



2017 STATE OF THE CITY
MAYOR DON WALTERS
February 21, 2018

I want to begin today by thanking Dr. Robert Kent from Western Reserve Hospital for the kind introduction. I am beyond grateful for the friendship that I have with Dr. Kent and for the invaluable partnership the city has with the hospital. Many of the programs and services that we are able to provide to our residents are due in large part to the generosity and unwavering commitment to the community from Western Reserve. Thank you, Dr. Kent. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Cuyahoga Falls Chamber of Commerce under the leadership of Laura Petrella for not only sponsoring today's State of the City but for also nurturing the partnerships between our community and our local businesses. 2017 was another record-breaking year with 22 ribbon cutting ceremonies for new businesses here in Cuyahoga Falls. I would also like to recognize the new Board President of the Chamber of Commerce Brent Van Fossen. Brent owns Metropolis Popcorn and Desserts, and we are incredibly proud of his business. He had the opportunity to relocate his business and chose to stay firmly planted on Front Street, and we are thankful for his commitment to the economic growth and success of our downtown. Thank you, Brent.

My wife Stephanie is paramount to my success as your Mayor. She is my support system and one of the strongest people I know. Many times she sacrifices time with me due to my full and demanding schedule, but she is in my corner no matter where I go. She is there on the good days and the not so good days and I could not ask for a better partner in this life. I could not be more grateful that she is my wife and I could not love her more if I tried.

I want to recognize all of the dignitaries and community leaders who are here today: Perry Alexandrides representing the Secretary of State, Greg Allison representing the Governor's Office, Munroe Falls Mayor James Armstrong, our Stow Municipal Clerk of Courts Diana Colavecchio, Judge Jill Flagg Lansinger, Barberton Mayor Bill Judge, Stow Mayor Sara Kline, Getta Kutuchief representing Judge Linda Teodosio, Judge Kathryn Michael, Summit County Council President John Schmidt, Summit County Executive Ilene Shapiro, former Cleveland Browns linebacker Frank Stams, and Josh Weemhoff representing Congressman David Joyce. I would like to give special mention to our School Superintendents Wally Davis and Dr. Todd Nichols. Thank you for everything that you continue to do for our kids and our community as a whole.

To our Cuyahoga Falls City Council, some of who are represented here today, I want to thank you for your service. Here today are Council President Mary Nichols-Rhodes, Paul Colavecchio, Tim Gorbach, Russ Iona, Jeff Iula, and Drew Reilly. Momentum has been steadily building over the course of the past few years and a new day of economic growth and prosperity is upon us. Without the support and leadership of Council, we would be unable to bring these imperative projects to fruition. In times when it has been necessary to put partisan politics aside, our Council has largely delivered. We are all better, and our residents are best served when we can all come together for the greater good of this City. Thank you for all that you do.

My Senior Cabinet Members are invaluable to the forward moving progress of our City. I would like to recognize Law Director Russ Balthis, Finance Director Bryan Hoffman, Community Development Director Diane Sheridan, and Service Director Anthony Zumbo. Additionally, I want to acknowledge my right-hand person and assistant Cathy Meacham. On numerous occasions, Cathy has gone above and beyond in her service to our City, and I do not know what I

would do without her. Thank you to all of you for your long hours, dedication and unwavering leadership.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to our City staff members who are true public servants. Every day they come to work not to receive accolades, but for the opportunity to be of service to and improve the quality of life of our residents. I have said many times that a city is only as good as the programs and services it provides, and ours are unparalleled. This is due to the efforts of our great employees, and I could not be prouder of each and every one of them.

As always, I will begin by providing an overview of our city finances. The 2017 General Fund ending unencumbered balance was \$8.96 million, and the cash balance was \$9.18 million. Our target with Moody's Rating Agency is to have a balance of 20% of yearly revenues, and ours is right around 29 percent. As a reflection of a steadily improving local economy, our 2017 income tax revenue was roughly \$24 million, our highest tax collection year ever.

