



DANIEL HORRIGAN, MAYOR

2020 State of the City Address Mayor Daniel Horrigan

**John S. Knight Center
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As prepared for delivery

Good morning! Thank you, Frank and Preston, for the kind words. Organizing this event, and many others throughout the year, takes a lot of hard work. Let us recognize the Akron Roundtable, the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs for their consistent support of this event.

And based on a simple lesson I learned early, growing up in an Italian and Irish household, the staff and management here at the John S. Knight Center make this event possible, and we always want to thank the chef!

As I start my 5th year as the Mayor of this great city, I'm reminded of the daily sacrifices that so many people make, not just for me personally, but also for this city and community. This is a very special job, and as I like to say, "I fully realize that I'm living the first line of my obituary." And truly, I'm OK with that. Of all the sacrifices that come with this job, none are more valued than the sacrifices my family has made for me, throughout this journey. Whether it's their time, physical presence, or the emotional toll on our family, this work has become a part of our lives. To my wife of 25 years, Deanna, my daughters Cassidy, Kennedy and Camille, my mom, my brother and sisters, and probably most importantly now, my granddaughter, Luca, I say, thank you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for your patience, and all you have done for me.

It is a privilege to come to work every day as your Mayor, alongside the 1800 dedicated City of Akron employees, and my cabinet. Please join me in thanking them for their service to the community.

I also want to recognize Akron City Council, who is beginning their new term as well. I'd like to ask President Margo Sommerville, and the members of Akron City Council, to stand and be recognized.

I look forward to working together on the issues that matter most to our constituents.

Becoming a grandparent changes you. It offers you an opportunity to view life through a new, and distinct lens. A lens that is infinitely oriented toward the future. As I held Luca for the first time, seeing three generations of strong women watching over her, I was struck by what my parents' generation did for us, what I've tried to do for my children, and now what we all have to do for the generations yet to come. I marvel at how Akron has transformed itself time and time again, and today, I want to take stock, of what we've accomplished the past four years, what we have yet to finish, and what has to be done if we are going to leave Akron better than when we found it.

These first four years have yielded significant change and growth. Some were welcome transitions, others hard-fought battles. But we've taken productive steps towards building a better Akron. One of my proudest achievements was the passage of the Safety and Streets initiative in 2017, which has nearly tripled the city's annual repaving budget and provided much-needed funding to Akron's Police and Fire Departments. These additional funds have supported the construction of two new fire stations, purchased new body cameras, vehicles and safety equipment, and re-opened the Akron Police Academy. And more than 150 miles of Akron roadway has been repaved since 2016.

Working with state and federal partners, we've implemented green-for-grey projects and better financing within our federally-mandated sewer program, reducing the cost to ratepayers by \$160 million dollars to date. We are moving in the right direction, towards a sustainable, and financially feasible sewer program.

I've also led projects and programs that have helped bring equity and a sense of shared responsibility to this City. I introduced the City's first non-discrimination ordinance and created the Akron Civil Rights Commission. I hired the City's first Health Equity Ambassador and continue to convene annual Health Equity Summits to address maternal and child health. I spearheaded the Youth Violence Prevention Plan, and worked with the Akron Community Foundation to reimagine our signature partnership, to assure there is grant funding to support that plan. We've also started a 5-year Age-Friendly Akron initiative, in collaboration with our Senior Citizen's Commission, Direction Home, the University of Akron and the AARP.

With a focus on reinvigorating business and entrepreneurship, we founded The Bounce Innovation Hub, to revolutionize the way our start-ups, small businesses and corporations interact and support each other. In coordination with the Downtown Akron Partnership, we created, and continue to implement, the Downtown Vision and Redevelopment Plan. Within our own City structure, I created the Office of Integrated Development and Great Streets Akron, both designed to better focus the City's human and financial capital, for greater community impact. We brought eBay to town, as we partnered with them on their internationally-recognized Retail Revival program, and we continue to act as a lead partner in the Elevate Akron strategy to enhance economic inclusion and grow local opportunity. My administration recruited the City's first independent, state-supported community college in Stark State Akron, and I continue to work very closely with the University of Akron, an irreplaceable partner, to build a stronger future for this anchor institution. I had the distinct pleasure of driving around Akron with President Gary Miller just a few short weeks ago. We discussed ways that we can continue to

work together and strengthen the relationship, as the University embarks on their 150th year.

