



DANIEL HARRIGAN, MAYOR

Mayor Dan Horrigan's 2019 State of the City Address
February 20, 2019
Final as prepared for delivery

Thank you, Grace, and thank you to the Akron Roundtable, Leadership Akron, and our partnering organizations that make this event possible. And many thanks to the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs that have been a part of this event for almost three decades. None of this is possible, without the fantastic staff and management, here at the John S. Knight Center. Join me in giving them a round of applause.

Three years ago, when I took the oath of office as your Mayor, I talked about the choice that was before us; a choice to simply manage our own decline or a choice to grow again. Since that time, every decision I've made, every action I've taken, has been to build a city that thrives. At a pivotal moment in our community's history, we've laid the foundation to rebuild and reshape our collective future.

I can't accomplish any of this by myself. It's an honor to work with some of the most dedicated people I know: the 18-hundred City of Akron employees, our department managers, and my Cabinet who are committed, to making Akron a great place to live and work. Many of them are here today. Thank you for your service.

I'd also like to thank Akron City Council for their efforts to assist in moving our community forward. I'd ask Council President Margo Sommerville and the members of Akron City Council to please stand. Join me in recognizing their service to our community.

For me, on a personal level, none of this is possible without the love and support of my wife, Deanna, my daughters Cassidy, Kennedy, and Camille, my mom, Lucretia and my extended family. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

I've talked about the great renaissance, that Akron is experiencing, and the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity we all have to embrace new ideas and a new vision. I've said, that we have to become more entrepreneurial, and adaptive to change, if we all want to build a city that "thrives" and not just "survives."

Today, I'm going to talk about that vision and the ways that our City government, and this community as a whole, are making progress on those issues, and why local leadership is more important now, than ever.

A recent study brought home the unique importance of local solutions in our current political climate. According to the 2018 Civic Engagement Survey, Americans are 64% more likely to say they feel well represented by their local officials, as compared to the institutions that represent them in Washington. A majority of Americans are optimistic that their community can come together to overcome political divisions and solve local problems – while only 36% of Americans believe the same about national challenges. And we see this data mirrored in our own state—more than six in ten Ohioans say it is more important to act locally than nationally.

All this data just reaffirms what we already know to be true – local issues and local policies matter a great deal. Citizens are more optimistic about our ability to get things done. All this means is they look to us to create real solutions for their very real challenges—from poverty, to lack of opportunity, to job creation, to basic safety and quality of life. Local leaders bear the front line burden of pushing the ball forward on all of these issues, day in and day out. It is no small responsibility. In fact, the importance of our impact on people's daily lives can be quite humbling. As local leaders, we can't escape the effect our decisions have on our community. We grocery shop, we worship, we drive, mow our lawns, raise our families, and build our lives right alongside the people directly impacted by the choices we make every single day.

As your mayor, I am committed to meeting all of you where you are, listening and responding. From picking up trash providing clean water, and public safety – we are providing services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Local government doesn't shut down, it doesn't sleep and it never quits.

I will always take on the challenge of impacting people's lives in a positive way by creating good-paying jobs, investing in infrastructure, building stronger neighborhoods, and protecting and uplifting all families. Our constituents - our neighbors – our customers – expect, and quite frankly deserve nothing less.

Last year, I called upon all of our institutions – including the City – to remake themselves and coordinate resources to achieve growth with equity. And this community, stepped up in big ways. By aligning our strategies – and our budgets – we are beginning to move on the systemic change our city needs. Through new community partnerships we are proving we can do things differently, and achieve better outcomes.

