

**UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**  
**FEBRUARY 9, 2022**  
**Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan**

Good evening, and welcome to the State of the City.

The people who work in city government work diligently to serve this community. I am proud to have them in this administration.

Our directors, chiefs, department heads, and every single employee here all understand the goals of the administration, and they have been empowered to use their expertise in service to the city and its residents.

The people who serve this community are the greatest asset the city has. I see it every day in the commitment, the work ethic, the joy of coming to work in a community that values public service. It is an honor to work with them, just as it is an honor to serve this community.

Let us continue to work together to serve this city, face the challenges ahead, and turn obstacles into opportunities to advance and improve this city.

**SONGS YOU KNOW BY HEART.**

Before looking to the future, let's take a listen to the accomplishments, or Greatest Hits if you will, of my first term as your mayor. Here's what we accomplished together the last four years:

- The rebuilding of the fire department
- The reopening of the Fire Prevention Bureau
- The creation of the Office of Community Policing
- The creation of the city's first Economic Development Department

- The rebranding of the City and the reclamation of our civic identity
- The strides in communication, transparency and openness
- Our Mosaic city magazine,
- All of the clean audits of our fully rebuilt and professionalized finance department
- The complete redo of our building department
- The creation of the office of Housing and Community Development to keep this City of Beautiful Homes beautiful
- The creation of our CIC to build houses again, and our first new housing development since the 1970s breaking ground this spring
- The CRA and its tax incentives which have driven investment and reinvestment in our community
- The elevation of Walter Stinson Community Park as a center of our community
- And perhaps most importantly, your perseverance during the pandemic coupled with our renewed dedication to racial and social justice.

That list may be music to your ears. It is not a complete catalog. It speaks of Greatest Hits, and doesn't even explore the deep tracks.

I will push this metaphor further. Like Karen Carpenter, I've been saying for the last year "We've only just begun." Because we are not here to rest on our laurels. We are not here to allow this work to become routine. We are here to continue the relentless pursuit of seeking the best, demanding the best, achieving the best, and never being satisfied with anything less.

Things that ought to be done today – and can be done today – should not be pushed off for another year or more. While we have accomplished so much in four short years, there is always Janet Jackson there to remind us "What Have You Done for Me Lately?"

Well, let's go over that now.

In my first year in office, we created our first Economic Development Department. We treat Economic Development as something we seek, plan, and make happen every day.

Since then, Economic Development Director Susan Drucker has been busy at work. Our focus is on small business and on business outreach. We are working with developers on development plans. 2021 saw new businesses come to town, with Goodwill Industries, Walk In Urgent Care, and The Joint Chiropractic. New restaurants came to town, and we have more coming like Sauce the City, Byrdcode, Primoz Pizza. The incoming new development at Cedar-Taylor, both business and residential, is a credit to the work of our Economic Development department.

When it comes to University Square, we will do what we need to do to make this redevelopment happen. Our residents deserve this. The City is in the process of acquiring the core retail parcel, long vacant and blighted, through eminent domain. We are intervening, as it will not happen without our intervention.

When finally redeveloped, University Square will bring housing and jobs to our community. It will enhance our community, and strengthen our tax base. We are working with the developers, with Target, among other stakeholders, to ensure this happens.

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District is ever committed to University Heights, and will be making further investment in the Wiley property to consolidate operations in University Heights. They have also pledged to work with the City on another project of mutual interest, as we begin looking to move the Service Yard and Service Garage into a larger modern facility off the current City Hall site.

Beginning in December 2019, the administration worked with Congregation Zichron Chaim on the planning of a new synagogue building to address their growing needs, and which will better serve the neighborhood and the community. I am pleased to report that the official ground breaking was last month. This is exactly the kind of project that builds community, and I am proud to support it.

Beyond these projects, there is more in the pipeline. Much more. Tonight, I cannot share more about them. This much I *can* tell you. You will learn about them soon. They will be transformative in this city. And the people we are working with behind the scenes are as eager as I am to break ground and proceed this calendar year.

#### SUMMERTIME.

It's been a long and cold winter, but I promise you that summer will arrive. Summer will bring familiar traditions, and two new events.

First, I have assembled a Citizens Advisory Committee on Sustainability. We are looking at ways to improve recycling pickup, to promote composting and other sustainable practices. We are planning to hold the City's first Sustainability Fair this summer. Details will be forthcoming.

2022 will see University Heights' first Juneteenth celebration. Just as the federal government recognized Juneteenth as a federal holiday last year, the City of University Heights now recognizes Juneteenth as a City Holiday. June 19<sup>th</sup> falls on a Sunday this year, so look for announcements this spring for details of the celebration. And yes, city offices will be closed on Monday June 20<sup>th</sup>.

