

UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS STATE OF THE CITY 2023

**John Carroll University, Dolan Science Center, Donahue Auditorium
Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan**

[Intro Music: Rhapsody in Blue by George Gershwin. As it ends, MAYOR takes the stage.]

Members of the Community, Members of Administration and City Employees, Members of City Council, Elected Officials, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen, welcome.

In 1925, John Carroll University announced its decision to move from Ohio City and build its new campus in Idlewood Village.

In celebration of the decision, the village changed its name to University Heights. And the new village hall it built in 1925 bore its new name on the façade.

Also in 1925, musician and composer George Gershwin debuted his jazz piano concerto, Rhapsody in Blue.

He was still writing it the day of its debut at Carnegie Hall. He even improvised sections of it on stage that night. But he could do that because he knew what he wanted to say.

The State of our City is STRONG, and to remain strong, we must keep moving forward. And that ... Depends on each and every one of us.

Since I was elected mayor five years ago, we have accomplished so much together.

We, not I. We.

Together, so many have done so much to move University Heights forward. People in the administration. City employees. Residents. Business owners and their employees. Our places of worship, and those of education.

We've accomplished so much, but we've only just begun. We will not let University Heights fall behind. We must continue to move our city forward.

Tonight, my address will celebrate community members who are moving University Heights forward. I'm going to talk about our schools, K-12 and right here on this campus. Then our comprehensive zoning code update. University Square. Our Service Department and Solid Waste Reform. New municipal facilities. I will turn to community programming and the community calendar. I will discuss our financial position, proposals for 2024 and beyond. I will then recognize some of the folks getting the job done here in city government.

Finally, I am going to talk about the state of our democracy.

So we'll start with something that is less "State of the City" and more "Civic Awards." I want to recognize some of the great people who are working hard to make University Heights an even greater place to live, work, and raise a family.

I wish to recognize Jeffrey Pearl for his work last year as a volunteer in helping to bring a composting drop off site to University Heights. Residents may now sign up with "Rust Belt Riders" to bring their composting to bins located on the East End of Walter Stinson community park. One day I hope that our city will be able to offer curbside composting services as sustainable communities in other parts of the country do. And when we resume the Sustainability Committee later this year, I expect Jeffrey Pearl will be there. because Jeffrey Pearl is helping move our city forward

I turn now to the University Heights Green Team. Elizabeth Englehart and others are out there extolling the virtues of better recycling, holding workshops on how to recycle better, while also hosting community days clearing catch basins and doing clean up. They are the change they want to see in our community. The Green Team has planned an event for May 21st, which will coincide with a memorial tree plaque dedication for Walter Stinson in the park named in his honor. These things are happening because Elizabeth Englehart is helping move our city forward.

Speaking of The Walt, Eran Shiloh leads a group of volunteers known as Friends of the Walt. The Friends helped beautify our park and keep

it beautiful even as the service department remains short staffed. The Walt was looking shabby until Eran and his group got to work. They even got a FutureHeights grant for native plantings. Their good results cannot be disputed; they, together with Eran Shiloh, are helping move our city forward.

Next, I recognize Demetrios Atheneos and his brother Nico for their belief in our community by opening not one but two restaurants in University Heights. I think we all know Chicken Ranch by now, but our first new business of 2023 is also his: Zina Greek Street Food. Demetrios may live in Cleveland Heights, but we're one big happy Heights community. Demetrios Atheneos is helping move our city forward.

Next Rachel and Sarah Gross of Bialy's Bagels. These twin sisters took over Bialy's, a local culinary institution, just before I became mayor of this city. They've already expanded their offerings, adding new bagel flavors. They held their own through the pandemic. They partnered with Libby Stineman at Milk & Cookies to make a savory and sweet Mish Mosh cookie. And now, after much planning, they have begun an expansion of their store space and will begin making and selling bagel sandwiches at their shop.

We have lived to see Geraci's accept credit cards and we will soon see Bialy's Bagels making bagel sandwiches. Rachel and Sarah Gross believe in what they do, and in our community, they are helping move our city forward.

Debra Shearin retired from her day job and opened her Inclusive and Body Positive boutique for women, Timeless Fashion, just a few doors down from Bialy's.

As a former small business owner myself, married to a small business owner (my wife, Gina – over there....), I love the entrepreneurial spirit that causes one to give up the certainty of a steady 40 hour a week job, to work even harder towards something bigger. Debra lives in Euclid, but she chose University Heights to fulfill her dream of running

her own store. Debra believes in University Heights, and she is helping move our city forward.

Bhavesh Patel was born in India and moved to Ohio to seek his fortune. He is the proprietor of Big B's Beverage in South Euclid since 2010; and last year he bought the old Midas muffler shop; put \$700,000 into it; and, just in time for the holidays, opened Heights Beverage. With Heights Beverage we have University Heights' first convenience store on the West End of Cedar Road. It's a beautiful store with an amazing selection of beer and wine. Bhavesh Patel's belief in our community is helping move our city forward.

Chef Victor Searcy moved his award-winning hot chicken sandwich shop "Sauce the City" from Ohio City to University Heights, now located at 14480 Cedar Road. And he has plans for expansion. Victor Searcy could have moved his business anywhere, and he brought it to University Heights. His belief in our community is helping move our city forward.