One of the most tangible and powerful accomplishments that this community rallied around in 2018 was the opening of the City's first Financial Empowerment Center in Kenmore, staffed and managed by a dedicated team at the United Way of Summit County. A diverse group of community leaders was recruited for an Advisory Council. This Council helped pave the way for how we would fund, organize and market the services of this vital new community asset—one that would truly impact the financial health of our residents. While the center has only been open 8 short months, demand for services has been incredibly strong. Since opening, the FEC has seen almost 400 clients across more than 800 counseling sessions. In addition, through complimentary services such as tax preparation, and banking education, we are providing free, comprehensive financial services to the community. These are astounding numbers. And with a holistic approach, I know this will be a pivotal tool in changing the way we combat the cycle of poverty in our community. Thank you to the United Way, and my staff, for all your hard work on this important and lasting endeavor. These leaders have truly stepped up to build a lasting partnership for this community.

And I can't talk about community coordination, without recognizing my Senior Citizen's Commission; an energetic and dedicated group that was appointed in 2016 to give specific attention to the issues and projects that matter most to Akron's seniors. Older adults make up a significant and essential portion of our community and they overwhelmingly tell me they want to stay in their neighborhoods and age-in-place. The Commission, in partnership with the AARP and Direction Home, approached me about an important program that would educate, encourage and promote improvements that would make Akron more age-friendly. This program aligns perfectly with the work my staff is already doing around safer mobility and the importance of quality housing.

I'm pleased to announce that the City of Akron will be entering the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Cities; a structured 5-year program that will enable us to pay increased attention to the environmental, economic, and social factors that influence the health and well-being of older adults. In the next few months, my staff will be working with the Commission, AARP and Direction Home to begin the process with a robust community assessment, ultimately turning this feedback into a final, actionable plan for improvement. Many thanks to Dr. Harvey Sterns, chair of the Senior Citizens Commission, members of the Commission including Sue Sigmon, from Direction Home, and the AARP, for their hard work to get this program off the ground. Making sure our seniors can safely navigate all aspects of civic life, and enjoy our public spaces, is what communities across the globe are achieving; and it's the least we can do for those who have helped build this community for generations.

Perhaps the most comprehensive change I have pursued with community partners relates to the path we have chosen for our economic development system, both within our organization and across the Akron community.

Since 2017, I have helped lead an initiative with the Greater Akron Chamber Summit County Executive Ilene Shapiro, and the GAR Foundation to assess where our economy is now, and what we have to do together to achieve better outcomes. Many of you have likely seen or heard about the product of those efforts – a new economic development framework called “Elevate Akron.” This plan represents a historic

coordination of resources between the three institutions most responsible for igniting economic growth in our community. It calls for us to embrace the “New Fundamentals” of economic development; including a more focused approach to local business retention and expansion, an emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation, improved business intelligence and research services, more vibrant places and spaces, and most importantly – an inclusive economy where no one is left behind.

We came to these strategies after an honest evaluation of our local economy, and how it fares within national and global realities. We found that Akron has inherent strengths we can build upon, including immediate proximity to state research universities, a new community college presence, latent start-up potential, high patent activity, and the raw ingredients necessary for a true advanced materials cluster.

Overall, Akron is not in distress, but our economy is not nearly as dynamic and adaptive as we have to be to compete in the global marketplace. According to the report, fragmented and outdated development practices across the region have resulted in a slow rate of growth downtown, a workforce skills gap, and neighborhoods farther and farther away from where the jobs are. However, most concerning to me, is the research that proves, what leaders in Akron’s black community have known for decades – our African-American neighbors are being excluded from economic opportunity. And if our businesses and residents want to experience success in the 21st century, this has to change.

The Elevate Akron partners have wasted no time getting to work. To focus on local business retention and expansion, an inter-agency team, led by Summit County, now meets weekly to coordinate projects and build a targeted portfolio of companies that are ready to grow. We are working to build import/export services to help our companies have better access to the global marketplace. Through this sharing of data and manpower, we hope to see increased job growth, and area businesses can expect to experience more relevant services that provide value-added support.

The City and Chamber have partnered to support a high-level position, laser-focused on pushing our inclusive growth strategies forward. The Vice President for

Inclusion and Opportunity will reside at the Chamber, and work to promote a narrative of inclusion and ensure we are viewing all economic strategies through an equity lens. I look forward to working closely with this new leader, and I ask each of you to examine how your organization can assist in making meaningful progress on expanding and diversifying economic opportunity for the entire community.

