



2018 STATE OF THE CITY  
MAYOR DON WALTERS  
February 21, 2019

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Dr. Kent, thank you for that introduction and thank you for your continued partnership with the City of Cuyahoga Falls. I was incredibly proud to see our award-winning Western Reserve Hospital launch the “Loyally Local” campaign because truer words have never been spoken about this organization or its dedicated staff. Western Reserve Hospital sponsors health chats and educational luncheons for our residents, sponsors art installations at City Hall and the hospital so that our community has free access to view and appreciate local art, and sponsors our Flicks on the Falls and Falls Downtown Fridays events. Their commitment and investment in moving Cuyahoga Falls forward are unparalleled, and I thank all of them for all that they do in service to all of us.

I also want to thank the Cuyahoga Falls Chamber of Commerce for hosting today’s State of the City and would like to thank CEO Laura Petrella and Board President Nate Winston for your leadership and commitment to helping move our business community forward. Year over year we have seen increases in our ribbon cuttings to celebrate new or redeveloped businesses and last year was no different. The City of Cuyahoga Falls saw thirty-two ribbon cuttings in 2018, and those were organized by our Chamber. Thank you for your partnership with the City and thank you for your continued commitment to helping ensure that our small businesses develop and thrive here in Cuyahoga Falls.

I want to recognize our school superintendents, Cuyahoga Falls Superintendent Dr. Todd Nichols, and Woodridge Superintendent Wally Davis. The city and the Cuyahoga Falls Schools have been able to partner on numerous projects that directly impact our youngest residents. Thank you for letting us be part of your curriculum and for giving us the opportunity to partner on projects with your students that give so much to our community. The Master Facilities Planning Committee is working hard to finalize plans for new school buildings that are so desperately needed. To Wally Davis and the Woodridge School District, many congratulations on the passage of your levy last fall and the grand opening of the beautiful new Woodridge Elementary School building. Our students are incredibly fortunate to be able to learn and grow in a new and modern environment where they will continue to be well-served by your spectacular programming.

I’d like to thank all of the elected, community and business leaders that are here today and would like to recognize our dignitaries: Munroe Falls Mayor James Armstrong, Nick Ciofani representing Congressman David Joyce, Stow Municipal Court Judge Lisa Coates, Stow Clerk of Courts Diana Colavecchio, Silver Lake Mayor Bernie Hovey, Leah Jones representing United States Senator Sherrod Brown, Executive Director of Summit Metro Parks Lisa King, CEO OF Akron Cleveland Association of Realtors Sandy Naragon, Stow Mayor John Pribonic, Summit County Executive Ilene Shapiro, Summit County Councilperson John Schmidt, and Vincent Peterson representing Congressman Tim Ryan. We are incredibly fortunate here in Cuyahoga Falls to have established relationships between communities that allow for collaborations of this caliber, and we are proud to be a part of the invaluable partnerships we have with all of you.

I want to thank and recognize my Senior Cabinet members Law Director Russ Balthis, Finance Director Bryan Hoffman, Interim Community Development Director Sara Leedham, and Service Director Anthony Zumbo. These are some of the most selfless community servants you will ever

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know, and I could not be prouder of the work that they do every day to make our city a better place to live, work, and play. On this coming Monday, I will be asking Cuyahoga Falls City Council to confirm my appointment of Diana Colavecchio to the position of Community Development Director. Diana is a beloved leader, attorney, and former small business owner here in Cuyahoga Falls and has dedicated her life to serving our community. I look forward to her leading the charge in our Community Development Department as we continue our efforts of economic development and revitalization across the city, once she is confirmed by Council.

