Thank you, Adrian, for that great introduction.

Grand Rapids has much to be proud of – and that includes having local talent like you, AB. You add to the rich music and entertainment scene in our city.

Good evening.

I am pleased to present to you the State of the City Address for 2017 – my second year as Mayor of our amazing city.

Thank you to those of you joining me in this new and beautiful space – and to those of you watching the live stream.

Tonight's gathering is an important one.

The purpose of my State of the City each year is to highlight our vision of what we can be, measure our success over the past year and share priorities in the year to come.

I am happy to share that we have made significant progress since we last gathered.

And while we celebrate our progress, we must stay focused on the challenges we need to address as we work to grow our community.

I am excited to share with you this evening my vision of a path forward as well as extend some requests and challenges to each of you.

Among those committed to our city's success are the generous community sponsors who have helped to make tonight's event possible. They recognize that we build progress together as a community.

If you are a sponsor here tonight, please stand. Please join me in thanking them for their support of this event and for all they do in our community.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge the elected officials who are here this evening. These individuals are important partners in our work.

They are my colleagues on the City Commission. Commissioners Kelly, Shaffer, Lenear, Allen, Jones and O'Connor. I am so grateful to serve with each one of you.

Other elected officials here are Grand Rapids School Board members Wendy Falb, Tony Baker, Kristian Grant, John Matias, Raynard Ross and Maureen Slade, area Mayors Hopewell of Kalamazoo, Sims of Muskegon Heights and Strazdas of Portage, Kent County Commissioners Brieve, Bulkowski, Hennessy, Melton, Skaggs, Stek, Talen and Womack, and County Clerk Lisa Posthumus Lyons.

I also want to thank state and federal lawmakers who are here. They are state Representatives Afendoulis, LaGrand and Brinks, state Senator MacGregor, state Board of Education member Lupe Ramos-Montigny, U.S. Representative Amash – represented here by Katherine Condon – and U.S. Senators Stabenow and Peters – represented here by Mary Judnich and Peter Dickow.

I look forward to continuing to work with all of you and any other elected official here tonight on improving our community.

I continue to be humbled by the opportunity to serve our community in partnership with each of you. I am inspired by your ideas and I appreciate your openness to mine. Thank you for your service and for all that you do.

To each one of you in attendance and watching at home, your love for our community is key to our future. Working together, we will build on the chapters written before us to make Grand Rapids a more vibrant, effective and inclusive city.

And what better way to look to the future than to hold this event in a newly opened space that demonstrates the positive changes taking place in our city.

Twenty years ago, the father-son team behind The Gilmore Collection – John and Greg Gilmore – saved the big, old building next door, now known as The B.O.B. – from demolition.

The building was constructed in 1903 as Judson's Grocery Warehouse, and it stood vacant for decades before the Gilmores stepped up to transform it.

This space we stand in tonight – 20 Monroe Live – opened a month ago, and it is the Gilmores' latest investment in our city.

This venue is poised to be another significant chapter in our city's story of growth and success – and it builds on the legacy of public-private partnerships. A place where people want to be. A place of energy and excitement. And a place where we are building an exciting and inclusive future.

So before we look to the future, let's reflect on the past year.

Together, we strengthened our commitment to eliminating disparities and addressing housing issues in our city.

We strengthened our commitment to growing our local economy by supporting entrepreneurs, startups and small businesses while appreciating the important role of larger businesses throughout our community.

The results have been more jobs, a vibrant local economy, the growth of businesses both small and large and an ever-changing skyline and landscape.

We made progress on the river restoration project.

We made transportation safer for motorists and bicyclists.

We made city government more accessible and transparent.

And we continued to lay the foundation for long-term improvements that positively affect all people who call Grand Rapids home.

Coming together takes communication, and we affirmed our ability to

have candid and caring conversations on important topics.

We did this through extensive community engagement throughout

this year.

We had conversations across our community around the Mayor's Book of the Year, “A City Within A City-The Black Freedom Struggle in Grand Rapids,” to gain a deeper understanding of our city's history and the origin of structural and managerial racism that still exists today.