2018 also saw significant growth for Akron as a regional center for entrepreneurship. Last year, I spoke to you about my vision for Akron's first open innovation hub – aptly named Bounce – which is now a thriving, independent entity. In early March, Bounce Innovation Hub hired its first CEO, Doug Weintraub. Doug and his team have hit the ground running, assisting over 50 Akron-area companies in their start-up journey. Bounce alone, accounts for over 250 Akron jobs. This coming May 1st, Bounce will open a renovated first floor, a space we call The Generator. It will serve as our regions' "front door" for innovation and entrepreneurship, designed by local artists using locally-sourced materials. I want to take this opportunity to thank Doug, the Bounce Board, especially Board Chair Deb Hoover, and the Bounce staff for their tireless work to advance innovation here in Akron.

It's important to note that Bounce is not a silver-bullet solution. Bounce is working in conjunction with other partners in the ecosystem to strengthen the connective fibers supporting entrepreneurs and innovators. There is much work to be done. Few partners are more important to the success of our innovation agenda than our colleges and universities. For maybe the first time ever, our four-year state research institutions – UA, Kent State, and NEOMED – are all searching for new leadership at the same time. This is a moment that cannot be taken lightly, experience shows cities that thrive in the innovation economy, do so, on the strength of their university collaborations. Pittsburgh, for example, has benefitted immensely from Carnegie Mellon Robotics and their industry partnerships around autonomous vehicles. For a city our size, we punch far above our weight class when it comes to patent activity, but we have yet to fully realize that economic potential in the marketplace. We have to push for increased coordination between our academic institutions, as well as with industry, if we want to truly capitalize on this untapped potential. This is going to require our local universities

to keep economic development as a strategic focus, as they search for their next leaders.

I'm happy to report that the board leadership at our universities agree. They have accepted my invitation to meet with the Elevate Akron partners to jointly discuss their searches, and how we can move beyond the silos of the past towards the aligned vision we've set out in this plan.

In order for the City to be a full partner within Elevate Akron, we have to become more focused and efficient internally. Since my announcement last year, we have continued to build the Office of Integrated Development, under unified leadership. Thanks to the generosity of Kyle Kutuchief and the Knight Foundation, we were able to bring significant outside resources to facilitate a process of merging economic development, planning, downtown operations, and elements of engineering under unified leadership. I'm proud to report that by this summer, I will be presenting a three-year strategy and staffing plan for the Office, that will include clear goals, metrics, and ways of working with our partners to streamline services and better leverage our existing resources.

Cities should ultimately be a reflection of the people who inhabit them. And in turn, local leaders have a responsibility to provide the highest quality of life possible for all its people. Place matters. "Home is one of the most powerful words in the English language. The spaces we inhabit together, can give us a strong sense of belonging, unity, and pride. Strong neighborhoods, diverse housing options, vibrant business districts, and activated parks have been, and will continue to be, essential ingredients for building a thriving city.

And when it comes to our places and spaces, my administration has continued to focus on improving our neighborhoods and downtown, to make them more attractive as hubs for living, working, and playing. Just two years after I released the Planning to Grow Akron report, I am proud that much progress has been made. When I took office in 2016, our community was building only a handful of new houses each year. Thanks to policy changes targeted at making Akron's housing market more competitive,

including our citywide property tax abatement program, we have over 1,000 units of new housing either in development or under construction in 2019. That's just a start. The City and the Summit County Land Bank will soon be launching a new web-based portal allowing everyone, to browse, view, and apply to purchase vacant city-owned or Landbank-owned properties. This tool will help us combat areas of blight in our city and empower residents and developers to turn vacant parcels into community assets and new places to live.