Last year, I announced that the Ohio Auditor of State had published the Financial Health Indicators Final 2015 Report that rates the City of Cuyahoga Falls with a perfect Positive Outlook. The report is based on 17 financial health indicators that are used to measure the fiscal health and well-being of local governments. I am proud to announce that the same is true for the 2016 Report and that, once again, the City has been rated with Positive Outlooks under all 17 of the indicators. This distinction is unique in that only eight percent of all cities in Ohio received the perfect positive outlook score.

Additionally, in October, the City of Cuyahoga Falls was awarded the Auditor of State Award with Distinction for a clean audit report. The award is based on excellent record keeping. We remain committed to strong financial management and being recognized by the Auditor of State's Office is an incredible accomplishment for our Finance Team led by our Director Bryan Hoffman. I am proud that we continue to implement best practices and utilize the innovative talents of our Finance Department to report our finances with accuracy and transparency to best serve our residents.

When it comes to transparency and outstanding levels of service, it is essential to mention our City Law Department led by Director Russ Balthis. Our Law Department can sometimes seem like a triage area, and it is not uncommon to see our attorneys and staff working late to best serve our community. Fortunately, they do not bill by the hour. Last year, we announced that the City was partnering with the County of Summit and surrounding jurisdictions to implement new case management software, providing much-needed updates to an antiquated system. We remain fortunate in the City of Cuyahoga Falls to have such strong collaborative relationships with leaders in our surrounding communities. Thank you to our attorneys and staff in the Law Department for all of your hard work.

Last year we welcomed new Service Director Anthony Zumbo, and he has hit the ground running. His experience and leadership have been instrumental in the Downtown Transformation Project, infrastructure projects, and managing the many facets that make up our Service Department.

Infrastructure maintenance has remained one of my top priorities, and 2017 was no different. Our street crews continued our aggressive road paving program, with over \$3 million committed to pave and repair our roadways to provide smoother travel for all residents. These improvements included the paving of 36 streets consisting of over 23 lane miles of roadway.

The Service Department also continued its efforts in the revitalization of our downtown through infrastructure improvements to Front Street and by making much-needed improvements to our parking decks. Led by City Engineer Tony Demasi, our traffic pattern changes went into effect in Downtown Cuyahoga Falls. Our one-way streets were successfully and safely converted to two-way vehicular traffic. The Engineering Department managed over \$15 million in public works improvement projects, and we are proud of the work they continue to do to address our infrastructure needs.

I know construction season can be frustrating for drivers, but I want to take the opportunity to truly thank all of our residents and businesses for their patience as these important projects were constructed. We commend everyone involved for completing these projects safely, effectively, and efficiently.

Our Safety Forces, headed by Fire Chief Paul Moledor and Police Chief Jack Davis, continue to be respected leaders in the region regarding the fight against the opiate epidemic. Our Police Department was the very first in Summit County to carry the life-saving antidote Narcan. Last year, we became the first city in Summit County to proactively address those living with addiction through our Quick Response Team. The team which includes one paramedic, one police officer and a counselor from Oriana House meets with individuals and their families to assist with finding effective ways to move the individual into rehabilitation. This program is the first time our Fire Department has stepped into the realm of community paramedicine, and I could not be prouder of their efforts. From a prevention standpoint, we continue to actively partner with Western Reserve Hospital for our Not Me, I'm Drug Free program, and Drug Take Back events.

Another prevention measure that was taken last year to deter crime was the use of GPS-tracking in bait packages to reduce theft. I proposed the idea to Chief Davis, and he and his team made it happen. The goal was two-fold: to track stolen packages and apprehend those that were committing theft crimes, and also to send a clear message that we are watching and do not tolerate criminal behavior in our City. The tracked packages received quite a bit of media attention, and the community was made aware of our bait packages. However, only one week after announcing the program, we received an alert that someone had, quite literally, taken the bait. He was tracked to a home in the area and told the officers that the package belonged to him. He was then informed that the package had a little more than he bargained for in the form a GPS and he was charged with the theft. Thank you, sir, for participating in our program.

The City of Cuyahoga Falls was ranked the 8th Safest City in Ohio for 2017 by the latest SafeHome research study. Being recognized in the top ten of the Safest Cities in Ohio is a true testament to the dedication of both our Cuyahoga Falls Police Department and the engagement of our citizens in our neighborhoods. Our Police Department continues to find innovative ways to

keep our residents safe, and our neighbors continue to keep an eye out for each other in an effort to maintain relationships as well as safety in the community.