Our annual parade will return to its traditional spot on the calendar – Memorial Day. Our parade continues to be our single

largest event in the city, as well as our official kickoff of the summer season. Our new Special Projects Coordinator Ben Schaefer will lead the planning for the parade, working in concert with our staff and community to plan and execute this special event.

And speaking of concerts...

[roll summer concert video]

The music won't stop with the end of summer. Fall Fest will return on Sunday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> at The Walt. Carlos Jones and the PLUS Band will headline the event, with special guest Diana Chittester. Wizbang Circus will return, and we'll have more vendors than ever. Last year's Fall Fest drew an estimated 2000 people, and we anticipate our biggest and best Fall Fest yet.

## REGIONALISM.

The needs of the region require we all work together, regardless of city or county borders, for the common interest.

Last year I chaired the Heights Hillcrest Communications Center Board of Trustees, leading to its merger with Chagrin Valley Dispatch. The result will be improved 911 service. Not only will the merger save money, it will save lives through faster response times.

As your mayor, I have been actively engaged on the Board of Northeast Ohio Area Coordinating Agency, and on the Board of the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission.

I serve on the Executive Committee of the Cuyahoga County Mayors and Managers Association, and as Secretary of the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District Suburban Council of Governments.

These committees are working on the Hyperloop, Irishtown Bend, and improved access to the Lakefront. We're also studying local tax reform, both out of fairness and in an attempt to make Northeast Ohio more competitive.

I am heartened by the energy and commitment to the region expressed by Cleveland's new Mayor Justin Bibb. Closer to home, Cleveland Heights' first elected Mayor Kahlil Seren is an open and willing partner to the joint needs and goals of our greater Heights community, and I look forward to doing wonderful things together. South Euclid's Mayor Georgine Welo and Shaker Heights' Mayor David Weiss have been reliable partners on an array of matters. And like Martin Horwitz before him, I look forward to working together with Beachwood's new Mayor Justin Berns.

When it comes to our community partners who serve our shared constituencies, I have met recently with the leadership of the CH-UH School District, the Heights Libraries, and Cleveland Heights City Government, to resume the four-way meetings of our boards and councils that began under my administration and were interrupted by the pandemic. Three meetings will be held in 2022, all at Cleveland Heights Rec Center.

We all want these meetings to be not just public relations, but actual substantive meetings about the issues that face our community, and how we can work together to better serve our constituents.

It is in better serving our constituents that I have called the Administration's 2022 Budget, "Putting People First." Let's take a look at that now.

## THE 2022 BUDGET: PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST.

My budget priorities are what University Heights residents have been asking for over the last few years.

Infrastructure. You want the roads fixed and the curbs, too. You insist on a modern and sustainable approach to improved recycling. It's also time to make new city facilities a reality.

I've heard you, and your priorities are my priorities. With this budget, we are Putting People First.

## THE CEDAR ROAD PROJECT.

The much-anticipated Cedar Road Project is the resurfacing of the road and the improvement of pedestrian crossings on Cedar Road from South Taylor Road to South Green Road in University Heights and South Euclid.

This project is being done in partnership with the City of South Euclid, and uses funds from NOACA, Cuyahoga County, South Euclid, and University Heights. The engineering has been completed, and after consultation with ODOT, the project is ready to proceed in 2022.

The condition of Cedar Road requires action this year. In addition, ODOT's estimated cost of the Cedar Road project has already gone up 25% since last year. Delay will not make this project any cheaper.

## ROAD RESURFACING AND COMPLETE CURB REPLACEMENT.

We must change how we maintain our streets. For years, University Heights has resurfaced city streets, but has been doing only spot replacement of curbs. It's like wearing a new suit with scuffed up old shoes. It looks terrible.

The policy of spot replacement has resulted in spotty outcomes. Some of our streets have mismatched curbs, and curbs that have sunken from years of inattention. They don't come back on their own.

On most residential streets, the curbs are original to the street construction. This means many of our curbs are nearly a century old or older.

I've heard from residents from all corners of University Heights on this issue. They're right. We need to do better. And this year, we will.

As I announced in November 2021, beginning this year, it is the administration's policy that full curb replacement is to be done with every resurfacing project. Full curb replacement is included in the 2022 roads program estimate.

My Putting People First Budget would resurface Bushnell Road from Edgerton Road to Warrensville Center Road, White Road, and Glendon Road from Meadowbrook to Silsby. None of these streets have been resurfaced since the 1990's.

Ensuring that we do full curb replacement on projects going forward is among the most responsive things we can do as a local government.