The same can be said for Amy Roth, who has been sewing for over 40 years. She moved her tailoring business Amy R. Roth and Company to University Heights after years in another nearby community. Amy's belief in our community is helping move our city forward.

Bo Knez, and everyone at Knez Builders, has begun marketing the South Taylor Place Condominiums, listing the first of them for sale on the MLS. It's the city's first new housing development since the 1970s. They did it because they believe in our community. We're working with them because we know they build a superior new home. They have built other new homes already in our city, infill housing on Raymont, Tullamore, Northwood and South Green roads. With thirty homes to come at South Taylor Place, Bo Knez believes in University Heights, and is helping move our city forward.

SCHOOLS

I would be remiss if I didn't mention our schools. University Heights is an attractive place to raise a family, due to its proximity to so many

great schools, public and private. Thank you to the private schools in and around University Heights, including but not limited to, Gesu School, Beaumont, Laurel, Hathaway Brown, Hebrew Academy, Hawken, Gilmour, Ignatius, University School, Fuchs Mizrachi, Gross Schechter, and the Mandel Jewish Day School.

A great city needs a great public school system, and I want to say thank you tonight to Tiger Nation. From the school board, to Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby, to all the teachers and support staff – you’re doing a great job.

Where can you go with an education from Heights High? Where can’t you go? You can go to the Super Bowl, right? And your brother can go too.

More importantly, you can go to college. Great colleges. Put in the work, and you can get a full ride to elite schools, Ivy League schools. In fact, the Heights High Class of 2022 earned \$17.3 million in scholarships from about 200 institutions.

The District has a weighted graduation rate of 88.9%, just shy of a 3-star rating. Heights High School currently has a four-year graduation rate of 87.7% for students who entered the 9th grade in the 2017-2018 school year and graduated in 2021. The five-year graduation rate is 90.7%. The District’s 4-year graduation rate goal, a key component of the District’s 2026 Strategic Plan, is 95%.

While the District’s four-year and five-year rates continue to exceed the state average of 83%, the District will continue to work hard to support all Heights High students towards graduating within four years.

Tiger Nation, I believe in you. And I say to all of you, take a look: there are wonderful things going on in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District. I support our public school district, and will continue to do so.

It's no coincidence that the State of the City is once again being held on the campus of John Carroll University. Our city's fortunes are tied to the fortunes of this university. And vice versa. For years, City Hall and campus ignored each other, sometimes even antagonized each other. Thankfully, those days are behind us. We are partners, and together we are moving forward.

One of the people moving JCU forward is Jeremiah Swetel. He's the Assistant Vice President of Facility and Auxiliary Services. His mission is to lead the way on facilities improvements that will make and keep JCU competitive.

One such improvement is the new JCU Fieldhouse and Event Center, which will be built on South Belvoir Boulevard, a new 63,000-square-foot field house, complete with a 200-meter track.

Currently, JCU track and field athletes train at SPIRE Institute, over 40 miles away in Geneva, and compete exclusively on the road. The Fieldhouse will be on par with those at other schools in JCU's athletic division.

JCU has also announced the South Gateway Project, which will bring to Fairmount Circle mixed-use, student residence living over restaurants and retail, together with a parking garage. There will be new businesses coming to the Circle as part of this redevelopment. And there is opportunity for current favorites to stay as well.

This development will straddle both University Heights and Shaker Heights. I believe it will be good for both cities.

Once this project is complete, it will have a Ripple Effect. Many students will live closer to campus; and, as they move into university housing, this will create opportunities to refurbish student rentals across University Heights, and potentially create room to re-envision Warrensville Center Road.

I welcome John Carroll's investment in itself and in our community. Look, JCU is our city's largest employer, largest economic driver, and

of course our city's namesake. There would be no University Heights without the university. The City government needs to be a reliable partner for these projects. The City Administration has been working closely with JCU to help bring these projects to fruition.

Jeremiah Swetel believes in JCU, yes, and he believes in University Heights. He is helping move our city forward.

But it's not all about construction cranes and new buildings at John Carroll. Guided by University President Dr. Al Miciak, progress will be made inside the buildings as well. A new nursing program begins this fall at John Carroll. This effort will be led by Dr. Melissa Cole, the school's inaugural Director of Nursing and Strategic Healthcare Innovation.

I'm going to let Al and Melissa together with Dr. Steven Herbert, Provost and Academic Vice President, tell you all about it. Let's roll the video...

[JCU NURSING VIDEO]

Melissa, Al and Steven believe in public service. They believe in John Carroll. Their work will move University Heights forward. Or, as they like to say on campus, "onward."

They are not alone. A University is only as good as her professors, and John Carroll has excellent professors. Thank you for your strong work teaching, and making John Carroll University an elite school.

And there are thousands of students at JCU who are making University Heights a better place. I'd like to mention two of them.

Jacob Kozlowski is the JCU student body president. Jacob started his term as president by addressing the issue of interpersonal violence on campus. He hosted a student discussion on the subject asking students to join the conversation to end sexual violence. Sometimes universities are hesitant to address this subject, as they don't want to

suggest that it's a problem “here.” It is a problem everywhere. I applaud this STUDENT-LED initiative to end sexual violence.

