



State of the City Speech

March 13, 2014

Thank you to the Gahanna Venture Crew 797 of the Boy Scouts of America for the presentation of the Colors and leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance this evening. Venturing is a co-ed, high adventure scouting program for youth ages 14-21. I have the privilege of working with these future leaders, and I am very proud of this Crew and the adults who volunteer to guide them. Crew 797 is graciously sponsored by Gahanna American Legion Post 797.

Scouts, you are dismissed.

Good evening and welcome to our 3rd annual State of the City address.

I would like to recognize our elected officials and members of Council who have joined us this evening. Thank you for your leadership and service to our community.

I would also like to acknowledge and sincerely thank our dedicated City Staff. Our successes as a City, are due in large part to their talent, hard work and commitment to serve the citizens of Gahanna each and every day.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you for joining us this evening and for all that YOU do, to make Gahanna a great place to live, work and call home. For the past 27 years, my family and I have been fortunate and blessed to call Gahanna our home. As an elected official, I have had the privilege to humbly serve this community for 22 years and serve as your Mayor for nearly 13 years now. I remain grateful for the privilege to serve you.

From our excellent school system, abundant places of worship, convenient access to the airport and downtown Columbus, strong business community and plentiful retail offerings; to our wonderfully livable neighborhoods, beautiful parks and multi-use trail system, Gahanna is a city that has much to offer. Even with all of the great amenities our city provides, I would say it's first and foremost our citizens- each and every one of you, that make Gahanna such a special place to call home.

Tonight I would like to begin a new tradition and take a moment to recognize just a few individuals who have made us especially proud in the last year.

Gahanna has been the home of many successful people in our central Ohio region. For example, last year Gahanna resident Stephen Garland was honored by 10TV and Nationwide Insurance with the Jefferson Award for his efforts in ensuring that 5,000 children and teens at 43 community sites had meals during the summer months in central Ohio. The Jefferson

Award honors the contributions of individuals who fulfill a need for service and help to make communities in central Ohio better.

This past September, we honored and recognized Jim Grote and Jane Grote Abell of Donatos Pizza, a company headquartered right here in Gahanna for many years, on their 50th anniversary. Not only have they provided job opportunities for so many, but the Grotes have a long history of service and giving back, that we value so much among our business community leaders.

Last year we also honored long-time Gahanna resident Bunnie Geroux on her 90th birthday. She was recognized for her many contributions to our community, including her passion to educate the public on the benefits and usefulness of herbs, and their role in Gahanna's history. This legacy continues today, at the Ohio Herb Education Center that Bunnie founded in 1999, and with herbal influences throughout Gahanna. Bunnie has served Gahanna in so many ways over many years; we are so fortunate to have her as one of our own.

I salute each of these individuals on their achievements. But these are just a few examples of those in our community who are making a difference.

Each day, I see many of YOU making a difference through Gahanna's many service, civic and religious organizations, as well as through personal initiatives, and these volunteer efforts are greatly appreciated.

This past year Gahanna Residents in Need (GRIN), a community-wide, faith-based organization, has re-energized and is working to expand its outreach to provide food, clothing and other services to local families in need. We are grateful for the generosity of this community for its support of GRIN, and for all that our many volunteer groups do to help our fellow neighbors during tough times.

We have experienced a challenging winter this year.

Thank you to those of you that assisted in our snow clearing efforts, by clearing your sidewalks for our students and pedestrians, or by lending a helping hand to a neighbor unable to shovel their driveway.

It's these simple acts of kindness and strong community spirit that bind us together, to make Gahanna more than just a city, but a welcoming community for all.

Gahanna today is a city of more than 33,000 residents, a destination attraction for tourists and home to a healthy variety of businesses, large and small. Although we have seen tremendous growth over the last thirty years, I am pleased that we are still able, in so many ways, to maintain the values and charm of a small town.

Last year, Gahanna was recognized by Ohio Magazine as one of the '*2013-2014 Best Hometowns.*' We were among ONLY five cities in the state to receive this honor. Gahanna was selected in part for the wonderful amenities our city has to offer, including:

- 775 acres of beautiful parks and 13 miles of trails
- Community events such as the Creekside Blues and Jazz Festival,

- And our wonderful Downtown and Creekside District

We were selected not only for these attractions, but also for our excellent school system, retail offerings, culture and heritage, but most importantly for our community spirit.