These conversations provided an important lens for us to see ourselves –

and our city – and helped us identify ways to be a more welcoming and inclusive place for everyone.

We also had numerous rallies and peaceful protests in our city over the past year.

We can be proud that all of these protests were respectful and respected – and that we are a community where voices can be heard in many different ways.

We must always protect the right of citizens to raise their voices – both when we agree and disagree with their words. For in doing so, we renew a commitment that they too will honor our voice.

We can be proud of our progress at City Hall on several important issues.

The City applied to be in the first-ever Racial Equity Here cohort with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity. We were selected as one of five cities across the nation for this important work.

This work is helping us identify ways in which government plays a role in perpetuating disparities in our community – and how we can transform City operations and policies to embed racial equity in all city decision-making.

We are working with the National Equity Project to provide training to the City's top management to advance racial equity outcomes in every department.

This past year, all Grand Rapids Police Officers underwent implicit bias training.

Implicit bias, also known as unconscious or hidden bias, is a negative association that people unknowingly hold. It is expressed automatically without conscious awareness.

City management will receive the same implicit bias training this year, followed by all employees.

I want to thank our City Manager, Greg Sundstrom, for joining me in leading this equity work and the other members of the City's Racial Equity Here team for their commitment to this important initiative. Please join me in recognizing and thanking Greg and our REH team for their dedication and hard work.

This past year, the City launched a Grow Our Own initiative to actively recruit individuals living in our community to apply for open positions at the City.

Our workforce should reflect the community we serve.

The City's Parks Department hired more than 100 young people to work in our parks throughout the summer.

We are working with Grand Rapids Public Schools to provide mentorship opportunities and training to students involved in the School Security Program, athletics and ROTC to grow future officers. This program is inspiring young students throughout the district.

One example is a young cadet from Union High School who participated in the ROTC program and then joined the GRPD Explorers Program, and she now wants to pursue a career in criminal justice.

The Grand Rapids Police Department launched a recruitment process that removes structural barriers that hinder diversity. This includes paying for police recruits to go through the police academy and training them to become certified officers.

The first police recruit class as part of this new process starts May 1 – and it will include 10 new police recruits.

We have also made progress on implementing the recommendations laid out in the 12-point plan to improve community and police relations:

* All officers now wear body cameras
* We are completing a racial profiling stop study
* We have updated recommended policies and procedures
* We soon will initiate an arrest disparities study

I want to thank our Police Chief, David Rahinsky, for his leadership and dedication to building trust and relationships in our community.

These efforts are on-going and remain a priority for us.

We are making progress on diversifying City Boards and Commissions to better reflect our diverse community.

We increased applications received for serving on boards and commissions by 500 percent through targeted outreach to residents.

We have more women and people of color on our Boards and Commissions this year – and we will continue to encourage and recruit a true cross section of residents to get engaged and help shape our city's future.

Creating a welcoming, safe and equitable community is key – and it intersects with additional challenges and opportunities before us.

We know we are still struggling with issues related to affordable housing – and we know we all need to work together to solve them.

We have made some headway in the face of these daunting challenges. However, significant work still needs to be done.

We took important steps forward on that journey this past year.

The City Commission created an Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which will be seeded with $1 million.

A Housing Advisory Committee – comprised of community stakeholders representing diverse voices – was formed to work on recommendations for the structure of the Trust Fund and address other urgent affordable housing policies.

Recommendations will be made to the Commission in May, and the Affordable Housing Trust Fund will position us to make progress in the year ahead.

I want to thank our community partners and my colleagues on the City Commission for their commitment to addressing housing issues,

and I want to specifically thank Commissioner Jon O'Connor for his leadership as chair of the Housing Advisory Committee.

The City Commission established a Neighborhood Matching Fund for neighborhood improvement initiatives and community building projects – and the first round of mini-grants will be dispersed this spring.

We are committed to strengthening neighborhoods and we are excited about our third annual Neighborhood Summit, which takes place this Saturday. And I am so pleased that registration is full with an estimated 475 people attending.

If you are not registered, you can watch it live on the Neighborhood Summit Facebook page.

Thank you, Stacy Stout and the planning committee, for your leadership on these efforts.