Last year's student body president Grace Kilfoyle, together with the student senate, took a strong interest in improving recycling in University Heights.

Sometimes we forget that students who live in off-campus housing use city services, and their opinions on the subject are valid. I applaud the student government for their ongoing interest in issues on and off campus. And I assure them, that this administration remains committed to recycling modernization consistent with well-established national best practices.

Grace and Jacob, thank you for believing in University Heights. Thank you for helping move University Heights forward.

Let me expand the conversation beyond Grace and Jacob. I want to say something to the entire student body. You all are part of University Heights. I welcome you. I'm glad you're here. In fact, I hope you consider settling down in University Heights after graduation.

As long as there is a university in University Heights, there will be students with a common interest in this community. You keep us young, and young at heart. You keep us moving forward.

ZONING CODE UPDATE

These changes on campus, and the changes they have on our community, mean that our review of our zoning code comes at an opportune time.

I turn now to the comprehensive zoning code update now underway.

Since 1956, our zoning code has been updated piecemeal to address zoning and development issues as they have arisen. This has created a disjointed code with inconsistencies and ambiguities that do not portray a unified or clear vision for our City.

With our comprehensive update we seek to set forth a unified and clear vision for the City, and more.

Generally we have three current land use goals.

- 1. Promote reuse and redevelopment to encourage economic growth in existing commercial areas.**
- 2. Ensure regulations that foster efficient land use and an aesthetically pleasing environment that is safe and inviting to pedestrians, cyclists, and motorized traffic**
- 3. Encourage mixed-use development in appropriate areas to maximize redevelopment and to create areas of the city where residents can live, work, and play.**

Our zoning code largely does not support these current land use goals – which is no surprise as the current code well predates them.

Our current code does promote high quality housing – but it does so in a one-size-fits-all manner that results in many variances being granted annually. Perhaps most significantly, while our residential neighborhoods are very walkable, our commercial districts are largely disconnected and unwalkable. A new code will encourage better scale and integration between our commercial and residential districts. We can be less automobile reliant, and encourage walking, biking, public transit – modes for all ages and abilities.

Think about some of the best places you have gone on vacation. Places where nearly everything you could want to do is just a short walk away. We can have that here. We are a lot closer to having that here than some of our neighboring communities. We are the second most densely populated city in Cuyahoga County. Let's build upon our density. It is how we will grow and thrive.

Even in advance of the comprehensive zoning code changes we are looking at streamlining the process for residential solar panels. Residents interested in solar panels in a standardized configuration ought to be able to do that with a permit from our Building

Department, and not have to wait weeks to go through a 5 minute ARB meeting just to be told that this looks standard and you are approved.

In all these zoning matters, we are moving forward.

UNIVERSITY SQUARE

Sometimes, moving forward means: refusing to give up on a difficult project.

Yes, I'm talking about University Square. Tonight, I am pleased to report on significant progress. For some time now, we have negotiated with Target, Macy's, and the new developers – with all the stakeholders – to break the impasse on redeveloping University Square. In December 2022 we negotiated an MOU – a memorandum of understanding – for redevelopment of this long-blighted center of our community.

When the bondholders foreclosed and took over the property in 2015, they had an 18- to 24-month plan to turn around University Square. Eight long years later, we now have the framework for finalizing the details for actual redevelopment.

If this were easy, it would have been done already, years ago, before I even ran for mayor. It was through sheer will, persistent efforts of this administration, Susan Drucker and Luke McConville especially, and the refusal to give up or accept defeat or failure, that has brought us to this point at last. A huge amount of credit also goes to the developers, Brad Kowit and Gregg Levy.

Brad and Gregg grew up in the Heights, and are investing their money and effort in University Square.

The framework is set for negotiating the rest of the deal so that we can begin the peel back of the garage and the construction of a mixed-use development, including 206 market-rate apartments, including new businesses, including one that I cannot identify tonight

but you'll be learning more about soon. I can't tell you who they are but I will give you a hint. 2 words: family entertainment. Soon, new business will be coming to University Square. Thank you Brad and Gregg for seeing in University Square as we do, a true center of activity for our community. Thank you for helping move our city forward.

SERVICE DEPARTMENT / SOLID WASTE REFORM

As mayor I have reformed every city department now but one. Let's now talk about the modernization of our Service Department.

I am inclined to limit my remarks on the topic of solid waste and recycling, because it's been talked about *ad nauseum*. After four years, it is still just talk. At this point much of this discussion has radiated more heat than light. So my limited comments tonight are to provide more light.

Look, before I became mayor, when I was simply a resident of this community, I did not perceive the problems with our solid waste collection. I put out my rubbish and my recycling out back. I took my yard waste down to the curb. If I needed a couch hauled away, I ordered a special pickup.

In 2017, I didn't run on changing any of that – except for being able to order special pickups online, which we have done – because like most residents, I knew what we did was a little unique, but I didn't perceive a problem.

Then I got here.

I saw how four days a week, the overwhelming majority of our service staff was working on solid waste collection exclusively.

I saw all of the labor, all of the time, all of the equipment dedicated to this critical task.

