

Mayor Fischer's 2017 State of the City address

Mayor Greg Fischer's prepared remarks for the 2017 State of the City:

(View the address [here](#))

Thank you.

Can we have another round of applause for our string quintet from Western Middle School and the Central High School drum corps?

Great job.

We have another special guest in the room today. I'd like to welcome the Honorable Matthew Barzun, back home after his service to our country as Ambassador to Sweden and then the United Kingdom. Welcome home, Matthew – we are proud of you!

Thank you all for coming today to the Baxter Community Center in the historic Russell neighborhood – the site of Louisville's first public park, established in 1880.



I want to thank Supervisor Rene Douglas and her team for hosting us. In this gym, kids as young as six, and grown-ups as young as 60 play ball. This center hosts mentoring programs, and LMPD officers meet with kids as part of a series of Youth Chats, strengthening the relationship between police officers and our young people.

Rene, to you and everyone who works and volunteers here, thank you so much.

I wanted us to meet here because this spot provides a great vantage point to look at our city. This neighborhood has a proud past – and a promising future.

I can't think of a better place from which to examine where we've been.

Where we are.

And where we're going.

A big part of my job is to create the conditions for prosperity, partnering with citizens, businesses, nonprofits and everyone who wants to see our city thrive.

That means I have to look at the big picture, the overview of what's happening in our city.

From that perspective, several things are clear: Our city overall has achieved a level of prosperity unlike anything in recent memory. In the last six years:

- We've created 61,000 new jobs and 2,600 new businesses;
- We've cut the unemployment rate from more than 10 percent to 3.5 percent, the lowest in 15 years.

Our median wage, adjusted for the cost of living, has increased every year since 2008.

In 2015 alone, more than 10,000 Louisvillians lifted themselves out of poverty. And more than 7,000 Louisville families joined the middle class. And, we've got an unprecedented \$9 billion invested in capital projects all over our city.

That's the overview - but nobody lives in the overview. The people of Louisville:

Live here.



And here.



Here.



And here



The 760,000 people of Louisville live in over 100 neighborhoods.

In 66 ZIP codes.

26 Metro Council districts.

And one rising American city.

Different neighborhoods are rising at different rates, in different ways. Some are struggling in critical areas, like education.

Health.

And public safety.

I've learned over these past six years that being mayor requires the head of a CEO and the heart of a social worker. And to take our place alongside great global cities, we have to ensure that prosperity exists throughout our city.

I take inspiration from the young man who put in the road work on the sidewalks of this neighborhood before inspiring people all over the globe as a world champion athlete and humanitarian.

Muhammad Ali said, "If you love God, you can't love only some of his children." We take the same approach in our love for Louisville. To see our city thrive, we must love, support and fight for ALL our neighborhoods.

So let's look at what's happening in our neighborhoods.

We'll start just a few blocks from here, between 2nd and 4th Streets, where close to 600 million dollars of investment is being realized between the Omni, the Marriott, the Hyatt, and the Kentucky International Convention Center expansion.

Altogether, we've got 23 hotel projects happening around the city. And we need them. Louisville has become a top-tier tourist destination, welcoming over 24 million visitors a year.



Much of that is thanks to Bourbonism. Louisville is the trailhead for the Kentucky Bourbon Trail, which brings people here year-round to our Urban Bourbon trail for restaurant and distillery experiences like:

Angel's Envy, which just opened last year.

And Whisky Row, which opens next year.

And our great local food scene, which draws praise and visitors from around the world to local restaurants that serve meals that are authentically Louisville.

Those destinations are much easier to reach now, because, after decades of talk, the Abraham Lincoln Bridge, and the Lewis and Clark Bridge are fully open.

The construction signs have been put away, and the untangling of Spaghetti Junction is complete. This means shorter commutes, less traffic congestion and cleaner air.

Put all this together, and we're seeing a critical mass that's drawing more people to our urban core, to downtown, to NuLu, to Butchertown.

That's where these apartments are going up.

Development like this shows what's possible when we come together to face challenges, like we did just south of Broadway, in the Sheppard Square section of Smoketown.

Here's what it looked like before.



And today, Sheppard Square is a modern, sustainable mixed-income affordable

housing development.



Affordable housing is one of our biggest priorities. We can't expect people to live up to their full potential if they don't have a stable place to live.

That's why we allocated \$2.5 million for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund this fiscal year. And why Louisville CARES is issuing \$12 million in loans and support to develop more affordable units in all corners of our community.

Moving eastward on our tour: We're helping renovate and expand the St. Matthews branch of the Louisville Free Public Library.



We will submit the project for bid in the next few weeks. I want to thank St. Matthews Mayor Rick Tonini, who's here today, for his city's financial help and partnership on this.

One of the reasons the St. Matthews branch needs expanding is that it's the busiest in our system, with people coming to it from much further east.