We are very proud and honored to receive this recognition. I'd like to extend special thanks to the Gahanna Convention & Visitors Bureau for their efforts in helping Gahanna achieve this designation, and for making Gahanna an exceptional destination for visitors.

Earlier this year, we partnered with the Gahanna CVB to launch a '*Best Hometown*' photo contest in honor of this recognition. Tonight, the winning photos were unveiled here at City Hall. We had some great photo submissions, so please take a moment to view them in our front lobby. The photos will remain on exhibit until the end of April.

This evening, I want to share some of our successes and challenges as a city in 2013, our plans and progress to date in 2014, and our path forward for 2015 and beyond.

I'd like to talk about some of our initiatives and successes last year through the focus of our core functions and missions as your local government.

One of our primary responsibilities is, and always will be, public safety. In 2013, working diligently to maintain the safety and well being of our citizens, the Gahanna Police Department responded to more than 39,000 calls for service. That's more than one call per citizen, last year alone. This number continues to increase every year, and we are responding with fewer officers on the street than in the past. Our professional police dispatcher unit answered emergency 9-1-1 calls in three seconds or less.

The average response time for officers on priority calls (those involving threats to life or property) was two minutes or less.

In an effort to engage homeowners about safety concerns impacting their neighborhoods, and to get valuable feedback and reports of citizen concerns, our police chief, joined by employees from many city departments, meets monthly with the leaders of many civic groups and homeowner associations, representing 25 neighborhoods and more than 13,000 households in Gahanna.

Thanks in part to the leadership of Chief Dennis Murphy and the outstanding efforts of our highly trained police force, we have seen a 12 percent reduction in violent and property crimes in 2013.

Another essential aspect of public safety, especially in our post 9- eleven world, is emergency management. In 2013, on behalf of the City of Gahanna, I chaired the Executive Committee of the Franklin County Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency. Gahanna's emergency management efforts, directed by General Jim Williams for the past 14 years, play a vital role in planning, preparing, and conducting exercises, and communicating essential information to our citizens to help us prepare for high risk emergency situations.

Another core responsibility of your local government is the engineering, construction and maintenance of critical infrastructure, including our roadways; and our water, sewer and stormwater utility systems.

Last year, our Public Service department, led by Service Director Dottie Franey and City Engineer Karl Wetherholt, responded to more than 1,900 water-related service calls including emergency water line repairs and meter replacements.

Using an innovative tool, our Advanced Metering Infrastructure system, we were able to locate and resolve many waterline leaks for customers this past year, saving our customers hundreds of dollars on each occurrence.

Maintaining the safety and condition of our streets is another core responsibility of local government. We continued our west side street rebuild program in 2013, as well as our citywide asphalt overlay and crack seal maintenance programs. We also repaired more than 4,600 potholes. Given the harsh winter we have just experienced, we expect this number will greatly increase this season.

In an effort to improve our water quality for residents and reduce storm water runoff, we completed an innovative stormwater project on Farmwood Place-that allows storm water runoff to infiltrate underground gravel bed. We believe that this pilot project will serve as a foundation for future projects in the watershed, and help address areas experiencing streambank erosion.

More than just aesthetics, our parks, trails and greenways provide an enhanced quality of life for our residents and help support economic development for our city. A vital Parks and Recreation program is, in my opinion, a core service of local government, and is essential for any city that strives to be exceptional. Last year, through the Clean Ohio Trails Fund, we were able to leverage a half million dollar grant to continue our development of the Big Walnut Trail - a project that, once completed, will help improve connectivity and access for Gahanna citizens. Gahanna's Parks and Recreation Department, led by Director Tony Collins, provided Gahanna citizens with a rich variety of parks and recreation facilities, activities, events, and programs in 2013.

The health of any city is judged in large measure by its economic success.