One of the greatest assets and selling points of our City remains our Parks system. Parks enrich our lives, add value to our homes and neighborhoods and help connect the entire community. Our Parks and Recreation Department takes great pride in providing joy to the families of our city and building relationships in the process. City playgrounds and parks saw vast improvements last year with much more planned for the year ahead. We also drastically increased communications and community outreach in our park system. Water Works Family Aquatic Center and Brookledge Golf Club saw outstanding days in attendance and revenues during the summer and fall seasons. Our facilities continue to outperform the local competition. Additionally, the Natatorium had another record-breaking year for annual memberships boasting over 17,000 members. Our Natatorium is unmatched and, as a loyal member, I am proud to take advantage of the facility about three times per week. I would like to recognize Interim Parks and Recreation Superintendent Lori Visner and thank her for her leadership during this time of transition.

Though I said earlier that we do not do this work for accolades, I should also add that it is incredibly encouraging when we are recognized for our efforts. One of the aspects of leading the City that I am most proud of is our award-winning services and programs that are offered to our residents. It was a great honor to be awarded the Age-Friendly City for the inaugural SOAR Awards 2017 through VANTAGE Aging. Communities were judged in eight areas of service to older adults. We are pleased to offer unparalleled services to our older adults such as Senior Watch, Senior Snow, Envelope of Life, and unlimited activities through our Parks and Recreation facilities.

We were also recognized by the Akron/Summit Convention and Visitor's Bureau at the 2017 Zenith Awards with the Friend of Hospitality Award. We are always looking for innovative ways to promote and increase recreational activities along the riverfront, specifically kayaking. Our City is unique in that we play home to Class V rapids that bring expert whitewater paddlers for the Annual Cuyahoga Falls Kayak Race. Last year, the race brought competitive kayakers from fifteen states to experience our river, and the event continues to grow every year. We are looking forward to hosting the 3rd Annual Cuyahoga Falls Kayak Race in late April of this year and are proud to continue our partnership with the event organizers.

When we discuss partnerships with the City, there is no more exceptional partner than our friends at Western Reserve Hospital. I want to thank them for their recent purchase of the hospital and land at their location on 23rd Street. I am grateful that this investment has further cemented their long-term commitment to the City and our residents. Western Reserve Hospital leads our region for healthcare and has won numerous awards this past year that ranged from receiving the Outstanding Patient Experience Award from Healthgrades to being certified a "Great Place to Work" and Northcoast 99 awardee. They have remained dedicated to partnering with the City in preventative healthcare, public art, and community development projects and events. They are steadfast in their support of our safety forces and our battle against the drug epidemic. Dr. Kent, Mark Bosko, and Kathy Romito, who I know could not be here today, you

and your staff are top-notch community servants, and your efforts to improve the quality of life here in our City do not go unnoticed. Thank you for everything that you do for all of us.

Last year, the community went above and beyond when Hurricane Harvey hit our fellow citizens to the south in our adopted city, Humble, Texas. Humble was devastated by Hurricane Harvey. We were able to send two large truckloads of much-needed items such as monetary donations, cleaning supplies, personal items, and non-perishable food and pet food. Our community answered a call to help our fellow citizens, and we are all so proud of the outpouring of compassion and charitable giving. The relief effort was a collaboration between the City of Cuyahoga Falls, Continuing Healthcare of Cuyahoga Falls, Cuyahoga Falls Chamber of Commerce, GOJO Industries, Kisling, Nestico & Redick, Riverfront YMCA, U-Haul Moving & Storage of Cuyahoga Falls, and Western Reserve Hospital. Thank you to everyone who participated in this relief effort.

I am pleased to announce that there continues to be a strong demand for housing in the City of Cuyahoga Falls and that housing values were up roughly eight percent last year. We remain cognizant of balancing economic development efforts with housing options.