I saw how much we were spending on this. And I also saw all things that weren't getting done in the Service Department, or weren't getting done promptly, because of the overwhelming amount of time and resources we were spending on solid waste collection.

I saw how it impacted fixing sewer catch basins, filling potholes, keeping up our parks,

I saw how it impacted leaf collection. I see how dissatisfied our residents are every year with that process.

And most recently, I have seen how staffing shortages, an overall labor shortage, has affected communities like ours who perform their own solid waste collection.

In early 2019, at my initiation, the City retained GT Environmental and commissioned a solid waste study. I wanted to see what we could do better in solid waste collection. I did not go in with a predetermined outcome, except to improve what we do to better serve you.

Turns out we have some of the most expensive solid waste collection around. And some of the worst outcomes when it come to recycling rate, and safety risk to our own employees. There is a way to improve these outcomes, improve worker safety, improve recycling, and save money on the task of collection.

I let the data, and expert opinion, guide what has become our administration's position and policy: that we can spend less time and devote fewer people to picking up the rubbish, and devote more time and assign more people to maintaining the rest of our infrastructure, delivering our other services better. This should not be controversial. We all want the benefits of the improved service. But to do that, we should be moving to curbside automated pickup of solid waste and recycling. And that has proven to be controversial.

Why? Lots of reasons, but here is one: Because there is uncertainty in change. Also, I do admit, that if I did not know what I know now about

municipal operations, our service department, and about solid waste pickup in particular, I probably would be skeptical of why we should change as well.

And when you consider through two community surveys that when presented the option of a change with some uncertainty, versus keeping what you have when it seems to work for you, the built-in bias is towards the familiar.

Four in ten people would prefer to keep curbside pickup just the way it is. Five in ten are open for some sort of change. The fact that it is even close tells us that more people than ever are tuned into the idea of making the improvements that will lead to better recycling, better infrastructure maintenance all around, a safer workplace for our employees, and a more sustainable city.

I know this is the right thing to do. I got to this position on the subject because I let the data and the facts drive this – with expert guidance, solid waste consultants, recycling consultants, national experts, experts at our own Cuyahoga County Solid Waste District, and right here, our own Service Director and Assistant Service Director. I trust their judgment, and the facts bear it out.

I will make this point before moving on. 84% of residents surveyed agree recycling is important, 23% self-report that they do not put out any blue bags in our current flawed program. So we know there are people who think recycling is important but don't participate in our recycling program. And some of the ones who don't participate have been telling us that they stopped because they don't believe in what we're currently doing. They don't like that we still use blue bags. They've seen their blue bags end up in the trash. They want a better system. Let's give them a recycling program they can believe in at last. Some of these folks have lived elsewhere with curbside automated. Residents who have familiarity with both methods of pickup tend to favor curbside automated. The data shows that. That's compelling. Let's apply the standards other communities have and deliver to our residents the good service and results they want and

deserve. To help do that, let's continue to educate and provide the information needed on this issue. Like those communities, we will not leave our seniors behind. Seniors, and people with mobility issues, in Beachwood, in Cleveland Heights, those cities offer assistance to help move the carts. University Heights will do that, too. Leaving no one behind, together we will move forward.

Just like University Square, if it were easy, it would have been done already. And like University Square, we will keep working at it until we get it right and until we get it done.

FACILITIES

The needs of seniors, our youth, as well as all residents of the city, should be heard as we plan our new city facilities.

Yes, the Police Department needs modern facilities. So, does the Fire Department, as does the Service Department. And we need an accessible City Hall with all departments under one roof. Plus, we need an accessible City Council chambers. All this and much more was established through the facilities study we undertook in 2021 and 2022, resulting in the University Heights City Center Needs Assessment Report.

But our new facilities must also provide community space. We have seen with the renovated University Heights Library, the intense demand on the meeting rooms they built. And we have felt the loss of those rooms with the flood they suffered last year. As we assemble our land and before we design the space, we must acknowledge the limited available space *in* our community and *for* our community.

We resolve to do something about that.

I am cognizant the Wiley property may already contain some of the features our seniors and other residents need. Certainly, Wiley could be the new home to features that the community desires, above and beyond the clearly established basic needs set forth in the report.

When it comes to community space, the administration will actively seek input from the community for what is called for.

We already hear the calls for meeting rooms. But what about a renovated pool with a splash pad? Or an indoor pool? Or workout facilities? What about a dog park? What about winter and year-round recreation? Perhaps an auditorium for speakers, music, theater and other events? [aside] this is a great auditorium we're in here tonight, but it is generally booked with University events, and we were fortunate to have it this evening.

There's a need for a true community center. Look, we have already seen how Walter Stinson Community Park has become our unofficial outdoor Community Center. On any given day, there is music planned by the city, or spontaneous events by residents. Odd Dog Coffee shows up to provide coffee and bakery. The Yummy Cart provides hot dogs and other snacks. But there's a lack of winter programming in this city, and we need to fix that.

We can do more. Let's do it in the right order. We are currently securing the land we know we need. Once we do, and only once we do, we will seek a project manager to work with to design and construct new facilities. We must not only design our new facilities, but we must endeavor to be creative – in how we create the space, and how we finance it.

New facilities must be green and sustainable-- not just in their construction but in their operation. And as a public project, the construction itself will be by union labor.

