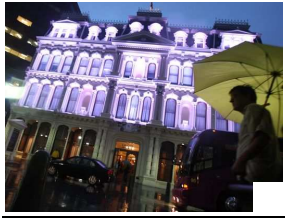


Task force: Wilmington needs more dining, entertainment

Yann Ranaivo, The News Journal 7:58 a.m. EST January 15, 2015



(Photo: WILLIAM BRETZGER/The News Journal)

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Increasing Wilmington's number of night time dining and drinking spots and improving accessibility to those establishments are among the changes young career adults believe will lure more of them to the city.

City officials released a "White Paper," or report, Wednesday night that listed general recommendations a task force formed by Mayor Dennis P. Williams in October suggested would help young professionals get interested in the city.

The report included other recommendations, such as offering a student debt repayment program for young adults buying homes in Wilmington or better marketing events like concerts, races or restaurant openings.

But Williams, who attended the report's announcement at the Delaware Theatre Company, said improving the frequenting of bars and restaurants is one initiative that could be done rather quickly.

Williams said one area that has hampered the city's ability to keep workers in town at sundown is parking, which he said can be seen through the several garages that shut off to incoming cars during the evening. He said the parking garage fees could also be lowered a bit to make some more comfortable using them.



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"It just turns people off when people look at the city being closed up," he said. "We're looking at some type of way to work with them to get easier fees in parking and the parking lots."

Williams said he'd also like to see if more Wilmington restaurants can extend their hours maybe a once a week to see if it changes the night time population in the city.

Williams said he set out after young professionals — a demographic city officials said is comprised of adults aged 20-34 — before he even got elected because he recognized the financial benefits they could bring the city.

"Young people spend money," Williams, who just recently turned 62, said. "When you get my age, you worry about mortgages ... getting close to retirement."

"My whole thing is young people want to be entertained. They're very energetic, they get off work and they want to have fun."

Sophia Tarabicos, a paralegal who took part in the task force work shops that led to the white paper, said one of the changes she'd like to see is improved transportation so it's easier for people enjoying the city's night life to be exposed to various entertainment spots around Wilmington.

She said she likes Trolley Square but also knows that Market Street in the city's downtown is underused, despite having some attractive bars and restaurants.

"We could never be a 24-hour city, but we need to at least be a happy hour city," she said. "There needs to be more people out regularly."

The task force also touched on the issue of crime, a subject that has long tainted Wilmington's outside image.

Tarabicos said young professionals generally enjoy urban living and the ones in Wilmington have not been deterred by the city's crime problems because they know where the hotspots are. She, however, said the city could improve its branding of hotspots so outsiders are more knowledgeable about the crime issue.

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