In June of last year, the City created the Vacant Building Registry program, aimed at attacking commercial blight in our neighborhoods. The VBR program requires property owners, with long vacant buildings, to register with the city and provide a plan, to either repair, rent, or demolish the structure. No longer will it be OK to let your commercial building rot without consequences. And I am giving the Department of Neighborhood Assistance the resources to make a real difference. The removal of commercial blight across our city will help reduce crime, increase property values, and foster economic development in our neighborhoods. This year, at my direction, for the first time in recent memory, the City will spend, as much on commercial demolition, as it does on housing demolition.

Let's talk about neighborhoods a little bit more, we are beginning to lift up our community business districts through the Great Streets Akron program I announced last year. In 2018, the City awarded 40 façade grants to local small businesses and property owners operating in our Great Streets areas. By targeting resources into these neighborhoods over the next five years, and achieving a critical mass of investment, we will see a noticeable difference in vitality and viability of these corridors. Why, is this significant because? Because we are leveraging one of the greatest strengths that a city like Akron has – walkable neighborhood business districts that can provide nearby residents with convenient shopping and job opportunities. Instead of our residents needing to travel outside of the city for basic goods and services, or perhaps even a job, we are creating those opportunities right here in our neighborhoods. By improving the quality our housing, and by revitalizing and filling vacant spaces in our neighborhood business districts, we are making Akron's neighborhoods more attractive to existing

residents, future residents, and the small businesses that serve as the lifeblood of our economy.

In our downtown neighborhood, we continue to make extraordinary progress. As anyone who travels downtown can see from the massive cranes, and endless construction equipment, there is kind of a lot going on at once. The remaking of Main Street continues to hit key milestones, as we stay on schedule to complete Cedar Street to Mill Street by this December. The next phase of the project, Mill Street to Route 59, will start this year and we expect to fully complete this transformational project by the end of 2020. And after 17 years of waiting; the Bowery is under construction.

In addition to the Bowery project, the renovation of the historic Mayflower Hotel is moving forward; the City found a strong partner to redevelop the CitiCenter all three hospitals continued their campus expansions, all while the Blutique Hotel began construction and new shops and restaurants opened on the Northside. Again, through unprecedented collaboration, and the determination of many, we have created tremendous momentum downtown. I firmly believe that in order to build on this momentum, we need a dedicated downtown development corporation. Both Elevate Akron and the Downtown Vision and Redevelopment Plan, recommend creating such capacity, and the time has come to act. I have asked a small group of our Elevate Akron working group, to develop a business plan and make recommendations for a downtown development entity Across Ohio and the wider region, robust downtown CDCs, have proven effective at implementing the brick and mortar revitalization necessary to make the broader vision of vibrant neighborhood districts, come to life. Akron has this potential, but we have to be thoughtful in our approach and careful to ensure any new organization is sustainable on its own and leverages existing expertise, right here in the community.

In the area of public health, I and my staff continue to combat many ills facing our community, and I want to talk about two of them today; the rise in youth violence, and the ongoing opiate epidemic.

Youth Violence is a serious public health issue in our city. It is a community problem and the City will not be able to solve it alone overnight. In 2017, after hearing the concerns, of many residents, I identified funding to hire Project Ujima, who would facilitate and lead a committee of stakeholders in drafting a strategic plan to address youth violence in Akron.

The Committee set a goal of reducing youth violence in Akron 20% by the year 2023. To achieve this, the Committee recommended 8 strategies to combat the problem. Of the eight strategies, the City will lead those focused on maximizing recreational activities during discretionary time, strengthening positive relationships between community members and the police; and reducing youth violence involving guns.

Summit County Public Health has agreed to be the lead agency, and will be releasing the full Youth Violence Reduction plan next month. I want to thank Health Commissioner Donna Skoda for her partnership on this important initiative.