The City is finalizing plans with local nonprofit Next Step of West Michigan to provide access to jobs for our community's most-vulnerable citizens – those who are homeless or who panhandle.

This pilot program – dubbed Hope Through Work – will offer an opportunity for day work to those who are homeless or who panhandle and provide referrals to social services such as workforce development, medical services and housing assistance.

Over the past year, community partners, particularly Grand Rapids Whitewater, continued to set the groundwork for the Grand River restoration project, which is key to the long-term vibrancy of our downtown.

Improvements were made to the flood walls and we secured easements along the river, and we are in the process of submitting federal permits.

Work is progressing on connecting trails along the river – because re-imagining the river's edge is a critical component to providing opportunities to connect with this amazing asset.

The Grand Valley Metro Council secured an $8 million grant for river restoration work and regional water quality initiatives, which is critical funding to help move this project forward.

We thank our partners at the federal level for this support. I want to specifically take a moment to thank Senator Stabenow and her staff for their leadership in helping us secure this grant.

The City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan is being updated, which will provide a blueprint for future parks, open spaces and recreational opportunities.

I want to thank Grand Rapids Public Schools Superintendent Teresa Weatherall Neal for her incredible leadership and unwavering dedication to children in our community – and for her commitment to greening our schoolyards, connecting children to nature and ensuring that every child in our community is within safe walking distance to a playground.

Thanks to the generosity of our community and hundreds of volunteers, we planted more than 400 trees as part of the Mayor's Greening Initiative. Coupled with the more than 2,000 trees planted throughout the city last year, we are closing in on our 40 percent tree canopy goal.

I am pleased to tell you that we plan to expand on this effort this year by beautifying our expressways and encouraging tree plantings on private property.

Last year, I told you that Grand Rapids had one of the highest bike crash rates in the state.

I am pleased that we have seen fewer crashes involving bicyclists this past year – thanks to new ordinances and the Driving Change campaign.

Fatalities were reduced from 11 in 2015 to two in 2016 over the same five-month period. And total crashes involving bicyclists decreased by more than 40 percent from 2015 to 2016.

We have also kept our promises to voters and have invested more than

$57 million in street repairs, reconstruction and maintenance since the income tax extension – with more than 200 miles of streets being repaired.

Last year, I said that I want people to call Grand Rapids "the best place to start a business."

I know some people may think: Isn't every mayor supposed to say that?

The answer is yes, but it goes deeper than that. This is a critical issue for me.

There are cities in this country that entrepreneurs want to leave. Some have put Grand Rapids on that list. In fact, we are on a list that points out how poorly we have done, especially for African American entrepreneurs.

In response, we are laying the groundwork for broad systemic change. Out of that change, a couple early initiatives have emerged.

This year, my colleagues on the City Commission joined me in easing restrictions and streamlining licensing for food trucks. Food trucks are an entry point for culinary entrepreneurship.

A great example of this is Daddy Pete's BBQ.

Cory and Tarra Davis started their food truck three years ago. Daddy Pete's was named Grand Rapids Area Black Businesses' Emerging Black Business of the Year.

Recently, they opened a brick and mortar location on Eastern Avenue. This is an example of a neighborhood business that would not exist without the entry point of a food truck.

This year represents a significant shift in the methods we use at the City to support entrepreneurship.

Another small project with massive potential was launched between Start Garden, Grand Rapids Area Black Businesses and the City. The goal of the project is to accelerate five African American-owned businesses that are up and running and could be growing faster.

This work is just as critical as the work being done at the Grand Rapids Chamber's ELEVATE Minority Business program, which is focused on supporting business owners of color facing complex business growth issues and the work being done by the Latino Entrepreneur Initiative at Ferris State University.

Why is this work so important?

Because, by identifying and removing barriers for five or 10 businesses, we

at City Hall – and the broader community – can better understand systemic barriers that have prevented entrepreneurs from thriving.

If we can build systems and structures that accelerate five businesses, we have systems in place to accelerate a hundred future businesses.

And that gets us toward a long-term systemwide change.