That's why we're also working on designs for the new Northeast Regional Library, which we'll build near New LaGrange Road.

Our libraries are not only lifelong learning hubs for families, they're also places where those who don't have computers can find out about job training and employment opportunities.

Thankfully, over the last few years in Louisville, job opportunities have been plentiful. In the last year alone, Ford has hired 2,000 new workers in great paying jobs.

And just a couple of miles from Ford's Chamberlain Lane plant is the new \$28 million Thornton's corporate headquarters. Not far from there, the international law firm Hogan-Lovells recently invested about \$9 million and is creating 200 great jobs on Shelbyville Road.

So, we are having a lot of success in job creation. In fact, one challenge now is that we have 30,000 open jobs - many in technology and other fields that pay well.

To keep those jobs here, we are training our workforce through programs like Code Louisville and the Software Guild, and working to get more people on the path to a stable, satisfying 21st-century career.

That's the focus of our SummerWorks program, created with KentuckianaWorks.

Last year, SummerWorks employed more than 5,100 young people – way, way up from our first-year results of 200. From smaller businesses like Deckel Money Penny Exhibits; Korrekt Optical; and Jace's Child Care; to Humana, GE, and Kentucky Kingdom.

I want to recognize Paul Diaz, who recently retired as CEO of Kindred Healthcare. He helped grow Kindred into a Fortune 500 company, and now he's giving his time and expertise to help us grow and scale the SummerWorks program. This is what a great citizen does.

And I want to thank Paul and his wife Vicki's Family Foundation for just issuing a

SummerWorks challenge donation of \$250,000.

Please help us meet that challenge!

All of you will find a SummerWorks postcard in the Progress Louisville booklet at your table. And we've got Shadea Mitchell, our SummerWorks Director, here with us today.

Talk to her. Find out more. Join SummerWorks.

When you give a young Louisvillian a job, you give them — and our city — a better future.

At Louisville Metro, a better future also means providing a world-class quality of life. That's why, continuing on our tour, we're thrilled to see the completion of the world class Parklands of Floyd's Fork.

It's the nation's largest new urban park system, created through the leadership of David and Dan Jones and in partnership with 21st Century Parks.

The Parklands covers 19 miles in Metro's east and southeast, helping make those areas more attractive for families and for development. Like the \$35 million Bardstown Pavilion retail complex in Fern Creek.

This part of Louisville Metro is seeing some of our biggest population growth.

Though the real story of our growth is in our foreign-born population:



That's a naturalization ceremony. I go to them every year at WorldFest. Watching people become American citizens is a beautiful thing to see.

Since 1990, we have doubled our foreign-born population every decade, going from 1.2 percent to 6.7 percent today. By 2040, one in six people in Louisville will be foreign-born, providing critical talent to our city.

Our foreign-born neighbors start businesses; they buy homes; and they pay taxes. They bring skills, experience and perspectives we need.

The fact is that a great city must be a global city. And we need people who can help us think, work, connect and compete globally.

That's why we developed our Global Louisville Action Plan, which lays out strategies to attract, retain and grow our foreign-born population.

The dialogue in our country around immigrants has taken a reckless turn in the past months. I spend a lot of time talking with our foreign born brothers and sisters — and you know what they tell me? They're afraid. Their children are afraid. They're shaken to their core about religious registries, bans and deportations.

These people are law-abiding Louisvillians; most are U.S. citizens. They're our city's construction workers. Our engineers. Our doctors.

Like Dr. Faten Abdullah. She studied medicine in her native Iraq, but couldn't practice when she arrived as a refugee in 2008.

With program help from Jewish Family and Career Services, she passed the re-credentialing exams, and today, she works at Norton Healthcare, treating Louisville families.

And it's worth noting that the federal travel ban enacted last week would have denied Dr. Abdullah entrance to the country had that policy been in effect nine years ago. That would have been a loss for her and for Louisville.

That's why we held the Rally for American Values on Monday.

And some 7,000-plus people came to show Louisville's support for our immigrant and refugee communities.





Dr. Abdullah, we're honored that you and your family, and thousands of other immigrants from around the world, have chosen to make our city your home - thank you.

We will continue to attract, cultivate and maximize our workforce talent. Doing that leads 21st-century employers to expand their local operations.

Like UPS.

They recently broke ground on their expanded Centennial Hub facility, tripling their sorting capacity. Three hundred new jobs and a \$300 million investment.

And UPS supports lifelong learning through their Earn & Learn program and their award-winning Metropolitan College program.

In our rapidly changing world, it's the lifelong learners who will adapt and thrive.

That's why we created our Cradle to Career framework for lifelong learning. Our goal is to get more Louisvillians ready to win in the global economy. And we're making strong progress. Today, almost 45 percent of our population has a two- or four-year degree.

That's six points higher than where we were in 2011, and four points above the national average.