Together, we'll move forward in building facilities that will better serve you and meet your needs. We will do this to bring our community together, and move our city forward.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR AND PROGRAMMING

Among the reasons I ran for mayor was to better build a sense of community.

We don't aspire to be a community where people never see their neighbors. Now that the worst of the pandemic is over, let's get out and enjoy each other's company. We don't have to stay at home. Let's get out to events, whether they are events sponsored by the city, or by other organizations.

To bring residents together, University Heights is now teaming with Yodel Community Connections. Let's hear from Corie Loomis, our "go-to person" at Yodel.

[YODEL VIDEO]

Thank you Corie and Yodel for your work in bringing University Heights together.

Now, let's talk about some of the events you're going to see soon on our community calendar.

Northeast Ohio's biggest and best Memorial Day parade will be back on the last Monday of May. The parade is great every year, but we are exploring opportunities to make it even more exciting. Stay tuned.

Our inaugural Juneteenth Celebration was such a success, we're bringing it back this year on Sunday June 18th. Like the parade, it will be bigger and better. Last year, we had one stage – this year, we'll have two. Again, stay tuned.

Fall Fest will return on October 15th for a fourth year. More vendors, more activities, and more music. We'll have an announcement on Fall Fest entertainment later this summer.

But what we can share with you tonight is the 2023 Summer Concert Series schedule. As always, we'll have some returning favorites. But we always like to introduce bands that are new to University Heights, and we've landed some great ones for this summer. Enjoy the announcement video...

[SUMMER CONCERT SERIES ANNOUNCEMENT VIDEO]

Opus 216 is a fun classical group, Billy Likes Soda has won awards for being one of the best cover bands in Northeast Ohio, and Apostle Jones has earned critical praise for their original songs. You're going to love The Ladies Night – a bunch of guys performing songs from Pop Divas like Britney Spears and Lady Gaga. Long standing favorites like Yiddishe Cup will be back, as well as the University Heights Symphonic Band – complete with a movie night, Marx Brothers movie “Horse Feathers.”

OUR FINANCIAL POSITION AND 2024 and beyond

In previous States of the City, we were still working on the current year's budget as I gave this address. This year, we have already passed the current budget, we did so in December, before we had the year-end 2022 figures. So I'm now looking ahead to 2024.

Let's talk first about our financial position as a City as of the end of 2022.

We will start with revenues.

- Total revenue recorded in the General Fund in 2022 was \$17,186,255.91**
 - o Primary sources of revenue in the General Fund are income taxes (\$11,722,013.71) and property taxes (\$3,253,862.)**

[Please note that for every hundred dollars paid in property tax in University Heights, the city receives only \$10.25.]

- o Actual revenue for both income tax and property taxes exceeded the original estimates for 2022. Income tax alone is up over 13% from 2021.**

Special Assessment revenue exceeded estimates in all relevant funds as well. Those funds are:

- o Sewer and Water Maintenance Fund**

- o **Shade Tree Maintenance Fund**
- o **Street Lighting Fund, and**
- o **Sewer and Water Capital Improvement Fund**

Finally, ARPA money. We began the year with \$670,249.66 in ARPA money, and received additional ARPA money in 2022 in the amount of \$675,601.23.

I turn now to the Expenses in 2022.

- **Total expenditures in the General Fund in 2022 were \$15,562,94.68**
 - o **Final 2022 GF budget was \$16,687,188**
 - o **End of year encumbrances (money we committed to spending but had not yet spent) in the General Fund were \$329,699.30**
 - o **Percent of 2022 budget not spent or encumbered was 4.76%**
- **Total expenses in 2022 for all funds was \$21,405,353.83**
 - o **Final 2022 budget for all funds was \$23,449,968.77**
 - o **End of year encumbrances in all funds was \$1,257,287.61**
 - o **Percent of entire budget not spent or encumbered was 5.36%**

In short: the City collected more revenue than we projected, while spending less than the City budgeted. In 2022, the City collected more revenue than it spent. As will be reflected in our Cash Position, which I will go over now.

At the beginning of 2022 the unexpended balance in the General Fund (what we often call the carry-over balance) was \$5,340,826.23

The ending unexpended balance in the GF for 2022 (i.e. the carryover balance in to 2023) was \$6,540,809.51

- o So, over the course of last year, the unexpended balance in the General Fund increased by \$1,199,983.28.**

Across all funds, including those special assessment funds I described earlier, the beginning unexpended balance (or carry-over for all funds) in 2022 was \$10,428,450.60

The ending unexpended balance in 2022 for all funds was \$10,016,057.72

- o The unexpended balance for all funds declined by \$412,392.88 during 2022**

It should be noted that the City is still owed significant funds for the Cedar Road project.

- o ODOT has not completed a final reconciliation of the project but it has indicated that we came in under budget.**
- o Monies are still forthcoming from NOACA, Cuyahoga County and the City of South Euclid also for the Cedar Road Project.**

Finally, the City under my administration adopted a cash reserve policy. By policy, 15% of the prior year revenue in the General Fund would be maintained on reserve. For 2023, that is now \$2,577,938.