I am proud to report that in 2013, the City of Gahanna's bond rating was upgraded to AA+ by Standard & Poores'. We received this upgrade primarily due to our strong local and regional economy, budgetary flexibility, ample reserves, strong management and financial policies. Our Finance Department, led by Director Jennifer Teal, continued the process of reinventing the City's budget and appropriations documents to align with best practices. The goal was to really tell the story about how the City operates with the resources we have and we have made great strides in accomplishing that goal. In addition, finance personnel have ensured that all our major financial documents are quickly available in their entirety on our city website for citizens to access at any time.

Economic Development efforts and investments continue to play a larger and larger role for the success of our local government . I am happy to report that nearly 50 new businesses (a 60%

increase from 2012), have moved into Gahanna and have committed to bring more than 500 jobs to our city over the next few years.

At Creekside, we are pleased that the new owner, Strathmore Development, has continued their investment in our community by working to complete their residential building, and by bringing new retail, restaurant and service providers including Ameriprise Financial, Ciao Vino Italian Kitchen, Three Creeks Coffee, Yudu Salon and Local Cantina Restaurant, just to name a few. I am happy to announce that the Residences at Creekside are 88% occupied and are on track to be completed by the end of the second quarter this year.

Gahanna's Planning and Development Department, led by Director Anthony Jones, saw a strong uptick in activity in 2013. This department encompasses not only economic development, but city planning, building and inspection, and zoning and code enforcement divisions.

In 2013, the City Administration created the Hamilton Road Corridor Plan. This plan spans Hamilton Road from I-270 to Clark State Road. The intent of the plan is to guide future investment to ensure that the corridor is developed in a well-planned, pedestrian friendly manner. This plan is significant because it will empower businesses with confidence they need to know that their investment is safe and will be complimented by future investment in the area. This plan will add to the success of the corridor.

In 2013, the City Administration created the Central Park Incentive District, which will leverage private investment to generate new revenue that will fund needed public infrastructure projects. These infrastructure projects then in turn will help to support additional private investment. It is a cycle of success that will help make Gahanna economically sustainable in the long run.

One of my administration's top priorities has been to increase transparency and frequency in providing relevant information to citizens.

Last year, we provided more frequent and consistent updates through a variety of communication channels including our e-newsletter, social media and the City's website, along with traditional media outlets.

We also partnered with Gahanna TV to launch a new online video series, *Get to Know Gahanna*, which helps citizens better understand how our city works.

In an effort to expand upon our public outreach and engagement efforts last year, we embarked on an informational and educational tour. This effort was created to help inform Gahanna citizens about the income tax reform proposal and how city services are funded, to learn about issues important to the community, and to answer questions about how our City works. Over the course of last year, we met with nearly 75 groups including homeowner associations, business organizations, social, civic and community service groups, religious communities and parent teacher organizations.

We continued our efforts of public engagement throughout the year, by inviting Gahanna citizens to attend a number of public hearings on a variety of key issues affecting our community and inviting residents and businesses to share their ideas.

As a City, one of our strategies to reinvent the way we do business is through innovation, and constant process improvement, to ensure we are relevant, effective and efficient in the services we provide to our citizens.

In continuing our efforts to improve efficiency in our operations, we sent two of our Directors to LeanOhio Green Belt Training in 2013. Finance Director Jennifer Teal and Parks and Recreation Director Tony Collins were the first local government officials in Ohio to participate in this statewide initiative to reduce waste and promote efficiency within our operations. Their shared training has already been instrumental in helping us identify and improve efficiencies. This unique training opportunity was provided at no cost to the City.

Of course, in order for the city to provide these core services to our citizens, there are key individuals and departments that provide essential support. Rounding out my team of directors and managers is Director of Human Resources Sue Wadley, Information Technology, currently led by Brandon McCorkle, Public Information Manager Niel Jurist, and Mayor's Court Clerk Amanda Parker. The Council Office, managed by our new Clerk Kim McWilliams, and the City Attorney's office complete the departments at city hall who served you in 2013.

The danger of listing individuals is forgetting someone, but time does not allow me to mention all our valuable employees by name, as much as I would like to do so. I am grateful to the many citizens who take the time to contact us and thank those employees who have served them well. That effort means a great deal.

Last year, we were able to make good progress toward achieving our goals. Despite these successes, however, Gahanna faces the increasing challenge of providing outstanding local government services at a sustainable level, with rising costs, higher citizen expectations and fewer available financial resources. THIS is our central challenge for 2014 and beyond.

During last year's State of the City address, I presented our five-year revenue and expense forecast for 2013-2017. The forecast allowed us to identify an average \$8 million dollar annual gap between our ongoing revenue sources and what it would cost to fund both our ongoing operations and the estimated cost for completion of a host of capital infrastructure improvement projects that were identified in our capital needs assessment.

In an effort to bridge this gap, we proposed an income tax reform initiative; however the measure was twice defeated at the polls last year.

Last June, we presented our 2014 Tax Budget and Five-Year Forecast to City Council. We identified a number of non-core services and improvement projects that would not occur in 2013 and 2014 if sufficient revenues were not realized.

We went a step further in our financial planning and outlined a number of reductions that needed to occur in order for Gahanna to remain sustainable in 2015 and beyond. Some of the reductions included: closing the swimming pools and the Senior Center, reducing parks and athletic field maintenance, cutting long-standing community events and some of our parks and recreation programming, as well as additional city staff reductions.

Since November, my administration and I, along with City Council, community leaders and citizens alike - have had some time to reflect on and assess our current financial situation, and to consider alternatives and new solutions. Now that we have a decision from voters on the level of investment our taxpayers are willing to make in our city, we are hard at work. We have embarked on the difficult path of creating a plan for long-term financial sustainability for the City. This process includes decision making regarding our core priorities, and simply put, what programs and services we will or will not be able to offer directly in the near future.

Some of the proposed reductions outlined last June were not funded this year and have already gone into effect.

One of the signature events we look forward to each February is our Groundhog Day Economic Forecast Breakfast. Since the city was unable to sponsor this year's event, the Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) stepped up and worked with corporate sponsors to provide this valuable 17 year tradition for more than 200 regional business leaders and potential investors

Last week, Parks and Recreation released our Spring/Summer Gateway Program Guide, which reflected reductions to some of our program offerings.

One of the changes includes the elimination of many of our long-standing and loved community events such as *Music in the Park*, *2nd Saturdays*, *Fireside Fridays*, *Backyard Campouts*, *Create & Play*, *Party in the Park* and our Grandparent Series.

Thanks to our community partner, the Gahanna Parks & Recreation Foundation we will be able to continue the tradition our Creekside Live Series this summer

We have received a number of inquiries from citizens regarding the future of our swimming pools and the Senior Center.

Tonight, , I want to reaffirm that all our pools will be open this summer, barring any catastrophic failure of our 50 year old pool facility. Our Parks & Recreation staff are gearing up already this year to serve the 5,000 citizens that purchase pool memberships each year.

However, our current operational forecast does not support the City operating pools in 2015. We have begun formal conversations with potential private partners about operating the pools in the future. Barring any additional revenues dedicated to recreation, the city is not currently planning to operate the pools as public facilities beginning next year. We do hope we can find a private operator to keep them open and invest in our aquatic facilities for future use.

The Senior Center will remain open this year and will continue to offer existing programming. We have expanded its usage and will now offer active adult programming to all adults in Gahanna. Additionally, the center is now available to the community as a rental space. This change is preferable to simply closing the building, as we first feared. We know change is often difficult, and many seniors are concerned about no longer having the exclusive use of this building. But without additional revenue, or possible corporate sponsorship, this is the best plan moving forward to retain as much senior programming as possible for our senior citizen community.

In parks and recreation particularly, and for many city efforts, our new model will, out of necessity, be one where government may no longer provide as many programs or services, but will continue to provide the opportunity for others to do so. As an example of this model, in past years the city has provided summer day camp for our youth at two facilities, Hannah Park as well as Friendship Park. This year, the City will only operate day camp at Hannah Park, which will create many opportunities for savings. However, Friendship Park will still be fully utilized this summer. Our long time private partner, Jump Start Sports, will operate a half-day sports and a full day traditional day camp at Friendship Park.

While we may not be able to provide the same level of services and amenities that many of our citizens have grown accustomed to over the years, we are committed to ensuring that the services we do continue to provide will be done well. We will remain focused on the future sustainability of Gahanna in all that we do and all that we fund.

As we reinvent our local government, innovation remains a key component in the process. City Council and the administration recognize the importance of measuring our performance as one strategy for spurring innovation. This year, we will be launching a performance measurement dashboard that will capture key performance measures City-wide and communicate them to citizens throughout the year.

We will continue our process improvement efforts as part of the LeanOhio initiative. For example, we recently analyzed and "*leaned up*" our accounts payable process. This project has reduced the number of steps and decision points associated with paying our vendors by 30 percent. Streamlining this process has reduced wait times for local businesses to receive payment for services rendered and has improved our internal workflow and reduced staff workloads.

Some things we know to be true.

Over the past few years, there has been much discussion about our nation's aging infrastructure and the reality of not having the funds to make the necessary repairs.

We know Gahanna is not exempt.

Age, use and climate have taken a toll our roads. Given the typical lifespan of a road is 25 years, we know that in order to keep our road quality at an acceptable level, and reduce the incidence of continued costly temporary repairs, we will invest in a sustainable streets program.

As our world continues to change, so do the nature of crimes in our community. Our police department's response and preparedness to addressing these crimes will need to keep pace. We will need to maintain a highly trained police force, at an acceptable force strength, properly equipped, in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Gahanna citizens.

We know that our citizens' expectations of city government remain high. We know parks, trails, and greenways are essential components of a great community. Having greater

connectivity and access will continue our efforts to enhance the quality of life for our residents and opportunities for favorable economic development.

We know that in order to retain and attract talented public servants for our city, we must continue to invest in our employees and make sure they are ALL compensated fairly, at market rates, for the exceptional services they provide to citizens.

We know that in order to remain competitive in the region, we must continue to encourage investment and development in Gahanna, and accomplish the planning necessary to make good development happen.

Since the beginning of the year, my administration and City Council have been working diligently together to address our challenges and to explore strategies to help move our City forward.

We have prepared a newly revised five year financial outlook, based on current data, which includes revised expenditures and revised funding strategies.

City council is working hard with the administration to revise the City's financial reserves policy, to more accurately reflect our exposure to risk, both from natural disasters as well as from future economic downturns.

Council and the administration are working through a comprehensive process, adapted from the LeanOhio Green Belt training, to create a plan for long-term financial sustainability. We expect that this process will yield many outputs by the end of this year, most notably the 2015 budget. Throughout this process, we will gather the necessary data, solicit resident input, and create a sustainable plan for City operations. We will review and prioritize capital needs and explore possible alternatives for funding them. We will be transparent in communicating information about our plans by sharing information as we proceed. As this process moves forward, we plan to dedicate a page on our website to provide updates and information on next steps so that you remain engaged during this important process.

As we envision the future for our city, let us continue to ask ourselves, "What Kind of city do we want Gahanna to be?"

We recognize the difficult task before us and we acknowledge these obstacles will not be easy to overcome. However, I want you to know your city is prepared to take on this challenge.

In the end, the strength of our city lies in our ability to come together to make Gahanna the great city we all know it is, and can continue to be. We are forging a new path, but we cannot do this alone. We need your help.

We need more citizen input, advice and ideas, so that the plan going forward is one that the majority of our citizens can get behind and actively support.

I believe that we will need to find new sources of revenue, if we are to fulfill our citizens' expectations of our local government. Or, we as a community will need to limit our expectations to fit our current level of funding.

We are going to need community partners to step up to ensure that many of the events and programs we have come to love and expect will remain in our city.

In closing, I want you to know that my team and I remain focused, energized and ready to confront the task before us. As I always have, I remain proud to call Gahanna my city, my home. I'm proud of what we have accomplished in 2013, and I look forward to creating a new and innovative path ahead in 2014 and beyond. Finally, I look forward to working with each of you as we together serve this great city. Thank you for joining me this evening. As always, I remain in your service. Goodnight.