

2018 State of the City Lima, Ohio

An essential part of Lima's story over the past 50 years is our resiliency, our ability to take a hit, overcome obstacles, and find new collaborative ways to grow and be a community. Over the years, Lima has experienced at least two waves of massive disinvestment, the first being the Rust Belt industrial closures (i.e., Superior Coaches, Lima Locomotive Works/Clark Equipment, Neon Products, Davidson Enamel and others) and the second being Defense Downsizing losses (i.e., Westinghouse Small Motors, Sundstrand, Excello, General Dynamics). In each of these waves, companies shut down, moved or shrank, and thousands of good paying jobs with benefits disappeared. The pain was real for residents and for businesses. But the resiliency and talents of our people and institutions allowed the Lima community to bounce back, build momentum, and foster what is now the best economy in more than 40 years.

Here are some signs of this positive momentum:

- At any given time over the past 2 years, our community has had a surplus of jobs, ranging from 1200 to 1500 available jobs each month.
- Public and private employers are hiring in all corners of our metropolitan community and in every market segment. In fact, some employers are commenting that they can't find enough workers to fill vacant positions.
- Private companies are investing in their plant and facilities. Procter and Gamble, Husky Energy, Potash, Dominion, General Dynamics, and others all have expansion projects underway for 2018.
- Public entities have started renovation and new building projects, e.g., the Allen County Courthouse, Apollo Career Center, the Lima Police Department, the City's water and wastewater facilities.
- Downtown investment is happening in exciting ways. Previously bold decisions were made to build a new YMCA, expand the Veterans Memorial Civic and Convention Center, and develop a parking garage to leverage the Wingate Hotel. These decisions and investments stopped the erosion that had been occurring in the downtown. Now a new set of investments are being made beginning most visibly with restaurant entrepreneurs, who have established The Meeting Place, The Met, Old City Prime, Vivace, Fat Cat and the Hollander. Their investments are making Lima's downtown a destination where people want to be, creating a market place that is also attracting niche retail businesses like Alter Ego Comics, Beauty by Jill, Fresh N Faded Unisex Salon, and others.

The resiliency of Lima's people is revitalizing our community in significant ways and encouraging others to join in that investment climate. I applaud all those who are stepping up and seriously considering business opportunities in the Lima metropolitan community. Your vision and entrepreneurial courage will drive our community's growth and prosperity to unprecedented levels.

The steady stream of activities in our downtown is a visible sign of Lima's positive momentum. The majority of Lima residents see our positive momentum and welcome the changes happening here. They appreciate the strength of the economy and are sharing that news with family and friends. As a result, we are beginning to hear stories of family members who had left for "greener grass" elsewhere and who are now returning to Lima to find employment and raise their families.

Notwithstanding those positive dynamics, we cannot ignore that Lima's story is a collection of individual stories that include those that have some very real concerns about our community that we cannot ignore. Folks are concerned with crime and violence, though they generally feel safe in their own neighborhoods. They are concerned with drugs, and are very much aware of the devastation resulting from the opioid/heroin crisis. They are concerned with the deterioration of housing and want to see some regulation of rental housing in order to preserve and improve property values and the quality of life in all of our neighborhoods. They believe that more needs to be done to support young people in our community, so that they are encouraged to do and be their best. I am committed to addressing each of these concerns. That's why, over the next four years, the focus of my administration will be on four top priorities: Crime & Safety, Stronger Neighborhoods, Infrastructure Improvements, and Investing in Lima's Youth

Crime & Safety

As Mayor, I will continue to push to make sure we do everything we can to provide the safety and security that all Lima residents deserve by investing in safety services. The 2018 budget reflects that safety services is a top priority, with over 50% of the proposed annual operating budget allocated for police and fire services. The proposed budget funds three new police officers, and two new firefighters. With the addition of these new officers both departments will be able to provide additional services to further protect the community.

Some years ago the Lima Police Department made commitments to implement a community policing philosophy throughout the department, and 2017 saw a renewed commitment to continue to foster and improve relationships with Lima citizens that involved the opening of two new COP Substations in 2017, and a new tool to fight opioid addiction in our community - the SAAFE Program (Substance Abuse Assistance For Everyone). SAAFE gives those individuals that have overdosed or been arrested with drugs or drug paraphernalia the option of entering a treatment program in lieu of facing criminal charges. The entire force is focused on working with residents to stop crimes before they happen and to ensure everyone feels safe in their home. The hard work of our law enforcement officers has made our streets safer. 2017 saw a nearly 12% reduction in overall crime.

In 2018, we will continue to work with Lima City Council to continue to keep our safety services as our highest priority. A new Citizens Block Patrol program will start this spring. The department has completed testing of body cameras and all of our uniformed officers will be equipped with body cameras in 2018. We also have committed financial resources for a \$2 Million renovation and expansion of the Hall of Justice, which will be rededicated and renamed the William K. Davenport Hall of Justice, in honor of the late William K. Davenport, Lima's first African American police chief.