We no longer use the vernacular of calling our carryover balances a “surplus.” When I took office in 2018, we had what we then called a 2.5 million dollar surplus. We now call that a carryover balance.

Today, we have a carryover balance of \$6.5 million and over 10 million dollars across all funds.

The City's financial position is sound.

You choose to live in a community like ours and pay the taxes you do, and so you expect a lot in return. It is incumbent upon city government to bring you not only good value, but full value.

As always, I will continue to advocate for doing better by you while responsibly utilizing our public resources.

So let's now look at 2024 and beyond.

Seniors

I get letters and calls from one of our most senior residents.

She tells me the City of University Heights does not do enough for senior citizens. And you know what? She's right. We need to do more. A lot more. We need to move forward.

While senior citizens make up only 11.3% of our city's population they are a valued part of our community. Seniors ought to be able to age in place in this community. We need to ensure that we are doing what we can as a city to engage them and include them in community activities and services. We need to be programming with them directly in mind.

So one of the things I am looking to do in 2024 is restore the position of Senior Services Coordinator, Walter Stinson's old job. This position should be restored and filled, with a budget for them to work with.

Planner

Looking ahead, we should restore the position of city planner in 2024. When I hired the city's first city planner in 2019, he was integral to envisioning the Cedar Road project and its pedestrian and

public transit improvements, and improving our exterior maintenance program. He helped us visualize housing conditions throughout the city which challenged some of our common assumptions.

We have undertaken a comprehensive redo of our zoning code, which would be better facilitated if we had a planner on staff. As also mentioned earlier, we are working with JCU on their capital projects, these too would be better facilitated, if we had our own city planner involved.

Our community is landlocked and fully built out yet needs thoughtful redevelopment, indeed “planning.” Having that person on staff is critical to successful ongoing redevelopment and will move our city forward.

DEI officer

Tonight, I’d like to propose for 2024 another way we can bring our diverse community together. And make no mistake, University Heights is a diverse community. We have a strong base of senior citizens, but we’re the 6th youngest city in Ohio and the youngest in Cuyahoga County. We have diversity in religion too. And according to the Census Bureau, nearly 30% of our population is non-white, with Black and African Americans composing 23.7% of our population. Put another way, nearly 1 in 4 UH residents are black, nearly 1 in 3 are people of color.

In University Heights, right down to our mosaic branding, we are a city that embraces diversity. We view our diversity as a strength. We do that when we celebrate Black History Month. We do that when we fly the pride flag every June for Pride month. We do that as we plan for the city’s second Juneteenth celebration. However, the real work of diversity, equity, and inclusion cannot be limited to certain months or special events.

The time has come for the City of University Heights to create and fill the position of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer.

The DEI Officer would be charged with leading the institutionalization of DEI principals in all City policies, decision-making and services, while also working across City departments to ensure a diverse workforce and to facilitate training and ongoing conversations on equity and inclusion.

What does that look like? We absolutely must improve recruitment of minority police officers and firefighters. Don't get me wrong, we're trying. The Chiefs are trying, the clerk of council, the civil service commission, too. But to move forward, we need to do more.

What else? We need to actively engage in being anti-racist, welcoming to LGBTQIA people, and welcoming to people of all religions and of no religion. We need to look at our services and amenities, like our public swimming pool, to ensure that we are not excluding people either by design or by outcome in their operation and use. We have often recognized that the residents of the northwest corner of the city have felt neglected and underserved. The fact that a concentration of minority residents live there cannot be ignored as part of that.

The point is, this is something we need to be actively doing every day, not just in February, not just in June. Not merely ceremonially, but in the day-to-day operation of our city. Creating and filling the position of DEI Officer further demonstrates our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, and will help us fulfill that commitment to our constituents of color.

I'm committed to building a sense of community in University Heights. We've started that, and we're not going to stop. We're going to move our city forward.

Bicycling Infrastructure and the Multipurpose Path

People who ride bicycles don't just want to exercise and lead an active lifestyle. They want to be able to go places.

Developments in bicycling infrastructure will not happen overnight. They are in the works for 2024 and beyond.

As we endeavor to make our city more multimodal, friendlier to pedestrians and bicycles, working together with Cleveland Heights and South Euclid, we have been seeking grant funding from NOACA for Phase One of the Heights Regional Greenway Project.

Last month, we obtained committee approval for 100% funding from the NOACA Transportation for Livable Communities Initiative (TLCI) program.

We are one step closer to having Northeast Ohio's first Regional Neighborhood Greenways Connectors.

This project goes to a vote of the full NOACA board on March 10th.

If that happens as expected, the Bike Boulevard project will be fully funded, and I mention it now in context and conjunction with this next item.

I'm also pleased to report out that University Heights and Cleveland Heights will be receiving funding from the federal Transportation Alternatives Program for a multi-purpose path that connects Cleveland Heights and Cain Park to University Heights and The Walt and then JCU. Under the Cuyahoga County Greenways plan, South Belvoir (which runs through the JCU campus and would connect with this Washington path) is already designated a bicycle route – and will also be the subject of further bicycle infrastructure between South Euclid, University Heights, and Shaker Heights.

Cleveland Heights Mayor Kahlil Seren and I worked together to take this item that was years out on the long-range plan, and move it up and get it funded. This is 80/20 funding that we will need to budget for in 2024 and beyond. We will work with Cleveland Heights to design this path so that we can begin construction as soon as mid-2025.