Few of us can forget the feelings of dread and grief, in the summer of 2016, when a wave of synthetic opiates hit Akron – devastating a community already grappling with pervasive addiction. Almost everyone in this room, myself included, knows someone who has been impacted by the epidemic. The City, along with countless community partners, have worked hand in hand to keep people alive and get them into treatment. As Mayor I have ordered Narcan be carried, in every police and fire vehicle. Our Quick Response Teams, have followed-up with hundreds of overdose patients, to-date, and alternative response protocols, have been deployed, to provide the right care at the right time for those dealing with addiction. While, we are not out of the woods yet, we are starting, to see results. In Akron, specifically, since 2016, we have reduced, overdose ER visits by almost 40 percent, and overdose deaths by 65 percent. And there is still a lot of work to do.

In 2018, in the area of core city services, I kept my promise to the voters of Akron who overwhelmingly supported Issue 4 by investing the first new dollars in a generation

into our core city operations – our police department, our fire department and our city streets.

Last year, we paved 54.4 miles of city roadway - that represents a 174% increase in city dollars going to battle potholes.

In addition to our repaving program, several major streets were improved in conjunction with the ongoing sewer and ODOT projects. ODOT alone is poised to invest 512 million dollars in the Akron-area through the year 2025. Moreover, Akron was one of only 20 cities in the country to ever receive, not one, but two federal TIGER grants, totaling more than 13 million dollars. At a time when Ohio communities are faced with a billion dollar gap in funding needed to repair, or replace, crumbling infrastructure, I'm pleased, at the incredible progress we are making in Akron.

I have to admit, I did not anticipate just how quickly the orange barrel would become Akron's unofficial mascot ... sorry Zippy. And you, like me, have had days when your frustration level makes you shout things in your car that you would never say in public. Actually, I take that back; many of you have communicated those thoughts on social media... I read those by the way. And in those moments of temporary anger, it's so easy to forget all that this construction represents. It represents investment into our city, with jobs and opportunity for Akron residents along with efficient access to goods and services. And it represents, a promise kept to the residents of this city that I would focus on our core mission to invest in our neighborhoods and improve the condition of our streets.

Last year also saw the City break ground on two new fire stations; the first in more than 20 years. The replacement of Station 2 after 74 years of service will bring new, state-of-the-art public safety facilities to the Middlebury neighborhood. This new station will include a training room with a triage station to serve emergency walk-in patients and 500 square feet for an Akron Police Department satellite office to serve the neighborhood. The construction of a new Station 4 – the City's largest and most comprehensive – began last summer on Thornton St. Station 4 serves the entire county and is the center of operations in emergency events. We have worked to ensure that

this new facility is equipped with the latest technology, as it will also be the permanent new home for Akron Fire and EMS command staff. I am happy to report that both of these projects are on time and on budget and will be placed into service this year.

The men and women of the Akron Police Department also received a much-needed boost last year. We replaced 53 police vehicles, introducing the first hybrid cars to the fleet. We purchased new body armor to protect our SWAT officers and launched a robust body worn camera program for increased accountability to the community. We continue to focus on replacing and upgrading the equipment and tools that our police department needs to serve and protect our citizens but we are also looking toward the future. To that end, I have created a fund that will allow us to ultimately replace the aging Stubbs Justice Center, which currently houses our police department and our municipal court. As the Court pursues a plan to relocate to the Ocasek Building, thanks to a deal negotiated with former Governor Kasich, the need for a long-term plan for Stubbs is further highlighted. In 2019, we will engage with outside experts to explore potential sites and designs to meet the needs of a 21st century police department.

After a decade of conservative spending due to strained city resources, we are once again, investing properly, in our men and women in uniform. I'd like to recognize, the leadership of Deputy Mayor Charles Brown, Fire Chief Clarence Tucker, and Police Chief Ken Ball, and, I'd like to ask, all our public safety forces, in attendance today, to please stand, so that we may thank you, for your dedicated, and faithful service, to our community.

Last year, the City, instituted our first, branded program to boost volunteerism, amongst employees, a program defined by two simple words that are the foundation of my service philosophy: We Care. In 2018, our City workers came out in force to build a playground with KaBoom!, read to children, and donate hundreds of winter items, among many others. I'm truly proud of the selfless giving of time and resources by our City employees. To champion volunteerism, and recognize its importance, I've created a City of Akron Volunteer of the Year Award to recognize an employee whose exemplary service, went above and beyond. Congratulations to the 2019 City of Akron

Volunteer of the Year, Tina Vick! Tina, we truly appreciate you and your service, thank you.