## MODERNIZED RECYCLING.

University Heights, I hear you. You want a greener city. One of the ways we do that is by modernizing recycling.

University Heights currently has one of the most inefficient recycling programs in Cuyahoga County. With only 6% of our solid waste recycled, University Heights has the third lowest recycling among Cuyahoga County suburbs.



We aim to turn that around. It requires residential collection of loose recycling instead of bagged recycling.

Under this budget, residents will no longer have to shop for blue recycling bags for their recyclables.

In our current system, we send blue bags filled with recyclables to Kimble's facility in Twinsburg for processing. The bags are ripped open, the contents are dumped onto a conveyor belt, and the torn blue bags themselves are then sent to a landfill. It's wasteful, and frankly, it goes beyond the whole intent of recycling.

It's also costly. Since 2020, Kimble charges the City 50% more to process bagged recycling than it charges other communities for the processing of loose recycling.

We can do better. My budget provides for one 64-gallon recycling cart on wheels for every household currently in University Heights. Residents may place their recyclables directly in the cart, loose and without a blue bag. The Service Department already has a cart flipper on hand for handling the carts. All we need now are the carts.

With the increase of mail order delivery for goods, especially since the pandemic, the carts are simply better suited for the volume of cardboard we use as residents. Currently, loose cardboard that isn't tied or bagged is frequently discarded with the rubbish instead of the recycling, as our current method of pickup is not compatible with handling a high volume of cardboard. Those two fixed cans on the fronts of the rubbish scooters simply don't hold cardboard well. Larger bins on the rubbish scooters aren't feasible or safe.

People want to do the right thing with all of their cardboard. Understanding that the City doesn't handle cardboard well when we pick it up, we have allowed residents to bring their cardboard

directly to the service yard to place in the blue cardboard container. Well intentioned residents then overfill the cardboard container on site. Turns out we don't handle it well here either. Cardboard intended for recycling gets wet and/or contaminated. The yard is left a mess. And there isn't room for additional containers.

We can do better, and with the recycling carts in this budget, we will do better for our residents, and yes, for the planet.

The time to do this is now. We commissioned a solid waste study, which was completed in May 2020, and have the expert opinion that this is the way forward. It is unlikely that future recycling bids will even offer the processing of bagged recycling.

Time is running out. By acting now, we can avoid disruption of our residential recycling pickup program by modernizing it, while achieving better overall recycling results – all while maintaining the high level of service our residents expect, deserve, and pay for.

We can do this. Drive around. It's being done in South Euclid, in Lyndhurst, in Beachwood, in Solon. Cleveland Heights is adopting a similar system this spring. We can do it here, and we should do it this year.

## SIGNS O' THE TIMES.

The Priority 1 Signage phase of the City rebranding project was originally scheduled to deploy in 2019. My budget gets our rebranding back on track. In 2022, our new city logo and branding will be seen on new signs welcoming visitors and residents to University Heights.

The Priority 1 Signage includes new primary and secondary gateway signs, new pole mounted gateway signs where space does not allow for a primary or secondary gateway sign. It also

includes permanent signage for Walter Stinson Community Park: a monument sign on the Saybrook end of the park, and a sign utilizing the existing arch on the Fenwick end.

Signs for City Hall, Purvis Park, Gateway Banners, pocket parks and other points of interest will be covered in later phases.

## NEW MUNICIPAL FACILITIES.

Over the last four years, we have increased programming at The Walt. We have moved our summer concert series there. In the summer we have events most weeknights, from Yoga in the Park to Tai Chi in the Park, to Bootcamp in the Park.

Organically, we have seen The Walt transform into a city center. Coffee sales on weekends. Volunteers tending to flower beds. Impromptu performances by musicians. Freecycle meetups. Even as the weather turns, people keep trying to use our community park, even in the cold.

People clearly demand a place to congregate year-round. With new municipal facilities, we can truly achieve the year round programming our residents have been craving. New facilities will help us better serve the whole community and improve service from our police, fire, and service departments. And even host our own city council meetings in our own facilities again one day soon.

The GPD Group will make a presentation to City Council soon on the condition of facilities. In 2022, we should continue transferring money to the Facilities Capital Improvement Fund. Our next steps will include the hiring of a project manager among other professional services.

My budget reflects what we all know - City Hall is obsolete, out of date and inaccessible. There is no gathering space for the community. The buildings for our police, fire, and service

department are also outdated and woefully inadequate. The upcoming issue of Mosaic magazine will feature a detailed article on these conditions.

Suffice it to state: the residents of University Heights expect and deserve better.