Additionally, I want to acknowledge my assistant Cathy Meacham. I do not know what I would do without your help every day. Thank you for the immeasurable amount of work that you do to ensure that I stay on track – and let me tell you, that is not an easy task. To all of our city employees, I want to commend you for the phenomenal work that you have done over this past year and your tireless service to the residents of our community. We have continued to deliver unmatched city services and provide innovative programs that significantly impact the lives of our citizens. Thank you for all that you do.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize our councilmembers, some of who are here today: Ward One Councilman Drew Reilly, Ward Four Councilperson and Council President Mary Nichols-Rhodes, Ward Eight Councilperson Russ Iona, and At-Large Councilperson Tim Gorbach. Last Friday, At-Large Councilman Paul Colavecchio resigned from his seat on our Council, and I want to thank him for his many years of dedication to serving all residents of Cuyahoga Falls. Last Saturday, Meika Penta was appointed to the At-Large seat and we welcome her to City Council. To all of our Councilmembers, thank you for your continued support of my Administration and for casting party politics aside to pass important legislation that allows us to continue the positive growth and success of our city.

Above all else, I want to thank my beautiful wife, Stephanie. When I decided to commit my professional life to public service, she did as well. There are many days and nights that I am away from home serving in the various capacities of my job, and she is always there rooting me and, more importantly, the success of our city on. I will never be able to thank you enough for your unconditional support, and I can honestly stand before this room and say that I am truly the luckiest man alive because I have you in my corner. I could not love you more.

Beginning with our city finances, the 2018 General Fund ending unencumbered balance was \$8.85 million, and the cash balance is \$9.19 million. I'm pleased to announce that at the end of 2018, our cash balance has increased by \$1,524,639 since my administration took office at the beginning of 2014. Back in the fall, we were proud to announce that we have been able to pay down over \$9 million of debt since I took office in 2014, saving taxpayers financing and interest charges. Further, our target with Moody's Rating Agency is to have a balance of 20 percent of yearly revenues; ours is right around 27 percent. Our award-winning finance team led by Finance Director Bryan Hoffman continues to produce sound financial management by leveraging innovative cost-savings measures and implementing best practices, and we thank them for their outstanding work.

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We also recently welcomed our new Tax Administrator Matt Skitzki and are fortunate to have him aboard as we transition our municipal income tax processing to the Regional Income Tax Authority. Matt will be facilitating our municipal tax collections with RITA, and we know that he will serve the city well.

The Service Department, led by Director Anthony Zumbo, continued to deliver what are some of the most significant of our city services such as sanitation collection, leaf removal, snow plowing, building maintenance, and providing water and electric to our residents and businesses. My Administration continues to prioritize investments in infrastructure. For 2019, we are adding a quarter of a million dollars for street paving, bringing the total investment to \$2.25 million with an additional \$300,000 for concrete street repairs. Last year we paved 34 streets consisting of over 17 miles of roadway. Our Engineering Department, led by City Engineer Tony Demasi completed over \$8 million in public works improvement projects, and I am incredibly proud of their efforts.

Speaking of roads, the biggest moment that happened in 2018 was arguably one of the biggest moments in the city's history over the past 40 years. On February 3, 2018, Front Street and Downtown Cuyahoga Falls were reopened for business. Residents gathered at the Downtown Pavilion and boarded buses to be amongst the first to travel down the new Front Street. The buses were preceded by a 1978 Trans Am and a new Tesla symbolizing the ushering out of the old pedestrian mall that was created in 1978 and the ushering in of a new day of economic growth and innovation. Special thanks to Dr. Scott Higley and Don Sitts for donating the Tesla and Trans Am, respectively.

Since the opening of Front Street a year ago, there have been ten new businesses that have opened along the corridor with many more slated for 2019. We are proud to provide free WI-FI for all who visit Downtown Cuyahoga Falls and do so to help make sure everyone stays connected while visiting all that we have to offer. We were also pleased to see the creation of the Downtown Cuyahoga Falls Partnership, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with the mission of revitalizing and sustaining our historic Downtown Cuyahoga Falls and the riverfront as a vibrant destination by promoting economic development and enhancing our downtown for residents and visitors.