These are just a few of the things we are looking to do in 2024 and beyond.

CITY EMPLOYEES MOVING US FORWARD

I began tonight's State of the City recognizing some people in the community, outside of government, moving our community forward. Now I would like to turn to some of the people in government moving us forward. I'd like to repeat something I have said in each of my States of the City. And it's this:

"The greatest asset this city has are its people; the residents, and the people who work here every day in service to this community."

It's still true, and it deserves emphasis.

The women and men who work for the people of University Heights are indeed public servants in the truest sense. We've assembled an All-Star team. They're in demand. They could choose to work elsewhere, but they choose to work for University Heights. They all have the best interests of residents in mind every single day.

First, Susan Drucker, our Economic Development Director. Former mayor of Solon, much accomplished in economic development during her tenure as mayor. Susan is here because she believes in University Heights. Redevelopment of University Square, actively supporting new and existing businesses, and managing the comprehensive rezoning project of the City, to shape and build the University Heights that we will have for decades to come. Thank you, Susan.

Dennis Kennedy, Finance Director. Former Finance Director of Brooklyn, Solon, Beachwood. Former director of the State Lottery. Former Fiscal Officer of Cuyahoga County. Dennis and his team in the Finance Department guided us financially through the pandemic. We earned recognition from the state auditor last year for "excellence in financial reporting" with our last audit. He helped us establish the policy of the prudent minimum reserve. I went over the numbers earlier, and we are in a sound position thanks in large part to his work. Dennis, thank you.

Jeff Pokorny, Service Director. Former Service Director of Solon. And the assistant service director, John Pucella – a 32-year career man here in University Heights. They want to see through the improvement and modernization of the Service Department that this city has needed for many years. Jeff is a big part of the current effort now to implement at long last the new city signs with the new city brand, there's a prototype over there [*motions stage left to translucent logo prototype*]. They will be installed later this year, and they're going to look great. They believe in our shared vision for the city. Jeff Pokorny, John Pucella and our entire Service Department are moving University Heights forward. Gentlemen, thank you.

Geoff Englebrecht, Housing and Community Development Director. Formerly with Cleveland Housing Court. Formerly advocating for Mount Pleasant and other Cleveland neighborhoods. He's working to maintain and improve our housing stock. He's working with our prosecutor Mike Cicero to ensure that landlords keep up their properties and don't subject their tenants to uninhabitable conditions. The landlords that do, are in court, where there will be subject to significant fines, even jail time. Listen, that's not something we're planning on doing, that's something that we're doing right now. Moving forward on the improvement of our housing stock helps keep University Heights a great place to live. And working with his counterparts in South Euclid and Cleveland Heights together with Council Member Brian King, Geoff is helping land the NOACA grant funding for the Bike Boulevards program. And Juneteeth? That's Geoff too. Thank you, Geoff.

Deanna Bremer Fisher, Executive Assistant to the Mayor on Special Projects. Deanna is big time. When I had the chance to hire her, I leaped at the opportunity. Former Executive Director of FutureHeights, and formerly with Cleveland Restoration Society. Deanna believes in University Heights. Indeed, she believes in all the heights. She's working on sustainability. In housing, in facilities, working with Geoff Englebrecht on getting our first EV charging stations here. And Deanna is helping us meet our goal to reduce our

carbon footprint by 30% by the year 2030. She is our point person with Power a Clean Future Ohio, we became a PCFO community in 2022. She's a pro, and we're fortunate to have her on our team. Thank you, Deanna.

Mike Cook, Communications and Civic Engagement director. Formerly at the Ohio Statehouse. Did communications for the American Red Cross, including on 9/11. Also, formerly with the Court of Common Pleas where he swerved out of his bailiff lane to organize education forums during the heroin epidemic. Mike helps create the good things we're doing in University Heights, then he spreads the good word to city residents and those beyond our borders through our e-news, Mosaic Magazine, and creative use of social media. And he does it all with a light smirk and some old school "Dad Humor." The sense of community we have is thanks in large part to Mike's work. Thank you, Mike.

Kelly Thomas, Clerk of Council. Formerly of numerous positions in the city from intern to building department to clerks office, since 1982 through today. Kelly is Heights through and through, an alumna of our schools, she also serves on the board of the Heights Schools Foundation. With the recent "Kelce Bowl Super Bowl" she personally saw to it that I had a gold lightbulb for celebrating the first-time brothers ever faced each other in the Super Bowl. Make no mistake, Kelly's job is hard. There are long hours, long meetings, and it demands great attention to detail. She's here for all of it. Kelly, thank you.

Jeune Drayton, Assistant Clerk of Council. Former Clerk of Council of University Heights in the 1980's. She came out of retirement to serve the community she still lives in and loves. We're so glad she's back. Not only is she helping Kelly, Jeune is the clerk at every meeting of the Charter Review Commission. And I'm not sure if there's a more pleasant person on the city's payroll. That's why Jeune is the reigning city Co-Worker of the Year. Jeune, welcome back and thank you.