Thank you, Dr. Miller, for your leadership and ongoing partnership.

And of course, I can't talk about the progress in Akron without mentioning the construction. I realize the past few years have been filled with orange barrels, and I know that can cause frustration. But I'm happy to report we've made major headway. The City is on track to complete Phase 1 of our Main Street project, everything between Mill and Cedar Streets, by this July. (Yes – you heard me correctly, THIS JULY. The end is in sight on the first leg of this important project.)

Other catalytic projects are also wrapping up this year. The 42 million dollar Bowery Project is nearing completion, and is expected to create tens of millions of dollars in additional economic impact. The Law Building, directly across the street, is now under construction. Romig Road is being totally reconstructed to make way for the 100 million dollar development from Amazon, at the site of the former Rolling Acres mall. Scheduled to open later this year, the Amazon facility will bring more than 15-hundred new jobs to an area where economic opportunity has declined for decades. Coupled with over half a billion dollars of ODOT investment, many of Akron's thoroughfares are getting a complete makeover. It can feel like a lot all at once, but the investments we are making now will pay off for decades to come.

Together, we have set Akron on a path to emerge from its Rust Belt shadow, and grow again. Many of our most promising initiatives require us to triple down the investment and support. Now is the time to go even deeper on what we've started as a community. In fact I've made it clear, both internally and externally, that the focus of my second term will be high-quality execution of those initiatives currently in motion. My immediate priority is to finish the projects we've started, and scale the programs we've launched.

For my part, I will remain focused on: entrepreneurship and expanding economic opportunity, financially empowering Akron families, redeveloping our neighborhoods, and building a more

equitable Akron. We are seeing results on each of these, due, in large part, to the cross-sector partnerships we have secured. But government cannot do it alone. Nor should it. The challenges within each of these focus areas are too big, and too entrenched, for me to solve by myself. It will truly take a village, of caring, committed people – from the CEOs to the grassroots – working together to achieve results.

On entrepreneurship, one of our key partners in leading this effort is the Bounce Innovation Hub. Amazingly, we cut the ribbon on the first floor Generator space just nine short months ago. Last May, Ohio's longest-running technology incubator fully evolved to become a regional innovation hub. It is now a space for tech gurus - but also, for creators, makers, freelancers and go-getters - in short, entrepreneurs of every kind. It is a space where meaningful connections are driving Akron's innovation economy, each and every day. And they are happening faster than ever before. In 2019, over 12,000 people visited Bounce - more than 6 times the number who visited the year before. Companies at Bounce provide more than 270 jobs, and while the numbers are still being tallied, they are on track to surpass their goal of 25 million dollars in annual startup revenue.

Bounce has fully embraced the Elevate Akron strategy and made a concerted effort to reach a more diverse group of business owners. In 2019, Bounce added new programming and jobs designed to support non-tech, minority, and female entrepreneurs. And earlier this month, they announced a partnership with Mortar, a nationally-recognized, 15-week program that helps aspiring and existing entrepreneurs learn the fundamental elements of business management. This program is specifically designed to support entrepreneurs of color, helping to make sure that Bounce is an asset for all.

Today, I'm proud to say that 50 percent of the client companies at Bounce are female or minority-owned. And I think that deserves a round of applause.

Bounce is working. They are meeting – and in most cases surpassing - every goal set for them. But it takes an entire ecosystem working together to make a true impact on our economy. Here's my ask of you - if you have expertise in starting or running a business - if you are an artist claiming your place as a creative entrepreneur - if you work at a corporation that might benefit from connections to innovative thinking - if you have an idea that will change the future of Akron...make 2020 the year you partner with Bounce.