It is an understatement to say that 2017 was an exciting year for Economic Development around the City of Cuyahoga Falls. We are proud that Portage Crossings continues to perform well financially, and that expansion is ongoing. We were thrilled to welcome all of the new businesses this year and wish them much success. That success has started to continue down Portage Trail with local businesses such as Big Eu's BBQ, Shawarma Brothers, E.C.P. Auto Group, the new Portage Crossing Barbershop, and Smoothie King which will soon be open. We are grateful that they are committing their businesses and themselves to the economic growth of our City. Additionally, we have been thrilled to see the construction progress and are looking forward to the much anticipated Grand Opening of Menards on Graham Road this year.

I am energized by the transformation that is happening along South Front Street. Over the summer, it was great to see patrons return to the Jetty at the Sheraton along our beautiful riverfront and I look forward to more fun there in the coming years. Places like HiHo Brewing Company, Hibachi, Craft Beer Bar, and TRIAD have breathed new life into our downtown. There is nothing more exciting than visiting South Front Street on a Saturday night to see the area activated and booming with visitors and patrons of our small businesses. To the north, businesses such as McArthur's Brew House, Totally Cooked Catering, and Darby's on 59 continue to do well, and we cannot wait for the opening of the new Missing Mountain Brewery later this year.

This is only the beginning for Downtown. As you may have heard, we have been hard at work on the Downtown Transformation Project. After forty years of being closed to vehicular traffic, the completion of housing and retail market studies, well-attended public meetings, countless hours of research and planning facilitated by Planning Director Fred Guerra, and a fact-finding tour with community and business leaders. After unanimous approval from our City Council, design and engineering phases of the road, numerous hard-hat tours for the community and an aggressive construction schedule, we were beyond excited to reopen Front Street on Saturday, February 3 of this year. Two busloads of residents and community leaders took the inaugural trip down the newly opened road accompanied by a 1978 Trans-Am and a new Tesla that symbolized

the ushering out of the old pedestrian mall and the ushering in of a new day of economic growth and innovation. Our very own King of Cuyahoga Falls Kenny King was there to wave us across Portage Trail with a checkered flag. That trip signified that Downtown Cuyahoga Falls is officially open for business.

Our building owners are making great investments in their properties as we work to backfill storefronts along Front Street. Last year, we were thrilled to welcome Crave Cantina to Front Street and wish them much continued success. We look forward to the opening of Pav's Creamery, Good Co. Hair Salon, Yum Yum Sweet Shop, and Ohio Brewing Company. We recently welcomed Celia's Boutique. We are grateful that these new businesses have come to Cuyahoga Falls, but we are also incredibly thankful that all of the existing businesses stuck with us through construction knowing that there were better days to come with accessibility to and visibility of their companies. I want to thank everyone who has played a part in getting the road open. I would especially like to thank the hard work of the Community Development Department and Director Diane Sheridan for the work they continue to do to make Downtown Cuyahoga Falls open for business.

Though we hosted a ceremonial road opening on February 3, I want to take this opportunity to invite you to join us for the ribbon cutting and Grand Opening of Front Street that is scheduled for Saturday, June 2. The Grand Opening will kick off with a community parade in our downtown and will be followed by a celebration that will include family entertainment, local food, and retail vendors, and will also showcase our Falls Downtown Friday events that will take place this summer along the riverfront.

Last summer, a team of volunteers led by Getta Kutuchief from Summit County Juvenile Court, Kathy Romito from Western Reserve Hospital, and CDBG Administrator Kelli Crawford-Smith, planned and delivered Falls Downtown Fridays. With the shortened season due to the construction schedule, there were four events that offered something for everyone. They were family and pet-friendly while celebrating our local restaurants, retail vendors, and local entertainment. This year's Falls Downtown Fridays is sponsored by Cascade Auto Group, the City of Cuyahoga Falls, and Western Reserve Hospital and will return with an expanded schedule of events. A group of community and business leaders is hard at work and planning is currently underway to deliver another summer of diverse entertainment and family fun along Front Street. This summer, residents, and visitors will enjoy Bebop on the Block, River Rock Fest, Crafty Mart, Stars and Stripes: Honoring our Local Heroes, Taste of the Falls, Kids Fest, and finally, Soul, Rhythm, and Brews. All of the events are family and pet-friendly, and we cannot wait to activate and showcase our new Downtown Cuyahoga Falls. For more information on each of these events, please visit our city website. I look forward to seeing all of you down there this summer and also at our three returning festivals Festa Italiana, the Irish Festival, and Oktoberfest.