City Hall, Fire, and Police would ideally remain located at the current location on the corner of Warrensville Center Road and Silsby Road. Additional property could be acquired for a comprehensive redevelopment. The Service Department remains a suitable candidate for relocation.

Residents need and deserve year-round senior and community programming, and new facilities will allow that to happen. A new City Hall will be environmentally efficient and ADA compliant with community spaces. New buildings for fire and police will allow greater access and help us serve the public more efficiently.

The Firehouse was constructed in 1941, while the Police Station followed in 1953. The “town hall” building was built in 1925, the year Idlewood adopted the name University Heights.

New municipal facilities were studied in the 2003 University Heights Master Plan, and adopted in the updated plan in 2016. We all know it needs to be done. What we are studying is how to get there.

In the meantime, the City will do its part to keep making The Walt a happening place, and do what we can for programming for seniors given the current facilities limitations.

## OUR COMMUNITY CENTERS – THE WALT AND PURVIS PARK.

I jumped into local issues back in 2012, as part of the grassroots effort to build the community park now known as Walter Stinson Community Park. We had great expectations in 2012, even I did not dare to dream of the success The Walt has become.

When the pandemic drove people outdoors, The Walt was one place people could safely gather. The use of The Walt has transformed from seasonal to year-round activity.

The park restrooms were designed for seasonal use only. Currently, they close for the season from Halloween till Memorial Day. Their design requires closure so that winter temperatures don't freeze the pipes.

The 2022 budget has funding towards modifying and heating the restrooms to keep them open year-round.

Turning to Purvis Park, the Beryl Rothschild Pool at Purvis Park has long been our community's greatest amenity. To keep it that way, it is time to paint the pool, paint the waterslide, and replace the poolside lounges and vertical chairs.

Finally, the budget restores the stipend position for Senior Services Coordinator, a position last held by Mr. Walter Stinson, who officially retired for the last time during the COVID-19 pandemic. While we are working with the Heights Libraries to coordinate the eventual resumption of Senior Happenings, a new part time coordinator will be given the latitude to create and arrange senior events that are safe and advisable under the ever-fluid conditions of the pandemic. In Putting People First, we owe it to our seniors to do what we can with what we've got, even with the challenges of COVID variants and our own limited facilities.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY REMAINS PARAMOUNT.**

When I ran for mayor four years ago, I campaigned on rebuilding the Fire Department, and together we did that. We reopened the Fire Prevention Bureau, and opened the Office of Community Policing.

The Putting People First Budget includes funding the Fire Department needs for turnout gear. It continues the funding needed for the Fire Department's voluntary Home Safety Inspection Program that residents may utilize to identify fire risks in their homes.

As for the police department, the budget includes two new police cars, and the funding needed to complete the police radio system upgrade.

Your police, fire, and service employees worked the duration of 2020 without a raise. Working together in negotiating the new Collective Bargaining Agreements with all unions, we all agreed that 2020 would remain a zero raise year, and instead agreed to 3.5% raises beginning in July 2021 and again in 2022. Council has approved these, and the new raises for both years will be paid for largely out of the 2022 budget. The 2022 budget also funds increased health insurance costs.

#### EXTERIOR MAINTENANCE PROGRAM RESTORATION.

The Putting People First Budget restores funding for the exterior home maintenance program for University Heights homeowners. Every homeowner wants to keep their home looking beautiful and up to code, but sometimes needed repairs are often out of their price range. By restoring funding for the exterior home maintenance program, we can support homeowners, maintain property values and ensure University Heights remains "The City of Beautiful Homes."

Established in 2019, the Exterior Maintenance Program provides a 90-10 grant up to \$2,500 to qualified homeowners for resolving an exterior violation. For some prior grant recipients, it was the difference between being able to afford to age in place, or giving up and selling the house.

## THE SERVICE DEPARTMENT AT YOUR SERVICE.

Over the years, the City has increased the workload of the Service Department without adhering to the equipment replacement schedules or addressing their staffing needs. For example, we built and opened an entire new park in 2016, without increasing staff to take care of it

The Putting People First budget recognizes the Service Department's role in the everyday lives of residents. We all hope we will never need to call the police or call for an ambulance, but every week, we need the rubbish and recycling picked up. Every winter, we need the streets plowed. Every fall, we want our leaves picked up. And when the sewers back up, or trees fall in a storm, they are there, day or night.

To better do all that, we must finally address and fill the need to hire two additional service department employees. At times this year, we had no more than one driver and one temp on a rake doing leaf pickup, while everyone else was assigned to solid waste pickup. That isn't sustainable and cannot continue. We need help.