And it's not just the Police Department, either. Our Fire Department is committed to the safety of Lima's citizens as well. 2017, saw a more proactive, community focus than ever before. While they have always done a great and courageous job, this year our firefighters worked hand and hand with first responders - daily rapidly responding to calls for service including drug overdoses and made significant improvements to the department's operations which resulted in an improved ISO rating. Also in 2018, nearly \$1million was spent to purchase a new fire engine for the department.

Stronger Neighborhoods

Lima is one of the best-kept secrets in Ohio and enhancing the quality of life in our neighborhoods continues to be a priority of my administration.

Previously, we adopted a complete streets policy committing the city to developing streets in such a way that all users—walkers, cyclists and drivers—are served by

these public ways. We have implemented a community wide plan for bike paths and routes and continue to encourage both active lifestyles and alternative transportation options.

Outdoor green spaces and recreational amenities are also important in terms of strengthening neighborhoods and improving quality of life. In 2017, we saw the opening and dedication of the city's newest park - Lima Stadium Park. This \$2.6 million dollar project was funded by public / private partnerships and has transformed the Bellefontaine / Market Street Corridor, a prime entrance into our community. Also in 2017, we announced a 4-Year Parks Improvement Program where we have committed \$1Million for the replacement of playground equipment in our parks. Phase I included the installation of new playground equipment at MLK Park, Faurot Park, and Robb Park. 2018 will see the completion of Phase II of this project and include new equipment for Lincoln and Schnoover Park.

Neighborhoods thrive where there exists a strong sense of community between residents and we work continuously to enhance the work of neighborhood associations and other groups to provide opportunities to connect with annual events like Citywide Pride, the Ottawa River Cleanup, and the Star Spangled Spectacular.

One of our biggest challenges remains the aging of our housing stock. Over the last decade we removed over 800 blighted housing structures. In 2018, we will continue to work with Lima City Council to identify higher quality standards for rental housing, along with methods for holding landlords accountable for both the physical condition of their properties as well as the management of tenants. We have also launched a new initiative charged with the identification of repeat code violation offenders and problem properties and will aggressively employ available resources to continue to remove blight in our neighborhoods and stimulate development.

Infrastructure Improvements

The city has several major infrastructure projects that will be getting their start at the end of this winter season. We are now out to bid for the federally mandated Simmons Field underground tank (expected to cost \$40 million), and for the Elm Street underpass (expected to be \$20 million). We are also preparing for a major sewer reconstruction project along High Street going west from St. Rita's (\$10 million) and a meter replacement project (\$10 million) for the city's entire water

system. The city will also continue its partnership with Rhodes State College for the development of their downtown campus.

In addition to our commitment for the improvement of physical infrastructure, the city also recognizes the importance of investing in technology infrastructure.

In the world we live in today, we must acknowledge that technology is an essential infrastructure component and a utility just like traffic lights, roads and bridges, water, gas, and electricity. That's why, two years ago, with the support of Lima City Council, we launched the Smart Cities Initiative. Our Smart City initiative is now underway and is reconfiguring the way we do business. We are streamlining procedures, cutting the "red tape" and making it easier to work with city government. We are also creating more opportunities for citizens to give us feedback in order to ensure that our departments are more customer friendly.

Smart Cities is all about using data and connecting technologies to design innovative solutions to our pressing challenges such as reducing traffic congestion, fighting crime, fostering economic growth and improving the delivery of city services. For the last two years we have been focused on analyzing and building the infrastructure and environment within city government to continuously improve the collection, aggregation, and use of data and the connectivity of software systems to improve the life of Lima's residents.

In 2018, we will launch the first initial projects of the city's Smart Cities Initiative – Advanced Metering Infrastructure Project (AMI) and Customer Information System (CIS). In late Spring, the city will begin the installation of smart meters that will feature radio frequency and cell phone technology to transmit meter readings directly to the city's water department. This remote meter reading technology will eliminate the need for a city truck to drive by the home to obtain meter readings and allow our water department to remotely conduct some service needs. The CIS project will also "go live" in 2018. Water customers will see improvements in how they pay their utility bills, request calls for services, and overall improvements in customer service.

Investing in Lima's Youth

Beyond a continuing focus on crime and safety, building stronger neighborhoods, and investing infrastructure improvements, I also intend to invite community stakeholders to work with me on a Youth Initiative.

Almost 30% of Lima's population is 18 years old or younger. Lima has many organizations dedicated to improving the lives of young people and their work has produced advancements in several areas in the lives of young people in our community. However, most programs and organizations focus only on one or two factors, with little coordination in addressing multiple factors impacting our youth. We must do more.

Our effort will take a comprehensive look at the lives of Lima's youth. We will focus on identifying gaps in services being provided to our young people and provide systemic and community – wide recommendations that address the whole person. We will then go to work on designing and implementing programs to connect with and support our youth. My hope is to involve our schools, community agencies, churches and others and create a roadmap to help Lima youth learn, live, grow, and invest right here at home.

So this is the State of our City in 2018: a resilient and successful city inhabited by creative people and dynamic organizations. We are excited about our future together because we are a community that has learned how to work together and find solutions. I feel blessed to be able to work with you and all the citizens of Lima as we continue to Move Lima Forward.

Thank you,

David J. Berger, Mayor
City of Lima