The housing market in Cuyahoga Falls remains strong due to our diverse housing stock. We currently have homes listed anywhere from \$50,000 to \$950,000. We have something for everyone here - ranging from starter homes to custom built homes and everything in between. Real estate professionals share that homes are being sold quickly. In many cases, full-price offers are made on the same day that the homes are listed. Listings and sale prices are on the rise, and it is not uncommon for a home to sell at or above the listing price. Let me put this into perspective from an engineering standpoint. Our Engineering Department reviewed over 100 plot plans for new homes in 2018 which equates to one new home starting roughly every three days. For a city of our size, this is a testament to the allure of the City of Cuyahoga Falls and our growth and development.

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I am thrilled to announce the creation of the Public Arts Advisory Committee and Public Arts Master Plan. The goal of the plan is to provide a long-term roadmap for strategically planning and placing public art throughout the City and to develop procedures for administering a public art program. The plan will help to encourage art in the downtown historic district, public spaces, streetscapes, parks, neighborhoods and private development projects. An Advisory Committee representing various interests throughout our community is currently being formed. A series of public engagement activities are scheduled to begin on February 27 and will continue throughout the process. The Community Development Department will work with a consulting team and the Neighborhood Excellence, Communications and Community Outreach Department to ensure ample public participation, including surveys, public meetings, interviews and roundtable discussions. This endeavor has been a long time coming and will allow us to make strategic investments for the purpose of executing public art in Cuyahoga Falls.

We also started the Green Initiatives Working Group to assess our city's current and future practices and policies to ensure that we are developing, implementing, and maintaining environmentally, socially and economically sustainable community initiatives and policies. We focused communication efforts this year on executing a "Recycle Responsibly" campaign to educate residents and businesses on how to effectively reduce the amount of materials that are being dumped in landfills. My Administration remains committed to the conservation of our resources, finding innovative ways to impact sustainability and the preservation of our natural resources such as our parks systems and the Cuyahoga River. Special thanks to Tristan Haidet, Teresa Hazlett, Becky McCleary, Council President Mary Nichols-Rhodes and Adam Paul, among others, for getting this necessary initiative off the ground.

Keeping with sustainability efforts, our Law Department is committed to upgrading their software and case management systems in an effort to be more environmentally conscious by reducing paper usage. Additionally, Law Director Russ Balthis led labor negotiations with our bargaining units, and we were able to provide reasonable wage increases to bargaining and non-bargaining employees while agreeing to innovative healthcare language that provides great benefits for our employees and controls costs for the city. Thank you to all who were involved for coming to the table and delivering a cooperative process. I would like to recognize the members of our Law Department for the imperative work that they do day in and day out to ensure that we are all doing what is right for all of our citizens.

Our newly formed Neighborhood Excellence, Communications and Community Outreach Department led by Director Kelli Crawford-Smith has hit the ground running by increasing communications across the city. They have been reactivating and creating multiple social media accounts because we know that the latest numbers show that 67 percent of adults now get their news from social media. You can now follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Nextdoor. We have streamlined and are improving our communications so that our residents, businesses, and visitors are better served by our programs and services. We have produced a centralized location for accurate and timely information. We are engaging our residents in strengthening relationships in their neighborhoods through our Neighborhood Excellence Initiative and started Front Yard Information - FYI meetings – to help bring City Hall and information about our

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programs and services into our neighborhoods and to give us an opportunity to hear concerns and ideas from our citizens. We know that residents have busy schedules that can make it difficult to see us at City Hall and so we are coming directly to them. Additionally, we are partnering and collaborating with organizations across Summit County to increase our community outreach efforts. The return on this investment is the strategic and intentional promotion of our city throughout the region, stronger relationships through neighborhood engagement and involvement, and mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations to leverage our resources to move the city forward. I know very few who would argue against working to ensure that our community is better informed, more involved and engaged, and well connected to community resources and services. To our Neighborhood Ambassadors, thank you for all that you do to make our neighborhoods stronger and more welcoming to all people.