To keep that momentum going, our families need year-round learning opportunities. That's why we're opening the new South Central Regional Library in Okolona this spring.

It's going to be state-of-the-art, and will also bring art into the lives of more kids and adults through classes and exhibitions as part of its local artist-in-residence program.



Arts and cultural experiences like those spark creativity and curiosity, and help promote lifelong learning. That's why we developed the Cultural Pass, giving kids summer-time exposure to dozens of our city's great cultural institutions.

Since 2014, we've distributed over 150,000 Cultural Passes, providing kids free access to institutions like the beautifully renovated Speed Museum, the Louisville Zoo, and the Kentucky Derby Museum.

I'd like to thank Churchill Downs Incorporated, which recently gave us a generous grant to extend the program.

And I'm proud to announce today that Metro Government has received a \$100,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to support the Cultural Pass and help even more kids in the years to come.

One lesson we want our kids to learn is that we need to honor our history and find ways to preserve it. That's why I'm proud of our work to save Colonial Gardens near Iroquois Park.

The Metro Council, my office, citizens, and Underhill Associates, are working together to transform that historic property into a viable commercial space for restaurants and other businesses.

We do this because in Louisville, we care about our past. Just like we care about our future. And we care about each other.

Compassion is another of our core city values. That's why we established the Give A Day Week of Service, which last year broke our own world record with more than 175,000 volunteers and acts of compassion.

Our ongoing compassion efforts earned us a perfect score two years in a row from the Human Rights Campaign, which sets the standard for cities that respect LGBT rights, and recognition as an International Model City of Compassion for the fifth year in a row.

These outstanding achievements created the conditions for another visit from His Holiness the Dalai Lama this coming April.

While here, His Holiness will learn more about a uniquely Louisville project that combines lifelong learning and compassion – the Compassionate Schools Project.

Through this project, JCPs students gain skills in social and emotional learning, compassion, mindfulness, and self-control.

In September, TIME Magazine – back again – visited Cane Run Elementary to highlight the program.

Meghann Clem, a teacher at Cane Run, says a student told her he loved her CSP class because, "I have ADHD, and in your class we are learning how to focus on one thing at a time. I didn't know you could learn how to do that, because no one has ever taught me that before."

The Compassionate Schools Project began with three schools in 2015; is up to 13 this year; and I am pleased to announce that next year, it will expand to 25.

It's a part of our efforts for breakthroughs in education and to pave the way to a successful job, career and life.

In some cases, paving the way is literally what we're doing.

In the last year, we paved 130 miles of roads and sidewalks across the city, which aligns with the first priority of our Move Louisville plan, to fix and modernize our transportation system and infrastructure.

Currently, the biggest item on the Move Louisville agenda is the New Dixie Highway. We're making \$50 million in improvements and adding Louisville's first Bus Rapid Transit line for the people of Valley Station, Shively and PRP.

Better transportation is critical to businesses. At Riverport, we're seeing growth and expansion from companies like Dynacraft and Algood Food Company. And that's critical, because data tells us that the vast majority of job growth comes from companies of all sizes that are already here.

We know there's potential for tremendous economic growth in south and southwest Louisville, and we want to maximize that potential.

That's also true here in west Louisville.

We know that potential exists because we know the people of west Louisville, and we know their proud history.

This neighborhood, Russell, was a community that many freed African-American families called home before the Civil War.



In the 1940s, Muhammad Ali Boulevard, back then Walnut Street, was the vibrant commercial heart of our city's black community, with shops, restaurants and nightlife – known throughout the country as Louisville's Harlem.

Residents of Russell could buy the latest jazz record from legendary Louisville musicians like Lionel Hampton or Helen Hume at Davis Record Shop, and see Hume perform live over at the Top Hat Club or Joe's Palm Room.

Then, changes like urban renewal came, and in too many cases, the result looked more like urban betrayal, leveling neighborhoods and decimating communities.

It's now time for another change in west Louisville. Only this time, change will

work to the benefit of people who live in and love this community.

I'd like to thank Reverend David Snardon, pastor at Joshua Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church, representing the Concerned Pastors of Russell and all of the residents of Russell, for helping guide Vision Russell.

A \$29.5 million federal Choice Neighborhoods Grant will allow us to leverage more than \$200 million in public and private funds to transform the Russell neighborhood.

Construction will begin later this year to redevelop this community into a sustainable, mixed-income, mixed-use, multi-generational neighborhood offering quality services and schools, as well as better transportation and job opportunities.

And together, as one community, we'll transform Ninth Street from a divide into a bridge.

This project represents the single largest investment in west Louisville in decades, if not ever, and the ripple effect will be felt all across Louisville.

This is a tremendous and important opportunity, because we have challenges to meet here. Perhaps the biggest is public safety.