We are fortunate to be able to plan and produce our downtown events because of the support of our residents and business community who give of their time and talents to make Cuyahoga Falls a better place to live. We have been incredibly fortunate also to have a group that is forming across the City to make our neighborhoods stronger and more closely-knit. I want to thank all of you who are participating in the Neighborhood Excellence Initiative. Part of the Neighborhood

Excellence Initiative is a call to action asking for residents to be Neighborhood Ambassadors. The Ambassadors serve as a local point-person in their respective neighborhoods to work with city leaders to help identify issues and help inform neighbors about beneficial services and programs that are provided by the city. Because of their efforts, we were able to have a 3-on-3 basketball tournament, had volunteers raking leaves for seniors, installed little free libraries, and implemented a greeting card drive, among other events. Community involvement matters and this is another reason why life is better here in Cuyahoga Falls. We now have well over 100 Ambassadors throughout our community, and I look forward to additional engagement and expanded projects in the coming year. If you would like to become a Neighborhood Ambassador, we would be honored to have you.

When I first took office back in 2014, I made some promises that I fully intend to keep. I promised that I would increase communication with residents, work to strengthen our parks and neighborhoods, and that I would identify any inefficiencies or gaps in our departments and services and address them to make sure that all of our residents and business owners are best served.

In regards to increasing and improving communication between City Hall and residents, I have always believed that our services and programs are only as good as the number of people who know about the benefits provided. Social media has provided me with an incredible outlet to stay in contact with residents through my Facebook page, Instagram, CFO Alerts, and NextDoor. We have continued to publish our city newsletter, the City of Cuyahoga Falls Community Report and Citizen Update. The Falls News Press is also publishing my monthly “Mayor’s Minutes,” to allow an added resource to help keep residents up-to-date about what is happening in the city. I continue to keep office hours for First Tuesday and make home visits through the Take 10 program so that I may visit with residents, hear concerns, and discuss potential solutions to a variety of issues. We have also been able to increase communication efforts through our radio station, 96.1 WCFI-FM and our revamped city website. Our website has been imperative in serving as a marketing tool to help attract businesses, residents, and tourists alike.

The work of strengthening our neighborhoods and increasing our communication with residents is not only necessary, but it is transforming our City. To continue to improve upon these efforts, I think it is imperative that we begin to better streamline our Neighborhood Excellence Initiative, communications, and community outreach to make sure that our residents are served to the best of our abilities through our available resources. As such, I am announcing my plans to take legislation to City Council to create the Department of Neighborhood Excellence, Communications, and Community Outreach. This Department will be responsible for overseeing the Neighborhood Excellence Initiative and Neighborhood Ambassadors to ensure that our neighborhoods continue to grow and thrive, that relationships continue to be strengthened, and that our neighbors are well informed about the programs and services that are offered to all residents. We can help work to ensure that everyone who lives in our City has a sense of place and sense of belonging. Next, we will continue to increase our communication through social media, our website, and correspondence through print materials such as our newsletter. We will continue to find and utilize new avenues of communication as technology evolves, and we will continue to grow and strengthen our relationships with community organizations, support service providers, and our schools. The implementation of this Department is cost-neutral.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the voters of the City of Cuyahoga Falls for taking part in this election and allowing me the great honor of another term to serve as your Mayor. The election is behind us, and we now move beyond it as united citizens with a strong sense of community and pride in our neighborhoods.

My Administration and I will continue to invest in roads through our aggressive paving program and infrastructure improvements. We will continue to redevelop and revitalize our downtown to restore vibrancy to the core of our city and will continue to focus on economic development opportunities to bring new businesses and additional jobs throughout the city. Additionally, we will work to cultivate our Neighborhood Excellence Initiative and increase communication in an effort to actively engage our residents through empowerment and strategic investments.

With that, I am proud to report that our State of the City is exceptional. Over the past four years, we have come a long way, but there is still work left to be done.

I remain grateful and humble for the privilege to continue to serve as your Mayor. My door is always open, and I look forward to working with you as we continue the momentum of moving our great city forward. Great progress is upon us, and together, as a community, we will succeed. Thank you.