We worked incredibly hard last year with community leaders and sponsors to plan and execute the Falls Downtown Fridays events to drive residents and visitors to experience the new Downtown Cuyahoga Falls. After we kicked the season off with a parade and Grand Opening event, we followed up with seven additional events that were family friendly with a heavy focus on local food, retail, and entertainment. We were thrilled to watch the crowds grow throughout the summer as people were not just coming down to enjoy the events, but were patronizing our local restaurants and retail businesses in our downtown. We raised over \$37,000 for local charities that serve Cuyahoga Falls. We have begun planning for the 2019 season and are pleased to announce that 91.3 The Summit has already signed on as our media partner and sponsor.

We look forward to another season of growth with new and exciting events. None of this would be possible without the continued collaborative relationships with our community leaders, volunteers, and businesses such as Western Reserve Hospital and Cascade Auto who served as series sponsors and will be returning this year. We look forward to seeing you this summer in Downtown Cuyahoga Falls.

Back in October, I was humbled to learn that the County of Summit Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services Board was awarding me with the Dr. Bob Smith Trailblazer Award. According to the ADM Board, those honored with the Dr. Bob Smith Trailblazer Award are known for offering hope and inspiring change in others. I was honored to receive this award, and I pledge to follow in the footsteps of Dr. Bob Smith, founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, in offering help and hope in treating every human being with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

The City of Cuyahoga Falls has always been at the forefront in the fight against the opiate epidemic that has been plaguing our region. The City of Cuyahoga Falls officers were the first police department in Summit County to carry the life-saving opiate-reversing drug Narcan and was the first city in Summit County to provide residents with resources and support through the Quick Response Team. Though the opiate crisis continues to weigh on the community, we were pleased to report that overdose-related deaths in Summit County were down from 340 in 2016 to a little over 100 in 2018. This is a direct result of the aggressive response that communities like ours took to address the problem head-on. The numbers are declining, and we remain committed to doing our part to end this epidemic.

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Our Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Jack Davis, continues to serve with the utmost respect and dignity that our residents and visitors deserve. We are thrilled that the construction of our new state-of-the-art training facility is currently underway. We broke ground back in the fall and look forward to the grand opening later this year. Our officers will now be able to be trained and complete qualification assessments on-site in the city. As we know, outdoor ranges are becoming relatively obsolete, and this location will provide our officers with an indoor facility that is located behind Fire Station 5 on Wyoga Lake Road. Special thanks to our friends at Western Reserve Hospital for providing emergency bags for every Police Department squad car to equip officers with vital first aid supplies for use on duty. These life-saving supplies help our safety forces continue to provide top-notch services to our citizens.

In the Fire Department, we bid farewell to former Chief Paul Moledor last fall when he retired after 35 years of dedicated service to the City of Cuyahoga Falls. He left an indelible mark on the department through his many years of leadership, and we knew that the next Chief would have big shoes to fill. In October, I swore in former Assistant Fire Chief and Paramedic Fred Jackson as the city's 15th Fire Chief. Fred has served the city for over 30 years and has a proven history of leadership as he has risen through the ranks of the department. He has been excelling since he entered his new role and under his leadership, we will see the construction of the new Fire Station 3 which will soon break ground on Portage Trail.

It was a great honor to unveil the permanent memorial signage at the corner of State Road and Maitland Avenue in honor of fallen Cuyahoga Falls Firefighter Frank Schumann. Schumann lost his life in the line of duty on December 15, 1957, and this tribute is long overdue. I want to thank Firefighter Charlie Kilbel for his work on getting this project completed under the leadership of Chief Jackson.

Back in late fall, residents and businesses in our city donated funds to help victims of the California wildfires through both the North Valley Community Foundation and Ventura County Humane Society. We wanted to be able to help people and pets through reliable nonprofit organizations that would directly impact fire victims and displaced animals in what was listed as the third worst fire in California history in terms of the number of acres that were devastated, according to officials in California. We later received press coverage in the Camarillo Acorn newspaper because those who live in the area and were affected by the fires were so touched by the fact that strangers from thousands of miles away were willing to donate their hard-earned money to people they didn't know. They learned what we already know – that Fallsites have hearts of gold and we will do anything to take care of our fellow citizens. Thank you to all who donated.