That's a city-wide challenge and responsibility, which is why we have over 1,200 police officers throughout Louisville covering every neighborhood.



But it's no secret that crime, and especially violent crime, is tragically acute in a few specific neighborhoods.

The people of these neighborhoods - hard-working, law-abiding citizens who want to live their lives and take care of their families -- deserve better.

That's why we're taking action to make those neighborhoods safer through our police response and our crime prevention strategies.

On the police side, we have reorganized LMPD to add resources where they're needed most.

We are hiring 150 additional LMPD officers, the most since merger; and are adding two new squads of detectives to address crimes involving narcotics.

We're collaborating with the DEA on overdose death investigations to get heroin dealers off our streets, and forming a task force with other agencies, including the FBI, the DEA, ATF, the U.S. Attorney, Kentucky State Police, and the State Attorney General's Office, to pursue, arrest and prosecute our most violent offenders.

We've created a full-time SWAT Division so we can more quickly deploy highly trained officers to handle volatile situations.

And we've created a Community Services Division of LMPD to strengthen trust and connections between police and the people they serve.

We're also working to prevent crimes through our Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods and programs like ReImage, where we identify young people who've had interaction with the justice system and connect them with mentors and opportunities for education and employment.

People like Deraldo Hall. A year ago, Deraldo was facing criminal charges; his life was heading in the wrong direction.

But since working with REImage, Deraldo has earned his GED, gotten a job with Tradesmen International Construction. And he's enrolling in the Internship Academy at the Kentucky Youth Career Center, where he helps other young people to turn their lives around.

And Chris Gathof is one of the mentors we've recruited to work with young people. Growing up in foster homes, he understands how important it is for kids to have someone in their corner.

Let's hear it for Deraldo and Chris, who are both here with us. Thank you!

There are other signs of progress and hope throughout our community.

In Produce Park, we transformed a vacant lot into an urban orchard.



There's also training for entrepreneurs at the Nia Center on West Broadway, which also provides access to loans and other business services.

And the Gigabit Experience Center at Louisville Central Community Centers. It will provide residents, entrepreneurs and industries with access to ultra-high speed Wi-Fi to drive innovation and job creation.

And the musical legacy of west Louisville is in good hands.

From Hampton and Hume to Linkin' Bridge and Bryson Tiller, to the next generation of artists, honing their musical skills through AMPED, or the River City Drum Corps.

We're seeing revitalization through the growing arts district in Portland, along with the opening of The Table restaurant, and the Tim Faulkner Gallery.

Heine Brothers moved its corporate headquarters to Portland, and Falls City Brewing is expanding there, bringing 100 percent of its operations back to Louisville.

And of course, there's Chef Space over on Muhammad Ali, a thriving business incubator training professionals in the food and beverage industry. They catered today's delicious lunch.

So now we're back to where we started in our tour of the city. There are still other issues to address, like becoming a healthier city. That means physical health, mental health and environmental health.

That's why we released our landmark Urban Heat Management Study, to help identify ways to reduce air pollution and cool extreme temperatures that can impact health.

We helped launch Trees Louisville, a nonprofit that received a \$1 million grant to help rebuild our tree canopy.

But our health challenges continue. Today, instead of traditional cigarettes, we see people turning to e-cigarettes and hookah.

That's a dangerous shift, and it's why I'm announcing today that I will formally ask the Metro Council to add hookah and e-cigarettes to the city's Smoke Free ordinance.

The Council and my team have worked well together on so many of the initiatives I've mentioned: bringing Omni to Louisville, boosting affordable housing, paving our roads, investing our recent budget surplus in public safety, and much more.

Thanks to President Yates and the entire Council for your leadership and partnership. This is how we do great and important things for every neighborhood in our city – we come together.

And there's no more powerful example of Louisville coming together as a city than when we celebrated the life of Muhammad Ali.

The Champ's funeral procession started at A.D. Porter and Sons Funeral Home in Buechel. Made its way downtown, into West Louisville, past his boyhood home at 3302 Grand Avenue.

And there was this amazing outpouring of joy, love and pride. From all ages and faces. I felt like my car was floating down Grand Avenue. People from all over our city joining with people from all over the world.

It was one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. And it could only have happened here, because while Muhammad Ali belonged to the world, he only had one hometown.

Our hometown.

He was The Greatest – loved by our city and the world. And our job is to honor his legacy by working even harder to realize the greatness in ourselves, our neighbors and our city.

It's true that we are a city of neighborhoods, with great neighborhood pride. And that's something to cherish, especially in such a time of change in our country and across the globe.

But we must recognize that the people who have the greatest power to shape the future of Louisville are the people of Louisville.

To make the most of that power, we must face the opportunities and challenges before us together, as one community.

Our fates are as connected as our streets and the air we breathe.

Let's continue to come together and work together, so we can continue to rise together.

Thank you.

(See the 2016 Progress Report)