I've made it clear over the years that I will not simply manage our decline. Our infrastructure didn't crumble overnight and it won't be fixed in one year, but I will continue to emphasize our infrastructure. Why? Because perceptions matter and because a well-maintained city is one that retains and attracts, jobs, people, and investment. And our social infrastructure is an essential part, of this equation - specifically our parks and public spaces.

In 2018, I announced the Akron Parks Challenge an exciting collaborative effort, that allows neighborhood residents to pitch their vision for their favorite park and work together with city officials and design professionals to co-create welcoming accessible, and engaging public spaces that all of us can enjoy. With additional support from other funders, three parks were selected in 2018, and those neighborhood leaders engaged their community over the summer to brainstorm and prioritize what they wanted to invest in. From there, our job became simple – make their vision a reality. Currently, we are hard at work on planned improvements to Cadillac Park in Ward 4, Chestnut Ridge Park in Ward 9, and Reservoir Park in Ward 10. We will open up the application process again in April for the 2019 Challenge, and I invite neighborhood leaders and organizations to once again submit your best ideas for your favorite city park.

Additionally, I am happy to announce that June 8th thru the 15th, we will hold the inaugural celebration of Akron Parks Week – a city-wide effort to engage businesses and residents in volunteering to beautify, clean, and maintain our parks and community centers, all while meeting neighbors and having fun. Many thanks to Ken Babby, and the Akron RubberDucks, for signing on to be our presenting sponsor. We will announce details regarding the service project sites as we get closer to Parks Week.

Last year, I shared my belief that recreation was, and is, an essential city service. We had not reviewed our recreation offerings since 1969, so the time had come to assess our programs and ask residents what was important to them. A diverse team of recreation staff, spent the entire summer canvassing events, knocking on doors, and

meeting with citizens. The result was a dynamic plan representing the voices of over 31-hundred citizens. We learned that those who use city recreation services love them but we also learned we need to reach more of our residents. Those surveyed want more community events, better aquatic amenities, and more opportunities to connect with their neighbors in a safe environment. My new 5-year plan for recreation sets us on a path to meet those needs. This year, we are beginning construction of splash pads in North and East Akron, and commissioning restoration plans for our two existing pools. And beginning this summer, Recreation will offer a new Midnight Basketball league, in alignment with the Youth Violence Reduction plan. This evidence-based, eight week program will be open to young men ages 16 to 33, providing structured league play with mentorship and educational opportunities.

As author Eric Klinenberg recently stated in his book, *Palaces for the People*, "...social infrastructure requires investment, whether for development or upkeep, and when we fail to build and maintain it, the foundations of our social and civic life erode."

As I said at the top of my remarks today; local leadership is more important than ever. I am proud to say that over the last three years, we have taken enormous strides towards building an Akron that is more financially stable, engaged, entrepreneurial, and resilient. In an era that seems to reward swagger over substance and politics over good policy; for me, I have chosen a deeper path to governance: One based on collaboration, transparency, and accountability. A path in which we don't rest on our successes, where we admit mistakes and fix them, where we don't shy away from the complex issues. I know this leadership model doesn't always lend itself to sound bites and tweets; but our challenges don't fit into 140 characters or less, and our solutions won't either.

Every day I have used the power of this office to try and improve the lives of our residents. To grow our city and our resources. To make us more competitive in a dynamic world where the only constant, is change. I will continue to reject the idea of managed decline, and the fatalism that says that Akron can never be a place where people will want to live or invest. We are continuing to prove the naysayers wrong, as

residents and businesses who are proud to make Akron their home are investing their time, talent, and treasure, into our city.

Let's take a look.

(VIDEO PLAYS)