Our Police and Fire Departments serve our citizens with professionalism and dedication to the community, and I am proud to honor their service to our residents and thank them for their unwavering commitment to selflessly watching over all of us and keeping us safe from harm.

We were pleased to announce that Western Reserve Hospital's Division Chief of Emergency Medicine Dr. Sonny Bare was named the Cuyahoga Falls Fire Department's new Medical Director. In this capacity, Dr. Bare serves the city as a liaison between the Fire Department,

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hospital administrators and medical staff, local public health and public safety agencies, and members of the community. Dr. Bare provides written protocols that define and direct patient care. These protocols are designed to maximize quality patient care and safety and direct a patient's triage, treatment, and transport to the most appropriate facility. Dr. Bare, thank you for your continued commitment and service to our community.

Last year, we were thrilled to have Sara Kline join our leadership team as our new Parks and Recreation Superintendent. She and the Parks and Recreation Department have brought new programming and energy to the city that has changed the trajectory of the department. We were proud to have our inaugural City Hall trick-or-treat event for the community. All City Hall departments decorated their respective offices and came in costume to open our doors and distribute candy to over 300 children. Additionally, they added a special Halloween edition of Flicks on the Falls with a combined Trick or Treat event with the businesses along Front Street. The Ghostbusters-themed event included photo opportunities in front of Ecto-1, the Ghostbusters mobile, and the Ghostbusters themselves who completed a quick assessment of me to ensure I had not been taken over by a ghost. Over 250 people attended this event in Downtown Cuyahoga Falls. The holiday tree lighting and ice rink grand opening were held the Saturday after Thanksgiving with an attendance of over 1000 people, including Santa, Mrs. Claus, and their live reindeer. We are excited to add a new dog park in Water Works Park later this year so that residents and visitors can enjoy our park system with their beloved pets on the eastside of our city. These are just a few examples of the impact that is being made on our community through Parks and Rec.

There are two significant programs that will be launched by Parks and Recreation this year that I am excited to announce. The first is Mobile Rec. One of our old ambulances is being repurposed to bring scheduled and unscheduled visits in all of our city parks. How will this work? The Mobile Rec vehicle will pull into our parks and will activate games and sports aimed at bringing additional activities for our families to enjoy. Staff members will be on-hand to provide this fully-inclusive programming in our parks and community events. Look for Mobile Rec to be out and about later this spring.

The Parks Department is committed to expanded offerings for adapted and inclusive programming to best serve the needs of all residents and visitors to our parks system. The department has partnered with the Courage League Adapted Sports program from Iowa to assess and modify existing sports activities to ensure inclusion for everyone. Courage League is also assisting the department in developing an overall fitness class specifically modified for individuals who live with a disability. This fitness class can be a great opportunity to engage people who may not otherwise have utilized our wellness and fitness offerings within the Parks Department. Additionally, the Department has brought in a special education teacher part-time to ensure that Mobile Rec and the other child-centered offerings of the department meet the unique needs of exceptional children. Our Parks Department and the City of Cuyahoga Falls as a whole are truly committed to ensuring that everyone in our community has access to and support for recreation, wellness, and fitness.

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I could not be prouder of all that we collectively accomplished in 2018 here in the City of Cuyahoga Falls. People often tell me that they have never seen a bigger cheerleader for the city than me, but how could I not? We have some of the most dedicated and committed employees, residents, business owners, and community leaders in the region and our Falls Pride runs deep. We have only begun to realize the full potential of our city, and I know you are with me when I say that together we have put the City of Cuyahoga Falls on the map. Our opportunities for growth and prosperity are endless.

I am proud to tell you that our State of the City is incredibly strong.

I cannot thank you enough for being here today to hear about the incredible progress that we are making here in the great City of Cuyahoga Falls. Thank you for your continued friendship, your partnership, and your investment in our community. Above all else, thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving this city that I love so much as your Mayor. It is truly a life's honor. Thank you.

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