Denis Garcia, Chief Building Official. Formerly of the City of Cleveland, and their former Chief Building Inspector, going all the way back to Mayor Michael White. Dennis leads our Building Department, ensuring that Building standards are met and kept, handles the permit process for construction. All of this serves not only to keep our community safe, but to help ensure that new development in the City is well built and well fulfilled. Denis works hard, and his hard work is moving University Heights forward. For that, thank you Denis.

Luke McConville, Law Director. Also law director of the villages of Newburgh Heights and Middlefield. He is looking out for our interests as all law directors do, but has gone above and beyond with his work on University Square, defending the building and zoning codes, helping us in our efforts to redevelop the city, and helping us assemble the land for new municipal facilities. Not only does Luke work for University Heights, he lives in University Heights. Luke, you work hard, you work smart, and I appreciate it that very much. Thank you, Luke.

Dustin Rogers, Police Chief. Formerly a sergeant, formerly a patrol officer, both here and in Pepper Pike. Dustin is dedicated to the improvement of this community, and the guardian role of our police department. With Chief Rogers we opened the office of community policing. With chief Rogers we had full cooperation in 2020 when we created the citizens committee on policing policies. And we implemented those recommendations improving our policies on de-escalation and use of force. And looking forward, we'll be working together on a standing citizen advisory board for our police. Dustin Rogers, as well as the entire UHPD, is moving University Heights forward. Chief, thank you.

Bob Perko, Fire Chief. As a new firefighter and paramedic, he joined our department in 2007. He worked his way to the head of the class to become the chief. He comes from a firefighting family, his father being a firefighter and paramedic for 36 years in Seven Hills. As chief he has reopened the Fire Prevention Bureau, he has created multiple programs in fire safety, we have improved our ISO rating,

demonstrating that it is measurably safer living in University Heights. The city is safer due to Bob Perko. So, I say to the entire Fire Department as well as Chief Perko, thank you.

Joe Ciuni, City Engineer. Joe has been City Engineer since 1992, taking over for his father Steve Ciuni, whose firm began serving as our city engineer on April 3, 1978. Joe serves as city engineer for several communities, but he has never forgotten where he is from. For over 30 years, Joe continues to make University Heights a priority. Our infrastructure is as good as it is because of his institutional knowledge and careful and consistent work and dedication. Joe, thank you.

THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy can be fragile. As Madeleine Albright once said, “While Democracy in the long run is the most stable form of government, in the short run, it is among the most fragile.”

The preservation and flourishing of democracy requires people of good will, people with courage to stand up and lead, people who are devoted to the common good. Not the pursuit of power or self interest, but the common good. Commonwealth, as it is also called, from which we also get the term commonwealth.

These days, we have seen the failures that result when power and self interest override the common good. People who create their own reality instead of living in the reality-based world with common facts. That brought us January 6. Election denial. Illegal gerrymandered redistricting maps imposed upon our state. It all undermines the legitimacy of our democracy. We see it further in the erosion of majority rule, the undermining of voting rights in the recent lame duck session of the state legislature. Of the proposal to allow minority rule to decide our state constitutional amendments, instead of simple majority.

Ultimately the power of democracy lies with the people – with all of you and all of us together. There is no more important place to vote, to get involved, to speak up and be heard, than locally. It begins here at home. That is why I got involved – first on the citizens committee to build what became The Walt. Then to run to be your mayor.

If you're not involved already, get involved with your city government. We have citizen volunteers on the Charter Review Commission, the Tech Advisory Commission, the Records and Retention Commission, the Lay Finance Committee, and the Fair Housing Commission. We have citizen representatives on the Board of Zoning Appeals, the Architectural Review Board, the Planning Commission, and the Civil Service Commission.

We've had citizen volunteers on the Citizens Committee for Policing Policies, the Citizens Committee on Sustainability, and the Citizens Committee on Facilities and Infrastructure. We have the Memorial Day Parade Committee every year. There are more and further opportunities to volunteer in the community. And there are more and different ways to get involved.

I'm announcing tonight that we have revamped our volunteer page on the University Heights website. If you are interested in serving the community, this is a great place to start. You may find it at universityheights.com/volunteer. Tell us what you are interested in and what unique qualifications you bring. Channeling JFK, ask not what your *community* can do for you, ask what you can do for your community. Or, if you prefer James Brown, “Get up, get into it, get involved.”

How else can you get involved? Come to City Council meetings. You can watch, and you can make public comment. There is a period for that at the beginning of every City Council meeting. You can attend committee meetings.

Locally, there's something else you can do. This November, you will be presented with some choices. Too often in University Heights, you

haven't had real choices or options. But this fall, you're going to hear from people who want to move our city forward. When they knock on your door, take the time to engage with them. Listen to what they have to say, and give voice to your concerns. Consider what they hope to do. And where applicable, consider what they have done. If you like what they have to say, give them your support.

It is an honor to serve as your mayor, and it is an honor to work with so many of you to move University Heights forward. Together we've accomplished so much, we have reached new heights. And we've come too far to stop now.

The pursuit of progress demands it.

Democracy demands it.

The state of the city is strong and it depends on each and every one of us.

Together, let's continue. Forward.

[Walk Off Music – Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved by James Brown. Reception in Reading Room.]

Respectfully submitted,



Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan