that empowering all of the sectors of the City to help make meaningful changes will greatly improve the quality of life in Wilmington. Most importantly, this commission will put the words of this report into action and promise our City's residents that Hope is here to stay.

For a full report of the Wilmington Hope Commission's statistical findings, see, Social, Economic and Criminal Justice Data Affecting the City of Wilmington: A Report of the Wilmington Hope Commission. The report is available on the web at www.wilmingtonhopecommission.org.

The Wilmington Hope Commission Report

Submitted to Wilmington Mayor James M. Baker

March 16, 2006

Acknowledgments

The Wilmington Hope Commission would like to acknowledge and thank all of the people who devoted their time and energy to putting this report together and promoting the idea that Wilmington *will* be an even better City.

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