



# **FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Report to:

**MAYOR DAN HORRIGAN**

By:

*Blue Ribbon Task Force*

**F E B R U A R Y 1 , 2 0 1 6**

February 1, 2016

Mayor Dan Horrigan  
Suite 200 Municipal Building  
166 South High Street  
Akron, Ohio 44308

Re.: Transmittal Letter

Dear Mayor Horrigan:

On behalf of the City of Akron Blue Ribbon Task Force, which you commissioned, I am honored to forward to you our Final Report and Recommendations. We want you to know that we are grateful to have had this opportunity to “look under the hood” of our City government for the past ninety days. We are honored that you would entrust us with the responsibility to make suggestions to you for a course of action for your administration in the early days of your tenure.

We took very seriously the Charge which you gave us in early November and have diligently looked into most key areas of the City’s operations. We are grateful to former Mayor Fusco and the staff at City Hall for their cooperation with us. Staff have made available not only data, but in many cases spent considerable time with our Subcommittees so that we could learn how the City currently operates and test our thinking regarding future courses of action. We also want to thank you and your senior team, especially James Hardy and Annie Ochsenhirt McFadden, for your availability and advice.

As you will see on the following pages, we divided our work into four subcommittees: Finance, Sewer, Operations Improvement and Personnel & Human Resources, and Economic Development, Neighborhood Development and Education. We have sought to provide you with our analysis of the state of city government and our recommendations for your stewardship of the City of Akron (COA) going forward.

Each of our subcommittees prepared a matrix of their areas of review listing Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. That is followed by our recommendations. Of course, there were some cross-cutting issues and some that did not fit neatly into one of our sub groups. Thus, we do have some recommendations that are general. We have prefaced the individual areas of study with our general comments and recommendations and we suggest that you regard this transmittal letter as an “Executive Summary.” We are also providing you with a series of Appendices which detail certain areas of our review; provide you with data supporting certain of the recommendations; compare COA with other metropolitan areas and accumulate in a concise manner information and data which we believe will be of assistance to you.

Before summarizing our findings, we would suggest one note of caution. We are providing a wide array of recommendations, some of them will require further study; others will require additional resources (human and capital); and still others just may not work at this time. However, we believe that all of these suggestions deserve your review. We make them in the spirit of helping you to move a great city forward.

Our general impression of the status of the City of Akron is quite positive. This view is held by a substantial majority of Akron citizens as measured by the CMOR surveys. We believe that the City, on the strength of very solid leadership over the past several decades, has weathered a very serious storm. Moreover, the City and its government have many strengths. Our focus has been on City government itself, but one cannot totally separate the City government from the surrounding environment. We have not tried to do so. You will see strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats interwoven between the environment and the institution of city government.

Akron needs to play to its strengths. First and foremost, City Government is generally well organized. However, we recommend a reorganization of the Human Resources function of the City. Consolidating Benefits and other HR functions in a department with clear lines of responsibility to the Mayor would be an advantage. Also, we believe that the City's Development function would be better served by a more sharpened focus and strategic view. Otherwise you inherit a City mechanism which is both efficient and effective.

The City of Akron has many challenges today. Most of those challenges are not peculiar to Akron. Many of America's great twentieth century urban centers, like Akron, rose to prominence due to manufacturing and industrial growth. Populations increased steadily and great wealth was borne and accumulated. But beginning in the late 1960s Akron and many other industrial centers began to change, not in small part because of their prior success. Population expanded outward; manufacturing had competition, not only in the American South, but from international centers which mimicked the success of Akron. And, of course "automation" became a real factor in economic life. These economic head winds caused huge changes in the underlying conditions in Akron. The period from the late 70s through the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was daunting.

Akron not only survived, but in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century globalization and the "knowledge" economy were embraced. Akron was clearly turning a corner...and then the Great Recession.

The City of Akron was hit hard by:

- 1) The credit or financial crisis which decimated property values and therefore the wealth of our middle class;
- 2) A severe downturn in employment which had the effect of increasing the number of citizens needing public services, while lowering the principle revenue base (the City's income tax) which the City had to supply those services;
- 3) The State of Ohio's response to the Recession which cost the City of Akron approximately \$10 million per year in revenue, because
  - a. The Local Government Fund was substantially decreased
  - b. The Inheritance and Tangible Personal Property Tax were eliminated
- 4) The Federal Government's response to the Recession—a half measure—initially protecting teachers and safety forces jobs, and providing some infrastructure dollars for "shovel ready projects," but they also cut important funding sources such as community development grants.

The Recession and the governmental response to it left Akron with a number of tough choices: raise taxes or cut costs. The former was not feasible, so the latter was undertaken resulting in significant cuts to the City's work force. Through good leadership and a "can do" attitude, sacrifice and hard work Akron once again weathered the storm.

We cannot afford to have a change in momentum – we need to get over the top. Our SWOT analysis demonstrates first and foremost that the COA is stable, lean, and poised for growth. But we have challenges.

## **Finance**

The single largest challenge facing the City is its financial condition. The principle source of revenue for the City is the income tax. Since recovering from the Recession the tax has begun to grow, but slowly. No other funding source has emerged to complement the income tax. The City is highly leveraged due to the global and regional economic storms it has faced and weathered. It has been necessary in the recent past to borrow in order to promote economic development, assist in saving key City employers, invest in updating aging infrastructure, and even cover operating costs, including employee/retiree benefits. The City's current capacity for further borrowing is constrained. While the City's financial situation is manageable, there is little margin for error, great initiatives or even unforeseen circumstances, including emergencies and disasters.

### *Key Recommendations*

- Enhance existing revenues (for example)
  - Ensure the collection of current revenue sources such as: improving the revenue collection from contractors; collect appropriately for EMS services
  - Consider certain increases or additional fees or charges
- Focus on Debt Reduction
- Control Costs
  - Employee Compensation, including legacy costs
  - Minimize subsidies to various city enterprises

## **Sewer**

One of the immediate threats faced by the City is the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) issue. We devoted a specific committee to this issue because of its potential consequence. Our recommendations are specific and, we hope, achievable.

### *Key Recommendations*

- Communicate clearly and often to Akron residents concerning the status of the CSO issue
- Mobilize the corporate and civic community to obtain relief from the current plan

Notwithstanding financial constraints, there are many opportunities.

## **Operations**

The Operations Improvement and Human Resources Subcommittee suggests a number of areas where COA can build on consolidation efforts that have been successful with County government and a number of adjacent municipalities. We believe that additional efficiencies in city government can be created providing not only cost savings but improved customer (citizen) services.

### *Key Recommendations*

- Develop a backup plan for service continuity for water and steam
- Physically consolidate city services
- Pursue a ballot initiative to create a Human Resource Department
- Evaluate opportunities to optimize police, fire, and EMS services including a fresh review of opportunities to consolidate appropriate services with the County and other municipalities
- Press the FAA to approve the Airport Master Plan and aggressively implement its recommendations

## **Economic Development and Education**

Similarly Economic and Neighborhood Development would be enhanced by continuing and expanding partnerships with METRO Transit, the Metroparks, the University of Akron, the Greater Akron Chamber, and multiple economic development intermediaries such as Team NEO, JumpStart, etc.

### *Key Recommendations*

- Develop and implement a robust, comprehensive plan and retain a high level individual to lead the Plan and initiate implementation
- Invest in plans for Akron's neighborhoods and nurture neighborhood planning and organizing infrastructure
- Leverage ODOT's investment in the High/Broadway Interchange to improve access and spur neighborhood revitalization
- Leverage Mayor Horrigan's credibility as a former educator to drive messaging around the importance of education and family engagement in education
- Communicate with and collaborate with University of Akron and the Akron Public School District to promote educational attainment, economic development and efficient use of CLC assets

We also believe that there are a number of "one time" opportunities to obtain additional funds. We suggest that the City explore the sale of certain underutilized real estate; that COA aggressively market innovations developed by the City over the past two decades in areas such as water, sewer, and transportation. We also recommend exploring innovative techniques for monetizing certain City assets such as the out-of-county reservoirs.

Unfortunately, we cannot save ourselves into prosperity. We recognize that even if many of suggestions we make in this Report are successfully implemented, it may be that these funding

streams, or savings, will be insufficient to overcome the loss of State and Federal support in the long run. During your tenure, Mr. Mayor, you may need to explore increasing the City's income tax rate. However, we recommend that you seriously work to save cost and enhance incremental revenue prior to considering a tax increase.

In our analysis, the threats to Akron are largely external. The City is fundamentally sound. However, another recession, particularly one hitting before some of the revenue enhancements are implemented, could very seriously, and negatively, impact our community. Likewise a catastrophic event, either natural or man-made, could have very negative consequences.

As you know, the City cannot prevent those threats. But you can prepare. We have attempted to highlight areas of concern where the City Administration will necessarily need to respond.

Most of our work has focused on the near term in accord with your Charge to us. However, it is impossible to ignore medium and long-term threats and opportunities, so our recommendations are full of suggestions for further study and analysis.

We suggest either using this Task Force, or commissioning another group, to follow-up on our Report and Recommendations periodically to track the progress.

As Chairman, I have seen the dedication and hard work which the Task Force members have performed. I have no doubt that this group and many other Akron citizens would be happy to assist you in subsequent studies and similar endeavors. Proof of this assertion is the wise and eclectic nature of the Comments and Suggestions which we received from the public. We are pleased to include this public input in the Appendix to our Report and Recommendations.

The Task Force had a very short period of time—3 months—to prepare this report for you. Nevertheless, we hope that this will be helpful to you in this first four years of your stewardship of the City of Akron.