The previous City Council declared late last year that "[t]he City of University Heights shall maintain backyard solid waste collection for its residents." In order to do that, we need more employees. Money for two new full-time laborers is in the budget. To be absolutely clear, we do not need additional staff for my recycling proposal. Instead, these hires are essential to ensuring the timely collection of rubbish, the ongoing improved plowing of streets, and keeping leaf pickup on schedule.

As for equipment, and as scheduled, the budget provides for another new garbage truck, a one-ton pickup truck with plow, and a mower. All are to replace equipment in poor condition that are due or past due to be replaced.

It should be noted that supply chain issues make timely ordering of equipment all the more imperative.

#### IMPROVING INTERNAL OPERATIONS TO BETTER SERVE YOU.

This year will see us formalize at long last a regular IT provider for the City, and we have budgeted for this. This will finish the transition I started four years ago to IT that is proactive and not merely reactive.

With that, we have budgeted for a new website with improved functionality. During the pandemic, we moved special pickups online. Other city payments, like ordering a garage sale permit or for a civil marriage ceremony, are planned to be moved online as well.

We have budgeted for an outside HR consultant to handle the day-to-day HR duties, in a proactive and not merely reactive way. Currently we rely too heavily on department heads to serve as their own HR. This creates problems when we have workers compensation and disciplinary issues. We often end up referring matters to labor counsel that could have been handled more efficiently and more economically by an HR professional. With the adoption and implementation of the new employee handbook, the time is ripe for professionalizing the city's HR functions.

#### PLANNING, BUILDING, AND MAINTAINING THE SUSTAINABLE CITY.

The Building Department budget is actually less now than it was in 2019 thanks to the efficiencies created by SafeBuilt. In late 2020, our City Planner was temporarily promoted to interim manager of Building and Housing while we transitioned to SafeBuilt. Once SafeBuilt came in, he left to pursue another



professional opportunity. We did not fill his position in 2021. Restoring the City Planner position is in the budget for 2022. This is essential to the Community Development function of the Housing and Community Development Department.

The Putting People First budget provides funding for the widely-supported comprehensive zoning code update. The redo of the zoning code is essential to planning by design the University Heights we want to be for decades to come.

## THE STATE OF THE CITY IS STRONG.

Being Mayor is a political position, yes. It's also a calling. And it's also a job, done day in and day out like other jobs, for long hours and off hours, dealing with every problem imaginable and unimaginable. It requires broad expertise, backbone, stamina, and a visible, palpable empathy for the walks and conditions of life.

As your Mayor, I want to leave things better than how I found them, all for the people of University Heights.

Ideally, the person in the job wants that one thing: to leave things better than they found them, while doing everything in their power to achieve that goal.

As I said at my first state of the city address, one year into office:

*"When you are mayor, you have no idea how long you get to do that. I would never want to look back at this time and think I did not do everything I could to improve our city. I never want to look back and think that I held back."*

I have not held back.

Serving as your mayor continues to be the greatest honor of my professional life, even with all the challenges brought on with the

pandemic. I believe in the strength of our ideas. And that the future of our city depends on their fulfillment. I know you believe in them too, which is why you gave me a second term in office. On balance, you favor what I have done for you and for the City with my first four years as your mayor. I will continue to bring my best effort and best judgment. I will continue to bring progress, especially to those who need the hand. I will continue to bring empathy, especially to those who need the heart. And I will continue the work bringing to fruition the plans that are moving this City forward, and chart its course for decades to come.

The state of the city is strong. It is strong because the people of this city recognize that the future of this city is here. We know what we have, we know what we want, and we can get it. We know what steps we must take to move from what we have to what we want.

Four years ago, the city council passed a budget reflective of this then newly elected mayor's campaign platform. Tonight, I extend my hand to the city council to do that once again, so that we together honor the will of the people and the mandate the people put on city government.

What the people want is a sustainable community with prudent investment in its future. What we have now are the resources to do it, and the budget that makes it possible. The next step, is to pass the budget and get to work.

It is a budget that modernizes recycling.

It is a budget that works towards upgrading municipal facilities – from our parks to our city hall campus.

It is a budget that improves critical infrastructure.

It is a budget that builds for the future, through a comprehensive zoning code update, yes, and devoting the resources we need to will into existence the redevelopment of University Square.

It is a budget that is fiscally responsible and prudent, as it does all this while honoring our commitment to keep at least \$2.5 million in reserve.

It is a budget that addresses real needs now.

It is a budget that Puts People First.

It is a budget that seeks to fulfill everything we talked about together on the campaign trail last year. You know what we want, you know what we've got, and you know what it takes to get from what we've got to what we want.

Together, we can get what we want: a modern and sustainable University Heights.

Thank you, and good night.