I always believe there is more we can do to make Akron the entrepreneurial capital of our region. This week, I was proud to announce another addition to our ecosystem – a City program called Rubber City Match. Modeled after a similar program in Detroit – but designed for Akron's needs - Rubber City Match pairs new and expanding businesses with vacant space in our Great Streets. If you own a building in one of these districts, you can apply to have your space marketed as a top property and be matched with vetted, quality businesses. If you are an entrepreneur, either established or aspiring, you can apply for technical assistance, design and architectural services, and capital to help make your idea a reality.

Rubber City Match will lower the barriers to entry for small businesses, create a more inclusive economy, and further activate our neighborhoods. Applications for Rubber City Match are open today, and we invite committed building owners and entrepreneurs to apply.

In 2018, the City of Akron partnered with the United Way of Summit County to open the City's first Financial Empowerment Center, which offers free financial coaching to Akron residents and beyond. These are not just financial literacy lessons, but individualized one-on-one sessions to empower residents to take control of their financial future. The FEC partnership has been one of our strongest, and has proven very effective in offering our working families a real opportunity to get ahead. I want to personally thank United Way CEO Jim Mullen, and Director of Financial Empowerment Angela Lowery, for their commitment to making the FEC a reality.

So far, the Financial Empowerment Center has 6 locations, 946 clients, and has facilitated over 27-hundred individual coaching sessions. Most importantly, these sessions, have now generated 1.3 million dollars in increased savings and reduced debt for local residents. Quite simply, the Financial Empowerment Center is getting it done, and based on this success, we have to deepen our commitment, and expand program capacity. I'm proud to share that this year, I have committed 250 thousand dollars, to expand the number of financial coaches, in an effort to keep up with demand for services.

These pivotal services are helping our citizens achieve their goals. Citizens like Amy, and her husband Harry, who are working diligently towards buying a new house. They began routine coaching sessions at the FEC to set a budget for themselves and create healthier spending habits. I met Amy and Harry last year at an FEC event at Canal Park Stadium. They were optimistic about their financial future, and eternally grateful to the FEC staff for helping make their dreams, become a reality.

Partnerships are a key component to the success of the Financial Empowerment Center. Organizations like Urban Vision in North Hill, have helped us expand our outreach in the immigrant and refugee communities. These families in need are now taking note, and we're seeing increased frequency in engagement with our "New American" population. Also, another strong partner in this work is the University of Akron—one of our first satellite locations. This on-campus location has been very successful in serving both traditional students, just learning to create a budget, and non-traditional students who are balancing school, work and sometimes family.

While the FEC has built strong partnerships to provide the right services, to the right individuals, at the right time, it's very clear we've only scratched the surface in connecting with those that need the help. I encourage all of you to reach out, take a tour, and see how you can help the FEC reach its full potential. Who here would NOT benefit, from their customers or employees, achieving a stronger financial foothold, more responsible bill-paying practices, or healthier family

budgets? While the Akron poverty rate is slowly falling, our ALICE population –those who are asset limited, income constrained, but still employed—make up more than half of households in Akron. The time is now to partner and invest in this program. When fully embraced and supported, financial empowerment services will be transformational for working families, with ripple effects throughout our community.

In 2017, I released the Planning to Grow Akron report, which outlined the strategies to grow the City's population to 250,000 by the year 2050. With 15-year tax abatement available for new home construction, or renovation, Akron has more than 1,000 units of new housing in development or under construction. The year before I took office there were less than 20. The housing strategies we have utilized so far are working to create new housing in the city, however, we haven't seen an equal level of investment in housing rehabilitation necessary to preserve and market our existing housing stock.

Many of us have read in the national, and even local media, about the affordable housing challenges in cities like San Francisco, New York, and all over the country. In Akron, we have a challenge as well, but our challenge is that the prices of houses in many of our neighborhoods are, in fact, too low. Too many residents are living in deteriorating homes with limited prospects for property valuation. In some cases, the cost of routine maintenance may exceed what the house is actually worth. This is unacceptable to me, and should be unacceptable to many of you. Through targeted investments, and forward-thinking strategies, we will do what it takes, to ensure older houses are rehabilitated in this city.