Even more exciting, Darel Ross from Linc Up and Jorge Gonzalez from the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce just joined the executive team at Start Garden to expand that kind of systems level work across our entire city.

Each of the individual areas of progress I have highlighted stands as an achievement on its own merits. However, a great city does not come from just a strong economy.

A great city is not just a beautiful green city, or just a place where all citizens have opportunity or where there is a good quality of life.

A truly great city comes about when all of these come together in concert.

And that is why it is so important that we have made progress in each of these areas this past year.

And we will build on that in the years ahead. Our vision is to become a city of empowerment where all residents have equitable access to opportunity.

So how do we get there?

We get engaged at new levels. We support one another. We open our hearts and

minds. We nurture the growth of our city together to ensure that everyone shares in our success - whether you are sixth-generation or new to this community.

And we know City government cannot do this alone.

The work we are doing to embed racial equity within the City organization is critical. However, it is not enough by itself to truly move the needle on economic equity and opportunity in Grand Rapids.

Grand Rapids continues to be a tale of two cities, where neighborhoods in 17 census tracks – home to roughly a third of our city's population – have 48 percent of their residents living in poverty.

These neighborhoods are more racially and ethnically diverse than the city as a whole.

These neighborhoods are economically unstable with low-median household incomes and high unemployment.

We are one city, one community – and we rise and fall together. Without racial equity, we cannot be prosperous.

This year, we will work to create a new Grand Rapids Racial Equity Initiative.

There are a number of individuals, groups and organizations working to advance equity.

The Grand Rapids Racial Equity Initiative will aim to enhance this work, reduce fragmentation and convene key stakeholders to create specific action steps to increase equitable employment and reduce racial disparities in our City.

In addition, the initiative will create a Racial Equity Dashboard for transparency and accountability, and it will identify ways to work together in order to have a greater communitywide impact.

Through this effort, we will work hard to strengthen our partnerships with the NAACP, Urban League, Hispanic Chamber, Greater Grand Rapids Racial Equity Network, The Right Place, The Source, WMCAT, GROW, Grand Rapids Area

Chamber of Commerce, the West Michigan Small Business Development Center and others.

I hope all of you will join me in this vital effort, which, I believe, is who we strive

to be as a community.

We are a kind, compassionate, generous community that consistently gives back to help make our city a better place for everyone.

During a time when there are deep divides throughout our country, I firmly believe that what ties us together is far, far greater, far stronger than what may pull us apart.

And these are the times to stand together firmly in our respect for one another and our commitment to being an inclusive and welcoming city – a place where all people who make Grand Rapids their home feel respected and safe.

We know and understand that strong, welcoming communities are communities that are truly successful.

We want to be this type of community. With this commitment comes a new initiative with key partners in our city.

We are partnering with the Hispanic Center of West Michigan, Grand Rapids Public Schools and Grand Rapids Sister Cities to launch the OurCity Academy program.

OurCity Academy will be a comprehensive training program for immigrants that provides an overview and education about how local government and school systems work, how best to navigate these systems and where to find important information.

Topics will range from public safety, economic development, city and county services, public transit, and educational and student opportunities.

To strengthen our commitment, I have also asked our Grand Rapids Community Relations Commission to work with other local organizations on action plans for making our city even more welcoming to immigrants.

And I look forward to hearing these recommendations soon.

The motivation for being welcoming to immigrants isn't just about human decency, it is also a matter of business success. Many local companies rely on the talent of individuals from across the globe.

According to the Michigan Office for New Americans, immigrants comprise more than 25 percent of the state's technology sector – and that is just one area of employment.

Supporting our entrepreneurial and business ecosystem is key to building the quality of life we want for all members of our community.

As part of this important work, we need to go beyond supporting businesses as they start up and make supporting local businesses a regular part of our everyday lives.

Local businesses are the heart of our local economy.

Economists inform us that when you support a locally owned business, significantly more of your money is used to make purchases from other local businesses, service providers and farms.

This directly strengthens the economic base of our community and has a profound economic impact.

Small local businesses are the largest employer nationally and provide the most jobs to residents. Small businesses are job creators.

Our local businesses express who we are because they are owned by our brothers, our sisters, our neighbors.

They are the neighbor who greets us as we get our groceries from Martha's Vineyard or Supermercado Mexico. Or buy our flowers from Ball Park Floral or our morning coffee from the Lantern.

They need our commitment to support them.

At the City, we are working on ways to better support locally owned businesses, including minority- and women-owned businesses, through our procurement process.

We need to be a business-friendly city. And this year, we will actively seek input from business owners on what we can do to better serve them.

This year, I will host business roundtables to ensure on-going and open dialogue with business owners, with a commitment to strengthening and building relationships between the City and businesses.

Tonight, I extend a challenge to all of you for the year ahead. I ask that you join me in making a commitment to support our local business owners to ensure that once they start a business, that business thrives in our City.

Tonight, in partnership with Local First, we launch a GR Local Challenge campaign.

This is an initiative that asks each of you to commit to visiting one locally owned business at least once a month. At least once a month, I ask that you make a conscious effort to support a local business.

When you need to purchase a gift, go to a local boutique you haven't been to before. When you need a new pair of shoes, look to a local shoe store.

As you decide where to go for dinner, eat at a restaurant you haven't been to before and in a neighborhood unfamiliar to you.

Be a tourist in your own city.

There are retailers and restaurants to explore that could fill up a year of Saturday afternoons.

And if you're not accustomed to shopping in a store where other customers are not speaking English, it's a cultural experience waiting for you in your own backyard.

When you go to order a book on Amazon – or a shirt from Target – stop and ask yourself: Can I buy this in my neighborhood?

The answer is likely yes – and you can make it a habit.

These choices may seem small as just one person, but they have a real positive impact on our community and our goals: a strong economy, a vibrant community,

equality and a rich quality of life.

Your small choice, when multiplied again and again, makes a significant difference.

When you venture out, share that with us by posting it on social media and using the hashtag: #GRLocalChallenge

When you reach the end of 2017 with at least one local purchase every month,

you can change that to #GRLocalChallengeChampion

Let's support our neighbors and our neighborhood business districts and strengthen our local economy.

Last year, many across our community embraced the challenge to read a book chronicling our city's history of racial disparity and then joined in conversations

about it.

This year, I have another reading request for you.

This past year, I made it a priority to visit and tour companies throughout our City – from third-generation family owned businesses to businesses that were started by two college buddies.

Each time, I was moved by the story and successes they shared.

And each time, I found myself thinking that our city is full of quiet, small giants – companies that are deeply rooted in our community and a critical part of the fabric of who we are.

They are businesses that have an impact that extends far beyond the economic sphere.

Businesses can empower others, and be a vehicle that make dreams a reality. They shape our community and are critical partners in solving community challenges.

And that is why this year I am asking you to join me in reading the book

*"*Small Giants*."*

This is a story of businesses that choose to go deep in their community and make a big difference with their choices and their commitment to people. Examples of businesses across the nation are highlighted.

The intent of this reading is to help us – as a city – gain an appreciation of how important the nature of business is to the destiny of our city.

Ultimately, a community is made up of new businesses, old businesses, local businesses, small businesses and big businesses.

The book's themes include how important it is that we have businesses with a heart – businesses that shape their respective communities and embrace their communities shaping them.

So, Grand Rapids, I hope you embrace the challenges I have laid out.

We have covered significant ground tonight. We have shared our progress and we have laid out the opportunities that lie ahead.

We have highlighted various areas of our community, including the need for

diversity, equity, economic inclusion, economic success, green space, safety of residents and quality of life.

We must be strong in each of these areas to be a truly strong community.

I urge you to get engaged in the year ahead.

Buy local. Read Small Giants. Support the City's actions in these areas and join in wherever you can.

Help us continue to grow a culture of kindness and a culture of great respect and support for all in our community – those who are here today and those who may join us tomorrow.

Our city is built on small giants – those who get up every day to live their dream, support their family and work to make our community a better place.

When this book was first given to me, in the cover was written, “Let's make GR a small giant!”

That is my final request to you tonight. I ask that you join me in making Grand Rapids THE small giant in our country.

Thank you.