Respectfully submitted,

Timothy Ochsenhirt  
Chairman, Blue Ribbon Task Force

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## **Blue Ribbon Task Force Roster**

Tim Ochsenhirt, *Chairman*  
*Retired President*  
*Roetzel & Andress*

Daniel C. Colantone, CCE, IOM  
*President and CEO*  
*Greater Akron Chamber*

Mark Douglas  
*President*  
*Tri County Building & Construction Trade*  
*Council*

Ron Fowler  
*Retired Pastor*  
*Arlington Church of God*

Randy Frame  
*President*  
*Ohio Edison/Penn Power*

David James  
*Superintendent*  
*Akron Public Schools*

Ravi Krovi, PhD  
*Dean – College of Business Administration,*  
*University of Akron*

Amanda M. Leffler  
*Attorney at Law*  
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Scott Levin  
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*GOJO Industries, Inc.*

Christine A. Mayer  
*President*  
*GAR Foundation*

Brian D. Nelsen  
*Director Finance & Budget, Summit County*  
*Executive Russell M. Pry*

Linda Omobien  
*Akron City Council Woman-At-Large*  
*Akron City Council*

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*Owner*  
*Glen Stephens Inc.*

Michael Rickman  
*Vice President Compliance & Ethics*  
*Goodyear*

Grace Wakulchik  
*Chief Operating Officer*  
*Akron Children's Hospital*

### **Consultants**

Thomas V. Chema  
*Chairman*  
*Gateway Consultants Group, Inc.*

Cheri Cunningham

Richard Merolla

Warren Woolford

## **Charge to the City of Akron Blue Ribbon Task Force**

For the first time in 28 years, the City of Akron will have a new Administration and City Council. This provides an ideal and timely opportunity to assess the city's finances and operations, as well as a chance to identify key priorities for the City of Akron. Mayor-elect, Dan Horrigan, hereby creates the City of Akron Blue Ribbon Task Force to evaluate aspects of city government, and make recommendations of immediate steps that should be taken within the first 100 days of the new Administration.

The Task Force is advisory to the Mayor-elect and will consist of diverse leaders from education; health and human services; government; business; labor; philanthropy; clergy; and the community at-large. Members will bring both energy and new ideas, and provide counsel not on behalf of a single constituency but rather on what is in the long-term interest of the City of Akron. The Task Force has been asked to focus on the following strategic areas of importance:

- City finances
  - Consider recent audit findings, including results of Summit County internal audit
  - Examine city revenues and expenses
  - Develop and promote transparency
- City operations
  - Evaluate processes and procedures
  - Examine opportunities for efficiencies
  - Review current organizational structure
- Personnel and human resource management
  - Promote diversity, equity and inclusion in hiring practices
  - Examine current human resources structure and function
- Economic and neighborhood development
  - Examine city economic development function
  - Evaluate current and potential efforts to attract and retain business
  - Identify priorities for neighborhood business district redevelopment process
- Risk management
  - Examine current city contractual obligations
  - Evaluate current risk management function and policy framework
- Charter changes
  - Any changes that may be required to implement recommendations

The statutory responsibility and authority for organizing city government remains that of the Mayor. While the Task Force has been established to assist and advise in that process, the Mayor-elect does not delegate to the Task Force any authority to undertake or perform any government act that is the responsibility of the Mayor under the Charter of the City of Akron or the laws of Ohio.

The Task Force will provide their recommendations on or about February 1, 2016.

The Mayor-elect extends his gratitude to members of the City of Akron Blue Ribbon Task Force for accepting this important assignment. The City of Akron finds itself at a critical time in its history. A time filled with challenges as well as remarkable opportunities for growth. It's time to write the next chapter in Akron's incredible story.

## **Subcommittees**

### **Finance**

\*Brian Nelson

Ravi Krovi

Scott Levin

### **Operation Improvement and Personnel & Human Resource Management**

\*Grace Wakulchik

Linda Omobien

Mark Douglas

Randy Frame

Amanda Leffler

### **Economic & Neighborhood Development and Education**

\*Christine Mayer

David James

Dan Colantone

Glen Stephens

Michael Rickman

Ron Fowler

### **Special Sewer Issue Committee**

\*Tim Ochsenhirt

Randy Frame

Dan Colantone

Scott Levin

Grace Wakulchik

## **General Recommendations**

### *Collaborations and Partnerships*

- On-going, routine meetings with County Executive and President of The University of Akron to insure coordination of activity, identification of initiatives and efficient deployment of resources.
- Maintain relationships with Business Community and Civic Leadership. The Community has been successful in meeting challenges such as retaining major corporate facilities. Akron knows how to respond and collaborate in “crisis” mode; translate this can do spirit into positive growth mode. The Mayor can serve as a “convenor.”

### *Outreach*

- Maintain and enhance COA’s connection with the State and Federal governments. Mobilize business and civic leadership to assist COA with lobbying agencies and legislatures to obtain requisite funding and related support.
- Continue efforts to expand opportunities for Akron’s residents through robust regional strategies with Summit, Portage, Stark, and Medina counties and their communities. Leverage relationships with Cleveland and Cuyahoga County. The Region is important to Akron; Akron is vital to the region.

### *Communication*

- Find vehicles for communicating (perhaps electronically) the status of the City’s progress to key constituency groups on a routine basis. The citizens need to learn that their local government is functioning well.
  - Consider bringing back the City Magazine, perhaps with corporate sponsorship.
  - Special attention to the Sewer (CSO) issue and its impact on business and residents
- Consider revitalizing the City’s Human Relations Commission to promote and value our diversity and to welcome people into our community, and deal proactively with social issues.

### *Leveraging Assets*

- Focus on Towpath and National Park
  - Broaden hospitality
  - Take advantage of tourism
  - Leverage for regional, statewide and national marketing

- Sports – consider developing a Sports Commission for Akron or expanding Cleveland’s to more actively promote sports and optimize Akron community sports assets.
  - University of Akron
  - Akron (Rubber Ducks)
  - Soap Box Derby
  - Firestone Country Club
  - Local heroes
  
- Investigate methods for expanding the broadband network, particularly in Downtown

*Internal Culture*

- Enhance an open, inclusive, transparent culture within the government of the COA.
  - Conduct regular open forum throughout the city
  - Continue to develop and share benchmarking “dashboards” for key city services
  - Seek input from the community as you did by initiating the Blue Ribbon Task Force
  
- Reach out to the growing millennial demographic and engage them in the life of COA.

# **Finance Committee Department Report**

## **Preface**

The Task Force, not surprisingly, concluded that the key to the City of Akron being in a position to take new initiatives for the citizens of the community is the status of the City's finances and thus the funds available to accomplish the City's responsibilities and the new Mayor's agenda. We performed a thorough examination of the City's current financial condition and focused on projections for the future.

We are grateful to the City's Finance Director and Deputy Director for their knowledgeable and thorough presentation to us. While the COA has, in a very transparent manner, made a great deal of financial data and information available to all of the citizens of Akron through the public website, municipal finance can be complicated and confusing. Thus we appreciate the clear, cogent presentation by staff and the further input we received from Rick Merolla, former Finance Director.

The Finance Subcommittee has compressed this data into a SWOT analysis format. We also have a number of recommendations. In addition, because it is so important to understand the City's financial status and the ramifications, we have also included as Appendix 1, a narrative that elaborates in the SWOT analysis. The appendices also include certain comparative data on other Ohio and similarly situated cities. Caution is to be observed relative to the comparative data: it appears that there is little uniformity in definitions, data keeping and presentation among municipalities. Nonetheless the comparisons are useful.

In sum, the City of Akron is in stable financial condition. The finances of the City are well managed. These facts are substantiated by Bond Rating Agencies and the clean audit opinions from the State Auditor. Both these agencies take a much deeper dive into the City's

finances than we were able to do during our three months of deliberation. However, the City has little surplus dollars available for initiatives, capital projects or emergencies. Debt level is high and revenue is growing more slowly than is optimal.

### SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversified Economy</li> <li>• Strong Financial Management Team</li> <li>• Solid Bond Rating</li> <li>• Strong Asset Base               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Vast water and sewer system</li> <li>○ Industrial parks</li> <li>○ Parks and recreation facilities</li> <li>○ Airport</li> <li>○ Parking facilities</li> <li>○ Capital equipment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall Economy has not totally recovered from the Recession</li> <li>• Decline of Manufacturing Center</li> <li>• Declining population base and median household income</li> <li>• Decline in real property valuation</li> <li>• Decline in State of Ohio funding support               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Phase-out of tangible personal property tax</li> <li>○ Elimination of inheritance tax</li> <li>○ Cut in local Government Fund</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Insufficient Reserve Balance               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 2015 General Fund balance of approximately \$3 million on \$153 million of annual spending</li> <li>○ 7.5 days of Cash (2%) on hand</li> </ul> </li> <li>• High Level of Debt               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Total of \$1.2 billion including                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tax supported Debt - \$375 million</li> <li>▪ CLC Debt - \$242 m</li> <li>▪ Sewer Debt - \$495 m</li> <li>▪ Water Debt - \$56 m</li> <li>▪ Other - &lt; \$1 m</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ See Appendix 1 for detail</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Contractual Obligations to Employees               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Constrained flexibility</li> <li>○ High cost, underfunded health care plan</li> <li>○ Retiree health care plan</li> <li>○ Legacy costs (\$9 m in 2014)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• High Level of Subsidized Operations               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ &gt; \$7.25 m in 2015</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Includes entities such as Municipal Court, EMS, District Heating</li> <li>○ See Appendix 1 for detail.</li> </ul>
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Subsidy elimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fee increases</li> <li>○ Spin-off operations</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Consolidation of services with other governments (County, other municipalities)</li> <li>● Monetizing Assets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sale/Lease of buildings or land</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Enhanced Fee Revenue</li> <li>● Healthcare Reform</li> <li>● Legacy Cost Reduction</li> </ul>	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of Revenue Growth</li> <li>● Economic Downturn</li> <li>● City-wide Emergency</li> <li>● Lawsuits or Audit Findings</li> <li>● Lack of Funds for Capital Needs</li> <li>● Healthcare Changes</li> <li>● Declining City Employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ City is already thinly staffed</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Recommendations:**

- **Monthly Review Process** – Probably the simplest and maybe the most important thing the City can do to mitigate the risk of serious financial problems is to put in place a regular and formal financial review process. The City needs to begin structuring a formal review process which incorporates reviewing actual revenue and expenditure results, local economic indicators and updating a five year forecast for its major fund types and some of its key non-major funds. The results of these updates should be shared with key stakeholders including public presentations to City Council. For the City General Fund and for overall income tax collections, this should be done on a monthly basis. For the other major funds this should be done on at least a quarterly basis. Given the fine line the City walks in balancing its books, it needs to be able to act quickly to changing economic conditions. This process will help ensure that all parties involved in managing the City’s finances are provided the latest relevant information in a timely manner.
- **Debt Reduction** – The City has done a good job over the years at refunding debt to take advantage of lower interest rates. There does not appear to be a lot of opportunity to do much else in this area. The City needs to begin paying down some of its obligations and refrain from issuing new income tax supported debt over the next several years. This likely will have a negative impact on the City’s capital budget, including less money for street repairs and economic development projects.
- **Subsidy Elimination** – The City needs to study ways in which it can eliminate or minimize the operating subsidies it provides to operations that should be self-sustaining. Options may include fee increases, service reductions and/or the sale or lease of the operations.

- **Mergers** – Similar to the merger of the City’s Health and Building Departments with Summit County, the City needs to study ways it can provide services in a more cost efficient manner through sharing agreements or outright consolidations with other political subdivisions.
- **Asset Lease/Sales** – The City owns many valuable capital assets which it may be able to leverage to produce a greater return for the citizens of Akron. The City should study the feasibility of either selling or leasing some of its capital assets with the returns earmarked for future capital needs. Assets such as the City’s water and sewer systems, parking decks, golf courses and airports just to name a few should be studied. The City should proceed with caution in this analysis and only move forward if it truly makes long term financial sense.
- **Enhanced Fee Revenue** – The City provides a great deal of services which are subsidized and are not charged at full value. The City should review all of its current fee structures to determine if they need updating and should look at the viability of additional fee opportunities such as a storm water utility fee, entertainment fees and facility naming rights.
- **Enhanced Revenue Collection Efforts** – The City needs to review its revenue collection efforts in several areas including Income Tax collection for contractors and sub-contractors doing work in the City and also collections for EMS services from insurance companies and non-residents. The City needs to review its current revenue sources and ensure that they are adequately collecting revenues due to the City.
- **Legacy Cost Reduction** – The City and its bargaining units need to look at meaningful, long term economic reform to both the City’s self-insured healthcare plan and retiree healthcare plan and terminal and retirement plans. These plans, as they’re currently structured, pose significant long term financial risk. The City’s bargaining units share tremendously in this risk as it has the potential to escalate its erosion of union membership. The City should consider preparing a comparative analysis of what other public and private employers are doing in both of these areas to determine if these plans continue to be appropriate.
- **Salary Comparison** – The City should consider preparing a formal study of its salary structure and the growth in those salaries over the past ten years. The Salary Study should take into account the total compensation received by employees, including health care. This study should be contextual and take into account the current wage and household income data for Summit County as a whole.

# **Sewer Committee Report**

## **CSO Issue**

### **Preface**

The Akron Sewer System is an important asset not only to the City of Akron, but to residents of numerous cities that are directly served by the system. Moreover, the sewer system is one of the most significant factors in preserving and enhancing the quality of water in the Cuyahoga River and the eastern basin of Lake Erie. Thus, its successful operation is vital to literally millions of Americans and Canadians.

In the modern era the City of Akron and the ratepayers to the Sewer System have spent in excess of 5 billion dollars in capital and operating costs to the system. Unfortunately, this expenditure level, now and in the near future, will expand drastically --- by about \$1.4 billion. Akron's sewer system like those of 800+ other cities is required to avoid the detrimental impacts of "combined sewer overflows (CSO)."

The City has entered into an agreement with the U.S.E.P.A which was incorporated into and enforced by a Consent Decree with the Federal District Court for the Northern District of Ohio. While compliance with the terms of the Agreement and Decree should predominantly mitigate the CSO problem, the remedy is very expensive. The City has already spent nearly \$350 million on the first phase and has committed nearly \$400 million on a current phase. The third and final phase is estimated to cost nearly \$400 million.

The funding of this project has come through Sewer rates. Since 2009 rates have increased by 200+%. These additional dollars have gone primarily to pay debt service on the current borrowing to support the capital program. If the program in its current form is fully funded through system rates (there do not appear to be funding streams available from external

sources, such as the federal or state governments) it is expected that rates will again increase substantially. The impact of these increases is not felt equally by all system users, though the rates themselves are equal. We are concerned about the impact of the increased rates on the average citizen and on economic development prospects for the community.

It appears to the Task Force that the COA has done an excellent job of managing this problem, and the project, to date. The Sewer System and the COA would be advantaged if certain changes could be made to the Consent Decree. We list them in our Recommendations. We also believe that there should be a greater level of communication on the part of the COA to all of its constituents concerning this issue and its impact.

**SWOT**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Strengths</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Sewer System itself is strong, a regional asset and well run</li> <li>• Staff is competent and innovative</li> <li>• COA has resources including land available for sustainability initiatives</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Weaknesses</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSO consent decree is very expensive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Potentially negatively impacts City’s debt capacity</li> <li>○ Negative impact (due to rate increases) on residents and businesses</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Community not well informed about this issue; its causes and its impacts</li> <li>• This issue has created negative relationships between the City and the State and Federal EPAs and the Federal District Court</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Opportunities</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New City Leadership can initiate improved relationship with EPA and Federal Court</li> <li>• Vehicle for establishing new communications pathway to constituents on this issue</li> <li>• Vehicle to mobilize the business community to support the City</li> <li>• Enhanced sustainability of water resources</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Threats</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New or additional requirements from EPA</li> <li>• Risks of non-performance and consequent penalties</li> <li>• Adverse economic impacts from increased sewer rates</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clean Cuyahoga River can be an enhanced tourist attraction and economic development generator</li> <li>• Use as a fulcrum to further develop Akron Clean Water initiatives</li> </ul>	
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### **Recommendations**

- 1) Communicate clearly and often with the Akron businesses and Akron residents concerning the status of the CSO issue. Describe the causes of the problem and the physical consequences to the environment. Describe the current plan for solving the problem and its costs, including the impact on rates to date and the future expectation.
- 2) Mobilize the corporate community and Akron’s state and federal legislative delegations to obtain relief from the current plan for solving the CFO problem.
  - a. Seek relief from the zero (0) overflow per year standard
  - b. Seek an extension of the time limit (now 2028) by at least 20 years to complete task
  - c. Seek extension of financing for improvements to 50 years vs current 30 years
  - d. Obtain approval of green options vs mechanical (tunnel) methodology. (The Integrated Plan)
- 3) Explore opportunity to utilize upstream assets (land and resources) of the water system to mitigate CSO issues.

# **Operations Improvement and Personnel & Human Resource Management Committee Report**

## **Operations Improvement and Human Resources Preface**

The Operations Improvement and Personnel & Human Resources Subcommittee of the Task Force undertook a review of the major operating departments of the City's government to determine if there are major areas where we could suggest improvements in order for the city to be more efficient and effective in its delivery of services to Akron residents. This report was completed by the Operations Subcommittee after interviewing content experts including Charles Brown (Deputy Mayor for Public Safety), Rick Merolla (past Director of Finance, Director of Public Service and Deputy Mayor), Cheri Cunningham (past Director of Law), Robert Konstand (attorney representing the Summit AirSpace located at Akron Fulton Airport), Warren Woolford (past Director of Planning), reviewing comparative data, reports, information on the City of Akron website and considering suggestions from the citizens of Akron. Data that was considered is attached or referenced as an Appendix to the Report. Additional information was obtained from the Finance and Sewer Subcommittees. The report is organized by city department and includes strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and recommendations of the Operations Subcommittee. City departments included are the Departments of Law, Public Service, Public Safety and Personnel. The airport was also included in the review.

## Law Department Preface

The Law Department oversees the operation of the Criminal and Civil Divisions and provides legal advice to city administration, Council and employees. The Department of Law manages all litigation, federal cases, EEO cases, drafting and editing contracts and legislation, collections, code/enforcement, claims processes, public records requests, employee relations, employee discipline, labor relations, zoning requests, training for the police force, some collection work OCRC claims, legal advice for judges and collective bargaining for the city with Randy Briggs. The department also manages an Indigent Burial Program. The Law Director signs off on all contracts. Outside counsel is used for areas of special expertise. Roetzel and Address has been used on the sewer project. Brouse McDowell has been used for some issues where there is a conflict of interest or need for specialized knowledge. Existing Sewer and Fire litigation require outside counsel. Civil Cases have increased from 1047 in 2010 to 1376 in 2014. As a result of the collections efforts of the Law Department, there was a large increase in Income Tax collection. Tax collections rose from \$95,237 in 2010 to \$710,368 in 2014. Labor costs have remained flat. There are 24.5 FTEs plus a Director and part-time law clerks. The 2015 Budget included 37 FTE-variance largely in area of Civil Law.

## Law Department SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cases are handled well, most without requiring outside counsel</li> <li>• Generally recognized that good people work in the department</li> <li>• Collective bargaining process for the city is almost resolved for a three year term</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The speed of the claims and collections process</li> <li>• Collection of revenue from EMS claims is problematic for non-residents</li> </ul>

<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications and timeliness of claims management and collections</li> <li>• Additional attorneys and staff could improve workload management and potentially bring in additional collection revenue<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire and Sewer litigations<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Residency requirements/veteran status points for promotion litigation<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
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### **Recommendations**

- Additional staff to process claims and collections could increase city revenue, largely through the collection of delinquent taxes, assessments, and utility bills.
- Continued support for the ongoing litigation regarding sewer and the Fire Department is essential. Preparation for expected outcomes is essential.
- Focus on reporting of contractors not paying taxes to the City on their employees and subcontractors (1099s). This has the potential to be a significant revenue source for the City.

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<sup>1</sup> Those cases have nearly doubled (2010-258 cases to 2014-580 cases) and the return on collections would more than cover additional staff costs. Tax collections were below \$100,000 in 2010 and \$710,368 in 2014. Collections for other than tax were almost a million dollars (\$993,918) in 2014, largely from delinquent water bill collections. The law department budget has remained flat since 2012 and additional collections staff could increase revenues over cost

<sup>2</sup> It is our understanding that substantial progress has been made in these two cases, since the initiation of our review.

<sup>3</sup> The litigation in Common Pleas regarding residency requirements and veteran status points for promotions is important regarding potential future costs and leadership issues in Public Safety. (City Council and others are interested in maintaining the current system.)

## **Public Service Department Preface**

The Department of Public Service includes the Divisions and Bureaus of the Airport (described in a separate section), Building Maintenance, Engineering, the Golf Courses, Highway Maintenance, Motor Equipment, Off-Street Parking, Oil and Gas, Parks, Plans and Permits, Public Works, Sanitation, Sewer, Street and Highway Lighting, Street Cleaning, Water, Traffic Engineering and the Downtown District Heating System. As of December 31, 2014 there were 534.5 FTEs with a 2015 budget of 591.5 FTEs. The department had a substantial reorganization in 2000. Significant downsizing occurred in 2008-2009 as a result of the recession and reduced funding from the state and federal governments. Public Service FTEs went from 1200 to 600 people. Faced with this smaller workforce while still attempting to provide excellent public service to residents, the Department adopted a TLC management technique, requiring all department decisions to be based on either using technology (T) to improve service, leveraging (L) existing city assets, or consolidation (C) of services with other governmental jurisdictions.

The Engineering Bureau is responsible for the design and construction of all city projects, and civil and electrical engineering for sewer, water, streets, parks and the airport. All city engineers have been consolidated into one department and charge their time to specific projects. As of December 31, 2014 there were 37 FTEs in the Department with 46 FTEs budgeted for 2015.

The Building Department has now been consolidated with Summit County. Plans and Permits is now staffed by one person who handles all plans and permits.

The Water Division (including water distribution and the water supply) had 140 FTEs as of December 31, 2014. The budget for 2015 was 140. The Division is managed well and

Akron's abundant water is a significant economic development tool. Most of the city's tax sharing agreements are based on the City extending its water to spur development and income tax growth. All or parts of Hudson, Cuyahoga Falls, Twinsburg, Fairlawn and Boston Heights receive water from the City of Akron.

There are 96 FTEs in the Sewer Division as of December 31, 2014. The 2015 budget was for 117 FTEs. The Sewer Division is examined in significant detail in a separate section of this report.

Approximately 13 maintenance employees (custodians) maintain more than dozens of buildings. Janitorial services for the buildings are outsourced. Highway Maintenance had 62 FTEs at the end of December, 2014 compared to a 2015 budget for 62. The Motor Equipment division had 29 FTEs at the end of December, 2014 compared to a 2015 budget of 38. The Motor Equipment Department maintains or provides services for vehicles for Akron Public Schools, the University of Akron, ODOT and the city (approximately 1900 vehicles) and also maintains a Municipal Truck service. Fuel is purchased via a futures contract. The City has an oil recycling program to cut costs. The City of Akron outsourced 20% of sanitation in the early 80's. Now about 25% of collection is done by a private contractor. The Division converted from a manual pick up to an automated pick up resulting in significantly fewer staff injuries. This division also manages the City's recycling operation, which is provided at a state of the art recycling facility near the Akron Municipal Airport and managed by Waste Management. Off-street parking operates 8 parking decks and several surface lots with over 8000 spaces and 1500 parking meters.

The Golf Courses are heavily utilized in accordance with the season and the weather.

Two golf courses: J. Edward Good Park Golf Course and Mud Run Golf Course are managed by four employees.

(Not part of Service Department) 311 – Non emergency phone service received approximately 180,000 calls per year. Approximately two thirds of the calls are informational and the rest are requests for city services. After hours these calls are routed to the 24 hour water dispatch service.

The Recycle Energy Plant used to burn trash and provide steam to large sections of downtown Akron. The plant is operated by a private corporation (Akron Energy Systems) for the City of Akron. Akron Energy Systems has significantly improved operations at the plant since 2008. Primary customers are Akron General Medical Center, Akron Children’s Hospital, Canal Place, the City, the County and most downtown businesses. The plant now burns gas and has come into compliance with EPA requirements.

**Public Service Department SWOT**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Zone light automation system</li> <li>• COA has recently completed energy conservation projects at City Hall, Citicenter, and the Stubbs Building to reduce costs</li> <li>• State of the art systems throughout the water supply operating network that provide algae detection, asset management services, and water security</li> <li>• Water system moved to remote meters</li> <li>• Akron Global Water Alliance (AGWA), intended to promote Akron as a water technology hub and to bring new economic development</li> <li>• Snow removal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street Painting</li> <li>• One person handles 1130 plan reviews and 1237 permits</li> <li>• There is only a 12 hour water supply if there is a major break</li> <li>• There is only one water plant. Water use can only be measured by a city vehicle driving by</li> <li>• Water and sewer are not included in the general fund</li> <li>• No plan for routine replacement of equipment in Public Works</li> <li>• Upkeep of Parks</li> <li>• Lock 3 does not cover the cost of operations.</li> <li>• Golf Course</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Public Service Worker” position, enables Public Service employees to work across divisional lines during emergency operations</li> <li>• Potholes are repaired within 24 hours of the city receiving notice</li> <li>• Oil recycling plan and retread tires program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Does not generate sufficient revenue to cover costs</li> <li>○ Use is dependent on weather and it receives many complaints from the public.</li> <li>○ Complaints about the golf course are largely attributed to employee issues at the golf course.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outsource additional services such as engineering, co-op or sell the Recycled Energy Plant</li> <li>• Sell/Consolidation existing city owned properties (vacant land and or buildings) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ City Center is underutilized</li> <li>○ Health Department has vacated the former Morley Health Center building</li> <li>○ Sell the golf courses to the Metro Park system</li> <li>○ 80 W. Bowery, AAA and other buildings may not be appropriate for adaptive re-use and could be sold to prompt local development. (Leasing is not an option due to the lack of infrastructure to manage the facilities.)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Marketing the school flashing light system and water technologies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ continue to provide water service in exchange for tax sharing</li> <li>○ generate licensing fees</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Compost Plant site may be available for re-development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A fats, oils and grease (FOG) intake center near the anaerobic digesters at the Botzum treatment plant could be established to reduce costs for local food industry businesses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a 12 hour water supply if there is a catastrophic water plant shutdown <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ no back up “tie ins” with surrounding water systems</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Downtown businesses, city services, Akron General Medical Center and Akron Children’s Hospital are dependent on steam from the Recycle Energy Plant</li> <li>• No redundant gas lines in downtown or power sources that could immediately be tapped for back up.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 311 system, the only one in Summit County could be provided to other County municipalities on a Subscription basis</li> <li>• Consolidate Divisions and Bureaus</li> <li>• Consolidate Lock 3 with another department</li> <li>• Promote the Recycle Energy Plant</li> </ul>	
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### **Recommendations**

- Develop a backup plan for service continuity for water and steam.
- Review and implement appropriate sale of city vacant property and buildings.
- Physically consolidate city services to reduce ongoing capital and maintenance costs. If sites become available consider selling or otherwise leveraging them.
- Consolidate divisions and bureaus, as appropriate, to create economies of scale, operating improvements and reduce management costs.
- Develop a plan to leverage city assets such as the water plant, water technology, school light technology, vehicle maintenance program and the 311 system. Consider spinning these technologies off into a marketing entity created by the city or assign to Akron Development Corp.
- Review street maintenance, sanitation and leaf pick up systems for improvements to enhance customer satisfaction. If current processes are deemed sufficient, improve communications to residents so they better understand what is and is not being done.
- Explore opportunities to work with Metroparks on an agreement for park maintenance; and to merge or purchase the golf courses.

## **Personnel/Human Resources Department Preface**

Human resource functions are scattered throughout the city's infrastructure. Benefits are managed by the Finance Department. The Civil Service Commission (including three appointees by the Mayor) appoints the Personnel Director according to the Charter of the City of Akron. The Personnel Director is responsible for appointing all employees of the Personnel Department. The Commission is appointed for a 6 year term and the Personnel Director is appointed for a 3 year term. The Department also manages testing for Akron Public Schools at no charge.

There are four divisions: Records, Classification and Compensation, EEO & Training and Employment. The Department does the recruitment, processes applications, administers tests for Civil Service positions and schedules disciplinary appeals. Recruitment reach is extended to Youngstown, Cleveland, Toledo and Detroit to promote diversity for the Public Safety Department. The Department uses selected testing companies. The Records Division maintains all city employee files and manages all records requests, employment verifications and subpoenas. Compensation is evaluated upon request and the Deputy Mayor in Labor Relations coordinates compensation for union positions. Benefits, including FMLA and ADA issues are managed through Finance. Union negotiations and union discipline is managed through the Deputy Mayor for Labor Relations.

## Personnel/Human Resources Department SWOT

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most employees are recognized as good</li> <li>• Records are kept well</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• need to revamp competency tests for positions, job descriptions and performance appraisals (some are not current or relevant)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evaluations are completed every six months and there is a general opinion that if an employee is downgraded, a grievance and legal action will ensue.                 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some managers rank all employees average to avoid this and some rank all employees as superlative to make the staff happy</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Civil Service requirements and the overlapping union structure make it difficult to promote good people and move the ineffective out</li> <li>○ To promote a candidate the candidate has to be one of the top three candidates after the promotion test. This process may not produce the most qualified candidate for the job.</li> <li>○ Customer service is not evaluated and there is a lack of human resource background or training for the current staff</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Compensations studies need to be completed (See Finance for additional information)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Benefits are not well understood or promoted to enhance wellness and reduce costs.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a Human Resources Department, with an appropriately credentialed Human Resource Executive</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current structure of human resource functions is fractured and does not promote the selection, hiring</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move benefits back to the department so a comprehensive compensation plan can be developed for employees</li> <li>• Update job descriptions, performance appraisals and promotion processes so they are equitable, current and relevant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improve ongoing training for staff and managers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>and development of employees to meet the mission of the City</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current benefits program is not financially sustainable</li> <li>• Partnership with the unions needs to occur to ensure the gradual changes in benefits and benefit language in the contract to ensure that workforce numbers do not have to be decreased to maintain current benefit levels</li> </ul>
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### **Recommendations**

- Create a Human Resources Department (that still includes the Civil Service Commission) that includes all functions of human resources, recruitment, hiring, training, compensation and benefits, disciplinary action, promotion and succession planning. (See our Interim Report #2, attached as Appendix \_\_)
- Create a ballot initiative to allow the Mayor to appoint the Director of Human Resources (Personnel). (See our Interim Report #2, attached as Appendix \_\_)
- Reevaluate compensation and benefits as a package and offer competitive market rates for both. Work with unions to ensure a gradual transition to this model. Evaluate making changes on a “go-forward” basis to reduce disruption to current employees.
- Update all job descriptions, performance appraisals and promotion processes and systems so they are current, relevant, equitable and sustainable.
  - Work with Council to re-evaluate the process for giving preference to resident and veterans in hiring and promotion to the COA’s civil service. The current system may not be the most effective method.
  - Consider developing/updating a succession plan for key staff positions.

## **Public Safety Department Preface**

The Department of Public Safety includes the Divisions of Police, Fire and Communications. The Police Division included 449 actual FTEs (sworn staff) as of December 31, 2014 with a 2015 budget of 446. There were 38 civilian staff compared to a 2015 budget of 47. The average age is 38. The average age on hire is 24. There is a significant effort to recruit minorities and women to the force. Efforts have included recruiting in diverse cities, the inclusion of local ministers and the creation of a YouTube video. This has increased the minority workforce to 19%. The Police send recruits to local academies such as KSU and Briggs and Stratton for training. They are considering developing their own training program but at least 10 recruits are required to break even. The County has an open source academy. Ongoing training is brought in on topics such as domestic violence, testifying, cultural competency, Taser, communication and leadership training. Critical Incident Training (2 weeks long) is offered to help officers deal with emotional or mental health issues and the homeless. About 45% of all officers are trained in this. An independent Police Auditor reports to the Mayor and evaluates all complaints of use of force. Those issues are brought to the senior leaders in the Police.

The Fire Division includes EMS and Fire calls. The majority of the work is EMS (2915 EMS calls in October compared to 399 Fire calls). EMS collected \$237,000 for calls in October. All trucks have GPS and Police have locators. There are 357 employees in the Division.

The Communications Division manages 911 calls for police, fire and the Summit County Sheriff's Department. The Call Center is the front door of all services. The acting Director of Communications is supervised by Police and Fire.

## Public Safety Department SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Police Department               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ call for service</li> <li>○ engaging the public</li> <li>○ the park and walk strategy</li> <li>○ the Performance Dashboard</li> <li>○ the Police Explorers program and staffing</li> </ul> </li> <li>● EMS/Fire Program               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ They answer over 40,000 calls for service</li> <li>○ A grant writing program resulted in monies to support SCBA packs to wear in fires.</li> <li>○ The department also received a grant for plugs to turn ovens off automatically if they are too hot</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Communications Division               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ excellent job in managing suicide calls</li> <li>○ call when an officer is in chase</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Police Division               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ issues with overtime and scheduling coverage over the summertime when the crime rate is high and Police vacations are at a peak</li> <li>○ space concerns related to the Property Room, operations, record storage and holding space</li> <li>○ lack of a pistol shooting range                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Currently officers are using the University of Akron facility for night shooting and they share space at the Akron Canton Airport with the County which is very expensive</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ HVAC in the current facility is a problem</li> <li>○ security problem with a single elevator in the Stubbs Building</li> <li>○ The Municipal Court needs to be moved</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Fire Division               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Capital</li> <li>○ Fire stations, particularly 2 and 12 are in significant disrepair</li> <li>○ no routine vehicle replacement plan and the trucks are on the average 25 years old</li> <li>○ Fire stations 9 and 12 could be combined.</li> <li>○ More staff are needed.</li> <li>○ FTEs need to increase to 363</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Communications Division               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Needs additional staff.</li> <li>○ The staff there continually are working overtime, often mandatory.</li> <li>○ Shifts are 12 hours and the work is stressful.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The salary is problematic at \$35,000.</li> <li>○ It is difficult to find individuals with an appropriate background.</li> <li>● The division struggles to stay ahead of technology needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ (The MARCS system was just implemented.)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There are opportunities to expand the Community Policing program and the Cease Fire Program. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cease Fire identifies people who are likely to be a suspect or victim of a crime and intervene to prevent adverse outcomes. 6 of the last 50 people identified were killed.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Performance management</li> <li>● Forecasting for promotion and leadership training.</li> <li>● The establishment of a shooting range would meet the officer's needs and could potentially generate revenue if rented to other municipalities.</li> <li>● Separate EMS and Fire Stations</li> <li>● Use of GIS Software</li> <li>● CPR classes and Block Watch Programs at CLC</li> <li>● Centralized 911 Dispatch for Summit County</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the capital needs for Fire Stations and trucks</li> <li>● staffing needs for the Communication Center</li> </ul>

**Recommendations**

- Re-evaluate Police scheduling and vacations and implement planning methodologies to reduce overtime costs.
- Evaluate consolidation of Communications Center with Summit County.
- Re-evaluate the separation of EMS and Fire to decrease capital and training requirements.
- Evaluate opportunities to address Fire vehicle replacement.

- Evaluate physical consolidation of City services to make additional space for Police space needs.
- Evaluate opportunity to develop an in-house training academy, including a new shooting range for Police. This could be revenue positive.
- Evaluate the current process where Police use of force incidents are investigated by an Independent Police Auditor who reports to the Mayor. Perhaps city residents would be better served if investigations were done by an investigator outside the City and Summit County. A Citizen's Advisory Group could be included in the process.
- More widely implement performance" Dashboards" similar to that currently being used by the Police.
- Evaluate combining services with adjacent communities.

### **Akron Fulton Airport Preface**

The Akron Fulton Airport operates 24/7/365. It includes two runways-one (7-25) that is 6337 feet and a small less used runway (1-19) that is 2300 feet. The airport includes 15 hangars for 15 corporate aircraft. 75 planes are housed in condo hangars. There are 113 aircraft on the field. 70 aircraft per day are supported. The annual budget is \$297,560 with revenues of \$219,462. The shortfall is covered by the City of Akron. Revenues are from fuel fees, rent from companies and land leases. Operations are managed by Summit Air Services, a full service fixed base operator. There is no self-service for fuel. No commercial airlines use the facility. The facility compliments services at the Akron Canton Airport which provides tower service for Fulton, funded through a fuel tax of 75 cents per gallon. Security is maintained through gates at the facility. An Airport Master Plan was commissioned 3 years ago which has to be reviewed and approved by the FAA. Once it is approved, the FAA will fund 90% of improvements identified in the plan. Capital improvement projects required at the airport are projected to be \$2,572,000 through 2019. \$259,000 would be the local share of the expenses. Total capital needs through 2035 would be \$29,647,000 of which \$72,561,000 would be the responsibility of the City of Akron and \$5million would need to come from private sources for new hangar space.

### **Akron Fulton Airport SWOT**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operations at the airport have improved since they have been managed by Summit Air Service.</li> <li>• The relationship with the city has improved and private entrepreneurs have leased property for airline related businesses.</li> <li>• Traffic has increased 12% in four years since SAS took over operations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The airport is out of hangar space and needs a long term plan.</li> <li>• The Master Plan is not yet officially available.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This hinders the ability of the airport to receive funds for improvement from the FAA.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p>Over \$11.9M has come to the city in 2014 due to the airport.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ (From a comparative standpoint, the Cuyahoga County Airport operates at a deficit of \$475,000 per year)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improvements are needed to the runway and to clear visual obstructions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Without clearing visual obstructions, the FAA will not permit landing at night without clear conditions.</li> <li>○ This would require \$200,000 to remediate.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Citizens of Ellet may be concerned about noise.</li> <li>● There is no marketing staff to promote the airport. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The airport has a tarnished reputation from prior city employees.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● To take the airport out of service would require the city to pay the FAA back approximately \$20M for prior improvements.</li> </ul>
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● After the Master Plan is completed, there may be an opportunity to re-draw the fence line for the airport and make adjacent land available for economic development.</li> <li>● There is the opportunity to seek private funds to cover the remaining 10% of funds required for capital improvements after 90% funding from the FAA.</li> <li>● The City could sell the airport to private owners but there are few potential buyers due to the operating deficit. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A freight operator would be desirable but they won't commit at this point due to the uncertain future of the airport.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● There may be an opportunity to bring more corporate planes to the airport.</li> </ul>	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The largest threat to current airport operations is the lack of certainty about future operations.</li> <li>● Since the recent crash, capital is required to return operations to the prior level</li> </ul>

## **Recommendations**

- Press FAA to approve the Master Plan and aggressively implement its recommendations.
- Pursue public/private opportunities for economic development on land adjacent to the fenced in airport property.
- Pursue capital options to reduce existing obstructions to return the airport to prior service levels.
- Market the airport to enhance utilization and promote economic development in Akron.
- Consider spinning airport out of City to a not-for-profit owned by the City.

## **Economic & Neighborhood Development and Education Committee** **Report**

The subject areas of economic development, neighborhood development, and education are highly interrelated. While our sub-committee examined each area separately, we did so acknowledging that most issues play out across all three. Given the work of the Finance sub-committee, our group operated with the assumption that the City will have a limited ability to commit significant additional resources to these areas in the near term. That said, all three areas play a critically important role in the City's efforts to grow jobs, reverse population decline, and improve quality of life for residents. As such, many of our recommendations tie to the need to improve the City's return on investments currently made in these areas. We believe this is achievable through **more strategic use of resources**, as well as through **deeper leveraging of partners at the local and regional level**.

At its most base level, the City needs to grow. It must grow its population, which means it must grow its job base. As it emerges from the challenges of the post-industrial era and the Great Recession, the City finds itself with a population nearly 1/3 smaller than it was in its heyday in 1960. With development in the suburbs over the past few decades, much of the critical mass of people have moved out of Akron city limits. Jobs have followed a similar pattern.

A demographer / economist reported to our task force on the factors that the Federal Reserve has consistently identified as the most critical drivers of income and population growth: 1) innovation and patent activity, and 2) educational attainment. This finding perfectly illustrates the ways in which economic development, neighborhood development, and education are inextricably intertwined. We cannot have a thriving economy and job growth unless we have an educated citizenry. When we do have an educated, skilled citizenry (and when we can market

this educated workforce to companies), jobs will follow, especially when we can point to quality, appealing neighborhoods where people want to live.

Our sub-committee's recommendations rest upon the premise that all activity is not created equal and motion does not equate to progress. In an environment where resources are constrained and the need for improved outcomes is great, the City cannot operate within the status quo. Rather it must scrutinize its efforts, prioritize those that have the greatest likelihood of producing a return, and allocate resources accordingly.

### **Economic Development Preface**

Our sub-committee submitted questions to the City of Akron Economic Development department and spent several hours in conversation with department leadership. Additionally we reviewed extensive written responses the department provided. We drew upon the expertise of several subject matter experts not formally connected to the City.

*The following are some points to frame our economic development analysis.*

- Though Akron has fared better than many Rust Belt cities in the post-industrial era and through the Great Recession, **there is room for improvement in Akron's economic development efforts and outcomes.** Economic development outcomes in Northeast Ohio have been off the pace relative to other regions of Ohio. For instance, although Summit County accounts for 4.7% of the state's population, it contributes just 1.4% of the state's jobs, 2.0% of payroll, and 0.4% of capital expenditures. Between 2007-2015, jobs in Summit County have seen negative net growth of -2.4%, relative to -0.4% growth for the State and a positive 3.2% growth rate for the nation.<sup>4</sup> These data pertain to Summit County as

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<sup>4</sup> Data from JobsOhio and Bureau of Labor Statistics, compiled by Team NEO.

a whole. While we don't have the breakout for the City of Akron, it is safe to assume, based upon the pattern of growth in the suburbs, that the story is no better for economic development within the City of Akron.

- **Akron can be more strategic about the resources already allocated for economic development activity, thus ensuring that its financial and human resource investments are positioned for optimal returns.** For this reason, many of our recommendations tie to the need for a robust, comprehensive economic development strategy.
- Additionally, and as part of being more strategic, **the City can better leverage the resources and skill sets of others in the local and regional economic development ecosystem.**
- In recent years, a considerable body of work has occurred at the regional level, resulting in the Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy, (RECS). RECS is focused on improving development outcomes through the following strategic opportunities: heightened emphasis on driver industries, innovation/education attainment, community assets and quality of place.

Much of our recommendations center around a more comprehensive economic and community development strategy. One that evaluates and explores all options to leverage and link resources with local and regional intermediaries. One that inter-connects economic development, community development, innovation/education attainment, community assets and quality of place.

## Economic Development SWOT

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COA has industry strengths and companies working in driver industries which can be leveraged in e/d efforts</li> <li>• COA has successfully retained Goodyear and Firestone; strong track record with large businesses.</li> <li>• COA has developable land downtown and in the neighborhoods.</li> <li>• COA has some assets that can be used to support business development efforts (JEDDs, TIFs, etc.).</li> <li>• Due to aggressive attraction efforts in the past, COA has a strong brand as Akron USA, especially at international venues.</li> <li>• COA E/D has collaborative partnerships with other e/d entities (including Summit County E/D, Downtown Akron Partnership, Greater Akron Chamber, Development Finance Authority, and more); partnerships can be clarified, deepened, enhanced, and leveraged.</li> <li>• Akron Global Accelerator is a key strength that needs to be optimized.</li> <li>• COA E/D has international knowledge, commitment to Akron, and commitment to supporting innovation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no comprehensive strategic plan guiding the efforts of COA E/D. Effort is project-driven, reactive/responsive or routine-driven (go to x shows per year). A strategic plan is needed to provide focus and priorities (instead of doing a little bit of everything without clear impact).</li> <li>• Lack of a dashboard to measure performance; metrics, outcomes are unclear.</li> <li>• Staff stretched too thin for optimal effectiveness.</li> <li>• Heavily outsourced model (COA E/D has contracts of \$1.4mm on an operating budget of \$2.2mm), but without clear accountability for performance of outside providers; without seamless coordination among providers; without assurance that all contractors are all pushing a City-centric approach to the work.</li> <li>• Per interviews and public email comments, small and medium local businesses have not felt connected to COA E/D or mayor; they see international attraction efforts as the lead activity and priority.</li> <li>• Disproportionate share of limited resources in E/D are spent on international efforts. Return on that investment may not justify the focus on international, especially when authorities agree that 80% of a region's growth will come from retention and expansion of existing firms.</li> <li>• Some businesses have observed that the City's regulatory/licensing processes are hard to navigate, not well-communicated, and not user-friendly.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of a comprehensive strategic plan means that COA E/D is not leveraging and coordinating as well as it could with other City departments (such as Planning), nor with external partners (such as Team NEO, Summit County Economic Development, MAGNET, the Akron Chamber, and others).</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance, effectiveness of E/D will be greatly enhanced by the creation and implementation of a comprehensive E/D strategy.</li> <li>• Reversing, decoupling duplicative efforts in the highly outsourced model could free up funds to build much stronger internal team and to drive a comprehensive strategic plan.</li> <li>• Resource allocation (internal and outsourced) can be realigned to drive the priorities of a new, reset comprehensive E/D strategy.</li> <li>• COA has an opportunity to leverage a regional network of strong e/d resources (e.g., Team NEO for research, strong connection to JobsOhio, international attraction, other assistance; MAGNET for PRISM program to support growth of manufacturing cos, etc). These skill sets are there for the taking. <i>(See appendix highlighting the capacity and offerings of various intermediaries)</i></li> <li>• Communications with stakeholders about E/D strategy, resources available to businesses can be greatly improved.</li> <li>• There are significant federal dollars out there for brownfield redevelopment; need to have dedicated, sophisticated expertise focusing heavily on this to bring them in.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other communities with stronger, more coordinated E/D capacity are better positioned to service companies efficiently, entice them out of Akron.</li> <li>• Northeast Ohio’s image and brand (unfriendly to business, Rust Belt, low educational attainment in workforce) can limit our E/D prospects.</li> <li>• Akron’s perceived image / brand among local / state partners (e.g. lagging performance on JobsOhio jobs metrics) can limit E/D successes.</li> <li>• Lack of high-quality, move-in ready commercial space can fuel flight to suburbs.</li> <li>• Deficits in trust, transparency among local, regional E/D intermediaries inhibits successful collaboration.</li> <li>• Perception about strength of Akron Public Schools, availability of skilled workforce can impact E/D sales pitch.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong COA leadership of local E/D ecosystem will improve coordination, reduce duplication, and improve outcomes. Strong E/D leader should convene regular meetings of e/d stakeholders, involving, e.g., COA, Downtown Akron Partnership, Chamber, County e/d, Development Finance Authority, etc). The ecosystem should have full transparency and accountability about who is working on what, how they can better serve companies.</li> <li>• Recent efforts to expand neighborhood/retail call program have been well-received; expand this to meet appetite and to focus on neighborhood commercial districts.</li> <li>• COA relationship with developers can be reset with Mayor Horrigan’s leadership; COA can put City-owned properties to work.</li> <li>• COA approvals, processes, and compliance areas can be improved to accommodate businesses that want to grow, expand, and locate in Akron.</li> <li>• Improved coordination with Planning and Neighborhood departments of City (enabled by comprehensive strategic plan) could enable / accelerate development of smaller, community-based businesses.</li> </ul>	
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### Recommendations

- **Develop and implement a robust, comprehensive strategic plan for COA Economic Development.** This plan should, at a minimum, address:
  - The **WHAT** of COA’s economic development program
    - Articulate and rank the City’s e/d priorities
    - Focus on driver industries and industries where COA has a competitive advantage due to intellectual assets at University of Akron, with other

- higher ed partners, and with current business innovators (e.g. Goodyear, Gojo, Bridgestone)
- Rebalance COA economic development staff time and resources with an emphasis on retention and expansion of local businesses and a reduced focus on international attraction;
  - Improve COA’s business calling program through attention to targeted calling, salesforce effectiveness and consistency, data capture, and follow-up with businesses.
- The **HOW** of COA’s economic development program
    - Articulate a commitment to performance management through transparency, a focus on outcomes, and accountability
    - Establish clear performance metrics which will be tracked in a dashboard;
    - Clarify roles, responsibilities, and accountability of internal COA staff and all external partners;
    - Explore the longer term possibility for a public/private economic development structure that boosts effectiveness.
  - The **WHO** of COA’s economic development program
    - Strategically align with and leverage resources, expertise of internal partners at City Hall (e.g. Planning, Neighborhood Assistance departments)
    - Continue to align with and leverage resources, expertise of external partners in the local and regional economic development ecosystem (e.g. Team NEO, Downtown Akron Partnership, Summit County Economic Development, Greater Akron Chamber, Jumpstart, BioEnterprise, MAGNET, Development Finance Authority, Fund For Our Economic Future, etc.)
    - Scrutinize all COA Economic Development Department contracts with outside providers to determine impact, outcomes, value, fit with reset E/D priorities, and whether the contracts should be continued;
    - Designate the individual who will serve as the externally-facing point person for various key functions to improve customers’ ability to navigate E/D (e.g. small/medium business retention and expansion point, licensing and regulatory issue point, international attraction point, etc.)
- **Retain a high-level individual (whether employee or contractor) with the requisite qualifications to lead, drive, and initiate the implementation of the comprehensive economic development strategic plan described above.** Seek outside financial support for this position and consider employing such an individual through the Akron Economic Development Corporation for greater flexibility.
  - **As part of the comprehensive strategic plan for COA Economic Development, and in service to the goals and priorities identified in the plan, create a plan for City-owned real property.** Such a plan should:

- Inventory and assess sites, building on existing resources such as the Thriving Communities Institute report;
  - Plan for Q1 2016 entry of all industrial site data into Jobs Ohio site certification initiative in order to access potential state support for site preparation and site marketing;
  - Set development priorities based upon market potential, including potential creation of job centers that create attractiveness to target industries, that fit with neighborhood vision and ability to attract talent, and that build upon good public transit access;
  - Promote partnerships with developers and with Summit County Land Bank to expand new housing options downtown and in neighborhoods at a variety of price points;
  - Explore options for monetizing COA's real property holdings where doing so can yield resources and limit liability for COA without compromising strategic priorities. (Example: explore viability of selling conservation easements on COA's water reservoir holdings in Portage and Geauga counties)
- **Lead regular (bi-weekly) meetings of E/D partners**, to ensure transparency and open communication about what the various partners are doing to serve companies. Meetings should include all key partners, including Downtown Akron Partnership, Summit County Economic Development, Greater Akron Chamber, Development Finance Authority, and any others who will partner substantially in the tactical implementation of the plan.
  - **Benchmark cities to create a “best in class” permitting process for doing business in Akron** similar to State of Ohio Common Sense Initiative.

## Neighborhood Development Preface

Our sub-committee heard from Rick Merolla and Warren Wolford on the subject of neighborhood development. We reviewed materials from Jason Segedy. We interviewed some individuals external to the City administration, including Jim Mullen and Nichole Booker at United Way of Summit County and David Swirsky of the “City Repair” project. We looked to Nicole Mullet of ArtsNow for information about placemaking strategies that build upon arts and culture assets.

*The following points frame our neighborhood development analysis:*

- For a community the size of Akron, we have very few organized Community Development Corporations (CDC’s), serving to shape and steward planning efforts and improvement at the neighborhood level. As such, **COA’s organizational infrastructure at the neighborhood level is uneven, and weak in many areas.**
- **COA should nurture neighborhood-level organizing efforts and establish robust communication between COA administration and leadership networks in the neighborhoods.** Because such efforts do not take on a uniform appearance across the City’s 22 neighborhoods, additional work is required in order to determine how best the City can support nascent and emerging neighborhood organizations. Such support and communication is critically important because many of the highly visible issues that are front-of-mind for citizens (e.g., blight, street conditions, safety) occur at the neighborhood level.
- Throughout the study process, the neighborhood development sub-committee heard a call for a diverse mix of quality housing options in the City. In other words, there is a sense that we

cannot prosper by relying solely on the housing options we have today. **There is demand for new housing downtown and in the neighborhoods, at a variety of price points.**

- In recent decades, the topography of some Akron neighborhoods has changed dramatically. The active demolition of decaying structures has changed the face of some neighborhoods, leaving behind empty parcels that present opportunities for repurposing. **As planning capacity – at the City administration level and the neighborhood level – is developed, and tools such as the Land Use Development Guide and the Zoning Code are updated, there is an opportunity for COA to be more planful and intentional about the built environment, and to be guided by resident input in doing so.**
- Neighborhood development work could consume a large amount of COA resources. **The subcommittee recommends that the COA reach out to a variety of potential partners – especially in the developer community – to communicate its willingness to partner and to accelerate progress on high-priority projects.**

### Neighborhood Development SWOT

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Akron has 22 neighborhoods, all with assets and dedicated residents who are eager to be a part of progress and prosperity.</li> <li>• Some neighborhoods are experiencing a surge in vibrancy which creates positive momentum, a sense of possibility that we can build on (e.g. North Hill, Highland Square, downtown).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For a community the size of Akron, we have very few high-functioning community development corporations (CDCs). Neighborhood planning, coordination, e/d, and improvement efforts will not gain traction unless the City intentionally supports and nurtures infrastructure for neighborhood leadership and organization.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In many neighborhoods, we have quality housing stock that is well-built and creates a strong urban character.</li> <li>• The local arts and culture community is experiencing a resurgence and positive momentum. This could provide neighborhood assets and community organizing power upon which to build.</li> <li>• The Thriving Communities Institute study is a robust, recent, detailed inventory of residential housing stock in COA which can inform work.</li> <li>• Strong new cabinet-level leadership in Planning Department.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With a few exceptions, COA does not have current plans for neighborhoods, including downtown neighborhood (likely related to first point). Without plans, COA cannot leverage strengths, knit together assets into vibrant neighborhoods, and make smart strategic use of resources. Progress will be piecemeal at best.</li> <li>• Strong perception in the community that City leadership and resources are focused largely on downtown at the expense of focus on neighborhoods. Both require attention.</li> <li>• COA lacks modern and future-looking communications infrastructure in main core (downtown) and rest of city; potentially explore partnerships to improve in this dimension (<i>see Appendix</i>).</li> <li>• COA lacks diverse mix of quality residential options downtown; these are greatly valued by millennial knowledge workers.</li> <li>• Most of Akron (esp. downtown) does not have the features of a walkable, bikeable community; these features are highly prized by millennials and older citizens.</li> <li>• Due to age of housing stock and disinvestment in some areas, many neighborhoods have low inventory of desirable, affordable housing that is needed to reverse population decline.</li> <li>• Bus routes have not been updated in a long time; they do not necessarily support activity patterns of residents. (Also an opportunity)</li> <li>• COA has scarce resources to improve and maintain streets; current assessment system ensures that street improvements occur disproportionately in neighborhoods</li> </ul>
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	<p>where residents can afford to contribute to the cost. Shifting this balance to improve equity of improvements would mean drawing more heavily on scarce COA capital funds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is minimal signage creating a sense of neighborhood identity (also an opportunity)</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land Use Development Guide hasn't been updated since 1987. An update to this will frame progress.</li> <li>• Zoning Code has not been holistically updated in decades (amended piecemeal). A wholesale update could <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--bring in green practices (e.g. semi-permeable lots)</li> <li>--allow for re-platting of old neighborhoods where there has been a lot of demolition (e.g. Diagonal Road, Summit Lake East, Dudley Laird near Goodyear)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• \$100mm ODOT project starting in 2016 at High/Broadway interchange is a huge infusion of capital that could improve access to downtown from the south and channel investment in the south Akron neighborhood to revitalize areas of disinvestment and leverage Bridgestone campus improvements. COA needs to be thoughtful and open about plans, transparent in communications to capture neighborhood revitalization potential of this project.</li> <li>• COA can and should sell some of the properties it holds, use them to entice developers (esp. downtown for residential, improved commercial).</li> <li>• There are proven creative place-making models that have worked in other</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population loss in COA must be acknowledged, addressed, reversed.</li> <li>• Vacancies downtown are a huge issue. (<i>See Appendix.</i>)</li> <li>• Civic Block is a threat. As more time passes without construction, potential liability grows.</li> <li>• The Mayflower Hotel continues to be a challenging property for COA in the heart of downtown.</li> <li>• City's ownership of so much real estate skews the market, puts City in competition with other landowners, creates huge liability on City's books (maintenance burden, etc); real property is also an opportunity if it can be monetized, if City can forge relationships with developers who have not been interested in working with City previously.</li> <li>• Disinvestment and blight in some neighborhoods, if not addressed, creates a vicious cycle of further disinvestment and fuels flight and population loss.</li> </ul>

<p>communities and that can be used more extensively in Akron to drive neighborhood vibrancy. (<i>See appendix</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large retail centers in the City (e.g. Rolling Acres, Chapel Hill) should be reviewed, assessed for potential repurposing.</li> <li>• Metro is open to deeper partnership with COA on neighborhood and economic development through programs such as expansion of the Circulator concept. COA should invest in strengthening this relationship.</li> <li>• Innerbelt project is a major opportunity for master planning, civic engagement. It is important both literally (30 acres in middle of City) <i>and</i> symbolically (if City does this well, it will send a message to community about how their input is valued). Civic engagement opportunities should be designed with forethought and care, to be implemented when COA has the needed capacity to manage them well.</li> </ul>	
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**Recommendations**

- **Invest in, nurture neighborhoods’ planning and organizing infrastructure.** Potential strategies could include:
  - Convene on a quarterly basis a council of neighborhood leadership organizations (see Appendix for inventory of some established and nascent community organizations working in the neighborhoods);
  - Establish intentional, robust lines of communication between neighborhood leaders and City Hall;
  - Support technical assistance providers that can enhance the skill sets of neighborhood leaders.
  - Benchmark communities that have successful neighborhood-level organization in order to inform a template for the City’s nurturing and support of neighborhood organizations.

- **Support plans for Akron’s neighborhoods.**
  - With respect to the downtown neighborhood, COA should support Downtown Akron Partnership’s development of a downtown plan.
  - With respect to COA’s many other neighborhoods, COA should target development of plans for all neighborhoods in the coming years, as COA strengthens its planning capacity and as it supports neighborhood-level planning and organizing capacity.
  
- **Expand COA Economic Development department’s recent focus on door-to-door business visitation / call program in neighborhood business districts,** with an eye toward revitalizing neighborhood business districts.
  
- **Embrace Akron’s many arts and culture assets (including a vibrant artist community) to drive place-making efforts that will contribute to neighborhood vibrancy and distinctiveness.** See Appendix for an inventory of arts and culture assets across COA, as well as summaries of several place making strategies that have shown promise in other communities.
  
- **Revise Akron’s Land Use Development Guide and Zoning Code.** Revisions to these key documents will
  - Strategically frame development and improvement efforts
  - Open the door for the expansion of green practices in COA’s infrastructure improvements;
  - Allow for re-platting of neighborhoods where there has been significant demolition in recent years
  
- **Fully leverage ODOT’s coming investment of \$100mm in the High/Broadway interchange to channel investment to areas of disinvestment, to improve access to downtown from the south, and to spur neighborhood revitalization.**
  - Communicate the project to the public
  - Structure opportunities for public input into the plans
  - Emulate Cleveland’s Opportunity Corridor wraparound planning and engagement process in order to maximize catalytic potential of project and to build community support
  
- **Open a more robust ongoing dialogue with Metro to leverage Metro’s assets and resources in service of better transportation connections for Akron’s residents and businesses**

## Education Preface

As part of our effort to understand Akron's education landscape, our sub-committee spent time with Derran Wimer, Executive Director of Summit Education Initiative, and Dr. Matt Deevers, SEI's Senior Researcher. We interviewed Rick McIntosh, Executive Director of Project LEARN. We also talked with Jim Mullen, President and CEO of United Way of Summit County, and Nichole Booker, Vice President for Public Policy and Advocacy. Warren Wolford and David James, Superintendent of Akron Public Schools and a member of our sub-committee, also offered education perspectives to our group.

*To frame our education analysis, consider the following:*

- **The City is not where it needs to be in terms of educational attainment, with just 20.6% of City residents holding a bachelor's degree.** Cities experiencing strong growth post much higher rates of educational attainment (for instance, 44% of Pittsburgh residents over age 25 hold a bachelor's degree). When considering cities of comparable size, Akron's educational attainment level is among the lowest. (Only Rockford, IL at 20.1% with bachelor's degrees, was lower than Akron in a set of 14 comparable cities reviewed by the Task Force).
- While the Akron Public School district is ranked the best of Ohio's eight urban districts, it nonetheless faces many challenges in serving a high-need student population. Negative perceptions of APS adversely affect business development and fuel population decline (i.e. flight to the suburbs, many of which score better on Ohio Department of Education scorecards). Lagging performance at APS adversely affects the quality of life its students can expect to have as adults. **It is important for COA to embrace the realities in the data – to understand where APS struggles (in areas such as early childhood readiness, family**

**engagement, and literacy). And yet, at the same time, the ODE score cards do not tell the full story. It is critically important for COA leadership to understand, to promote, and to help build upon APS’ strengths (such as Centers of Excellence, robust quality career education programs).**

- COA has invested heavily in the Community Learning Centers (CLC’s) which stand as strong, highly visible assets across the community. Since 2006, APS has rebuilt 32 CLCs in Akron, scattered throughout its neighborhoods. **Due to their location in neighborhoods and their proximity to residents, the CLCs present a unique opportunity to address quality of life issues for residents.** There are willing partners in the community who could work with COA and APS to ensure that the CLCs are programmed to their full potential, bringing needed services to people where they live (and thus eliminating transportation barriers).

### **Education SWOT**

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COA has a strong higher education institution in the University of Akron (“UA”), with nationally and internationally recognized programs and a large pool of faculty and student talent resident in our community.</li> <li>• Akron Public Schools has many assets, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong, stable leadership at superintendent, senior leadership level</li> <li>• The best ranking of Ohio’s Big 8 urban school systems</li> <li>• Beautiful new Community Learning Centers (“CLCs”)</li> <li>• Centers of Excellence in STEM Middle and High Schools, Miller</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ohio Dept. of Education report card for 2013-14 gives APS a D in Achievement (69.6% on performance index) and an F (8%) for indicators met; this sends the wrong message to current businesses and residents as well as prospective businesses.</li> <li>• Community members perceive and report obstacles to using the CLCs (see also Opportunities).</li> <li>• Community reaction to UA’s recent decisions points to a need for more constructive community-wide/constituency dialogue.</li> </ul>

<p>South School for the Performing Arts, Akron Early College High School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A very strong dual enrollment system in partnership with Stark State, leading to many high school graduates who have already earned college credit</li> <li>• Numerous opportunities for APS students to access financial support for higher education through the Innovation Generation Scholarships, the LeBron James Foundation I-Promise program, and more</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COA has strong parochial high schools, with high graduation and college matriculation rates. These provide diverse educational options which are additional strengths for living in COA.</li> <li>• Stark State has introduced robust workforce preparation programming in COA.</li> <li>• COA has very strong intermediaries providing thought leadership and strong outcomes for the education system in Summit Education Initiative, Summit Workforce Solutions, Project LEARN, and others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The educational system has not communicated as well as it could the many local and regional assets we have for workforce development. Companies, residents, and other stakeholders do not have a strong understanding of these assets.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a former educator, Mayor is well-positioned to advocate repeatedly and effectively for a focus on education and family engagement in education. There are many quality tools and assets Mayor Horrigan can uplift and promote to the community. A deeper partnership with Summit Education Initiative could enable the Mayor to stay current on opportunities and messaging in the local education market. <i>(See Appendix)</i></li> <li>• Communicate more effectively and strategically the positive work and</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upcoming potential closure of some APS buildings will need to be well-understood by the Mayor, communicated, managed.</li> <li>• City will be called on for funding needed to complete CLCs.</li> <li>• Poor-performing schools have a negative effect on stability and growth in the community.</li> </ul>

<p>promising new directions within APS to give a fuller, more accurate understanding of what the district has to offer (<i>See Appendix</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve communications around process for using CLCs and ensure that the information is readily accessible in places where residents would think to look for it. This should help residents understand that the CLCs are a true community asset.</li> <li>• Cabinet should have a strong, well-informed education voice / liaison to ensure that COA is involved thoughtfully in education efforts, collaborative work.</li> <li>• Look to create and leverage partnerships with community stakeholders who can help drive programming in CLCs such as United Way of Summit County which seeks to offer “wraparound schools” that could provide needed services in neighborhoods. (<i>See Appendix</i>)</li> <li>• UA is a critically important partner to COA. New leadership at both institutions creates an opportunity to build a strong, mutually rewarding relationship between COA and UA. Mayor Horrigan could assist in mending relationships and communications channels between university leaders, COA, and key community constituencies.</li> </ul>	
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**Recommendations**

- **Establish a Town-Gown Committee involving Mayor Horrigan, key City leaders, and leadership from the University of Akron.** The mission of the committee would be to foster strong relations, to establish and communicate common goals and objectives for COA and UA, and to address common issues faced by COA and UA.
  - A sub-committee of the Town and Gown Committee could address and develop economic opportunities for the various constituencies of the University (business incubators, students, retention of graduate students). The subcommittee would have representatives from UA as well as business leaders and E/D leaders.

- **Prioritize the right-sizing of Akron Public School district and completion of the Community Learning Center (“CLC”) project, in partnership with APS.**
- **Explore opportunities to make better use of CLCs, with more palpable benefits for Akron residents.** Efforts could include:
  - “Wraparound schools” in partnership with United Way of Summit County, to use CLC buildings to provide social services (health clinics, banking, etc.) to neighborhood residents in evenings and weekend hours;
  - Expanded availability for workforce technical training programs requested by local businesses;
  - Improved access for out-of-school time programming, afterschool and in the summers
  - Communications about the availability of CLCs and process for accessing them should be clarified and highlighted on COA website.
- **Support the many workforce development programs in COA.**
  - Improve community and business understanding of available offerings (see Appendix);
  - Partner with nimble intermediaries that can shape workforce programs that are responsive to business needs;
  - Market COA’s workforce training capacity as an integral part of economic development efforts.
- **Leverage Mayor Horrigan’s credibility as a former educator to drive messaging around the importance of education and family engagement in education.**
  - Look to strong education partners such as Summit Education Initiative for specific tools and programs Mayor can highlight in his communications.
  - Ensure ongoing COA contribution to community-wide educational attainment through a strong, well-informed cabinet-level education liaison who can nurture collaborations

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