Recognizing that we have to address this issue, my Office of Integrated Development has begun work on Planning to Grow Akron 2.0. This new report will build on its predecessor, and recommend interventions meant to bridge the investment gap in our neighborhoods and incentivize the private sector to assist property owners in rehabbing our historic housing stock for current and future users. Look for its release this summer.

While we're on the topic of housing, I want to address the alarming fact that statistics indicate Akron has the highest per capita eviction rate in Ohio. Our eviction rate is not new to us, nor are we ignoring the issue. It is clear that systemic changes are needed to level the playing field for tenants. It is also clear to me that we have to engage our landlord community in this dialogue. Later this year, I will convene landlords in a Town Hall discussion, to engage in productive conversations with Akron's property owners. This will ensure that all ideas are heard as this community works with tenants and landlords alike to create fair and workable solutions to combat evictions. Most importantly, I will continue to advocate, in Columbus and in Washington, for a renewed focus on housing. How about this: Having an actual housing plan in this country. The housing crisis in the United States is not going away, and solving it will take systemic interventions at every level of government.

In the area of safety, I remain committed to preserving and improving the security of every citizen in every neighborhood.

In 2020, through the continued deployment of our Safety and Streets resources, the City will complete designs for a new Fire Station 12 in northwest Akron, with construction beginning in 2021. This new station will be built at the corner of Westgate Circle and South Hawkins, as many of you know, directly across from my former employer – Swenson's.

For Akron Police, we see a need to invest in our personnel, as waves of retirements continue and the urgent need to curb gun violence remains. Through the new police class hired in 2019, and with additional expected hires over the next 18 months, we will maintain our number of uniformed police officers at the highest level in over a decade. Our department, our citizens, and our businesses deserve no less. Thanks to the Akron voters, we have the resources we need to support this strategic investment in our community's safety.

While the opiate crisis continues, we are working with our attorneys to hold the manufacturers and distributors of opiates accountable through federal litigation. We are also actively participating in negotiations regarding a potential statewide or national settlement. Meanwhile, our first responders are on the front lines, in this fight, saving lives every single day. We continue to learn and adapt as a community to the reality that addiction is a medical condition, not a moral failure.

At the same time we are fighting the everyday battles for sobriety and recovery, we are also working hand in hand with County Executive Ilene Shapiro and her team in identifying the most appropriate ways to invest our settlement dollars. It is incumbent upon those of us in leadership to get this right. The whole world is watching. We are working with stakeholders and experts in recovery to make sure the dollars received ultimately help lead our community out of this crisis. I want to thank all of those with boots on the ground in the recovery arena—including our first responders, treatment providers, recovery coaches and advocates alike—thank you for standing shoulder to shoulder as we take on this challenge as a team.

As a community, the call to action around equity is one we can no longer afford to sideline. Across the globe, we are marching in a direction of greater diversity, elevating the voices of historically oppressed populations, reckoning with centuries of policy that enabled some to get ahead while pushing others down. Cities that hope to thrive in this century have to take this to heart.

Akron has to, and will for as long as I'm mayor, be part of that brighter future – a leading example for other communities in this time of inclusion and empowerment. Changes are happening all over the community. A new generation is taking key positions, and new voices are emerging. I encourage all of us to embrace these changes.

Over the past four years I have spoken with every single graduating high school class and asked them what they wanted from us. Here's what they told me – they want us to keep them safe, they want us to value their perspectives, and push aside barriers to their growth and success. As I have listened to Akron's youth, it is clear that we need to fight like hell for them, and create the future that they envision.

In borrowing from President Miller's remarks just last month, we as a community have to embrace the "common wealth of good," when it comes to education, from pre-K to post-secondary. It is proven that there are tremendous effects when wrap around services are made available within educational institutions. I see the growth and collaboration within our educational sector. From my experience though, I think we still have too many "individual actors" and could be even more aligned to focus on education in this community. Through discussions, partnerships and strategic funding allocations (or quite frankly the lack thereof), I will be pushing for greater collaboration towards achieving Bold Goals 1 and 2, and supporting the College and Career Academies, as led by the United Way and Akron Public Schools. A sincere thank you to Superintendent David James, for his leadership and innovative thinking in the education sector. Thanks in many respects to the inspiring work I see at the I Promise School, through the generosity of LeBron James, I am convinced that Akron can do even more to leverage its resources, and provide our kids the wrap around services needed so they can succeed in the classroom, and in life.

One of the most important efforts around equity, one that truly keeps me up at night, is our work to ensure each of our new mothers and infants are surrounded with the support they need to thrive in their first year. I chose to focus on infant mortality, and create the "Full Term First Birthday" initiative, because I saw a deep injustice within our community. I have been blessed with a healthy new granddaughter, and each time I see her (which I hope is every day) my

passion is renewed to see that every Akron family, is provided the same opportunities to grow and bond.

I won't mince words - the last four years of this work have been challenging. Truly coordinating resources and organizations takes a level of commitment that only Akron can accomplish. I want to personally thank our partners, and especially Tamiyka Rose, my Health Equity Ambassador, for being in the trenches every single day. Your work is paying off. The 2017 March of Dimes report indicated that Akron now has one of the lowest premature birth rates in Ohio, which is the strongest indicator we have on infant health. Also, our disparity between black and white babies is finally starting to close. Akron's Black infant mortality rate has dropped 16% since 2017.

But we're not there yet folks. To put it in perspective, the number of infants lost last year would fill two kindergarten classes. Let that sink in. So I'm asking you, if you are involved in "Full Term First Birthday:" dig deeper. If you are not yet involved, I'm asking you why not, and whether there is something you or your organization can do to help us protect that most basic of social contracts; empowering our mothers, so that every baby, regardless of their race, reaches their first birthday and beyond.

In many respects, 2020 represents an important year for this community. Every decade, we have two distinct opportunities within the City of Akron to assess our priorities, realign our strategies, and better obtain our fair share of federal funding.

First off, this year, we will empanel a Charter Review Commission. At the beginning of every decade we are afforded the opportunity to look at our founding document and ask ourselves how we can do better for our citizens. Our charter, which is our city's constitution, enshrines our ideals of self-government, transparency, and efficiency. But, as our community has evolved, so has our understanding of who can participate in public service, and how we best

protect them. Our charter has to reflect our growth as a people. This year I will come to the Commission with a very specific charge: how can we make sure our Charter builds and creates opportunity for all residents?

Over the last 18 months, I have been doing a “deep dive” into how and where the City spends its dollars, and whether those contracts are reflective of our population. Here’s a question we asked: are minority-owned businesses given a fair shake in our contracting process? Like all tough questions, there is no simple answer, but in the interest of time, I’ll be brief: NO.

We simply have not done enough at the City. In 2019, minority-owned businesses received just five percent of the city’s purchasing budget. This is unacceptable, and I’m going to see that it changes. As we wrap up our comprehensive review, a few things are clear to me. First, we need to revise our charter to align with current best practices for purchasing goods and services. Second, we will implement a comprehensive technology system, ensuring a more modern and transparent process. Third, I will create a Supplier Diversity position at the City, and recruit a skilled professional to guide our efforts. Look for more commitments from me, as we work to release a full report in the coming weeks.

While the City’s spend is significant, it pales in comparison to the budgets governed by many leaders in this room. Imagine the impact we could all make, the inclusive economic growth we could experience, if we took on contract reform as a community. I’m asking each of you to please join me in this effort.

From my first days in this office, I have been focused on recruiting and developing a City staff that reflects the broad diversity of the community we serve. And we have made meaningful reform. I created the City’s first ever Department of Human Resources, and we implemented modern practices and policies around employee development. I also worked with Deputy Mayor for Public Safety, Charles Brown and Police Chief Ken Ball, to raise the age for new police hires, re-launch the Akron Police Academy, and actually pay recruits a fair wage during training. And the results were meaningful: a 33 % increase in minority hires.

But, In order to make generational progress, we have to do more. We cannot simply do things the way we have always done them, and then magically expect to achieve different results. Once again, we will look to our Charter and ask whether the civil service employment system, designed before World War II, still serves the needs of a modern, inclusive City government. I want to pause, and make one thing very clear: I will never reduce the protections for City workers that keep politics out of city operations or those that ensure we are selecting the best qualified candidates for each job. Our city workforce is made of some of the hardest working, most dedicated people I've ever known. But that's often despite of the system, not because of it.

Therefore, where our hiring policies are outdated, I'll be asking the Charter Review Commission to critically evaluate them. It has been said that if you don't like change, you're gonna like irrelevance even less. Those of you that know me know I cannot stand still. We will do what it takes to create a diverse, agile, and effective workforce. The customers we serve, and those seeking employment with the City, deserve nothing less. I know this will make some people uncomfortable, and that's ok. I'm not afraid to ask the tough questions, and do the difficult work of creating more inclusive hiring practices.

Ultimately, any and all reforms that come out of the Charter Review Commission will go to the voters for their approval—and I look forward to once again engaging our citizens in these efforts to build equity and opportunity in our community.

One final opportunity that we have to seize this year is the 2020 Census count. Every decade, we get a chance to accurately count our residents, to give us a fair and equal opportunity to best serve the people that live here. The Census count determines funding for things like food assistance, healthcare, childcare, housing assistance, public schools – I think you get the message. An accurate Census count is imperative if we want to take care of our residents. We've organized a Complete Count Committee here in Summit County, co-chaired by County

Executive Ilene Shapiro and myself, which oversees and promotes Census awareness in our community. We've also created subcommittees to better leverage our collective voices in spreading the word about the Census. In this massive age of misinformation, we need all hands on deck to properly and accurately communicate the importance of this task. Here are some ways you can help. Add information to your newsletter, a tag on your email signature, or share our social media posts. There are a million little things you can do, to do your part for an accurate Census. If you want to know how get involved, email the address on the screens now, and we'll gladly engage you in the conversation.

As we begin this new decade, and approach our bicentennial in 2025, we have to set our sights on the future, and embrace the opportunity before us – the opportunity to break down the walls of injustice and indifference that will keep Akron from reaching its full potential. None of us want to leave the next generation with problems that we have the ability to address now. We don't need to be a community with one of the worst infant mortality rates in the nation, or one that has an income gap between black and white, or neighborhoods starving for investment. We have capacity for real change, for a better future, here in Akron.

As I said just moments ago, our youth want to feel safe and valued in their schools and neighborhoods. They want a fair chance at a job, a job that pays a living wage and provides opportunities for a career. They want to live in a city that doesn't just talk about "fairness", but one that puts it into action each and every day.

To make their vision of the future a reality, we as leaders have to get uncomfortable. Because it's going to take more than good intentions. It's going to take all of us, including me, becoming even more intentional about changing the systems that perpetuate inequality. Many of these systems took centuries to build, and while I fully realize we won't change them over night, we cannot be afraid to face them head-on. Fear of uncomfortable conversations, and uncomfortable realities, cannot stop us from doing what is necessary, to assure our working families can save and get ahead, to see to it that every mother and child receives whatever they

need to have a healthy start, to assure that any entrepreneur – no matter their background – gets the capital and support they need to go from idea, to open for business.

I'll leave you with this: it's not about us anymore. It's not about me, and it's not about you. It's about the generations coming after us. A more equitable, opportunity-rich Akron is the legacy I want to leave for them. That requires us as leaders to be the change. And we have incredible change-makers in this community.

Yes, the task before us is enormous, and at times, overwhelming. Yes, we will make mistakes, we will fall short of the standard at times, but that won't stop us from achieving big things. We can improve economic opportunities for all. We can financially empower working families. We can further stabilize our neighborhoods. And we can protect our mothers and babies. These things are within our power to achieve. And by achieving them, we will strike a mighty blow against inequity, and step that much closer to establishing the future our children and grandchildren aspire to live in.

Now let's get to work. Thank you.