

Good Morning! I want to thank all of you for joining us this morning for the annual State of the Government address. I appreciate how precious your time is, and I intend to keep my remarks on point. In any event, if my remarks aren't satisfying, at least we can all say that the company is good and the food is delicious.

I want to offer a special thanks to the Downtown Rotary for hosting this event: your commitment to our City, and especially to our downtown is to be commended.

As I began preparing for this address today my first reflection was this: we must always take time to take note of, and give thanks, to those persons and institutions in our County who are doing great things day in and day out. In my role as Mayor, I am overjoyed to witness first hand so many people who accomplish mighty works across our city and County. I would like to share my sense of joy with you.

Consider, for instance, a group of students from Coronado Junior High School. This team of young minds, Uhnoma Amayo, Carlos Jiminez-Reyes, Daleshon Sharkey, and Daquon Cheadle, led by Erin Morley, and William Wells, wanted to help astronauts when they are stressed, and knowing that mint can help relieve stress, asked: Can mint leaves be grown in space?

So they created an experiment called “The growth of mint leaves in Microgravity” which will rocket to the International Space Station this July aboard Space-X. There the astronauts aboard will conduct the experiment and return it to our students who will compare the results from space with the results of the same experiment conducted here on earth. These young people are giving us a great example, by opening their hearts to the astronauts and opening their minds to ask the right questions, gather the data, so as to solve a need. Thank you for your hard work and for showing us that it is necessary and good to seek far and wide for solutions to our own challenges.

Next, consider the awesome service that Donnelly College has provided over the past 70 years to the people of our community who would like to attend college, but perhaps do not have the family tradition of attending college or the financial resources to do so. 78% of current Donnelly students are first-generation college students. Their average household income is \$29, 840, they represent 25 different countries of birth, and the average age is 26. And Donnelly College recently broke ground on a beautiful new 72,000 square foot academic building, a \$34 million dollar investment in the future of our community. Msgr. Swetland, thank you for your leadership of one of our City’s anchor institutions.

Finally, consider the dedication of Loren Taylor, a native Wyandotte Countian who has always had a deep respect and love for the people and the institutions that have made Wyandotte County and Kansas City Kansas what it is today. Loren grew up in KCK, fell in love with a young woman from KCK, married, practiced law, raised a good family, and has served on many boards and commissions throughout his time. But perhaps his most important service to us is his work as our own resident historian. Loren has published numerous works, including two volumes of the Ethnic History of Wyandotte County, the Short History of Law Enforcement in KCK, the Historical Communities of Wyandotte County, a Historical Overview of Wyandotte County and its Historic Sites. And there are more. Loren Taylor, you possess a deep and broad knowledge of the history of the diverse peoples of Wyandotte County, and your work inspires all of us to respect one another as we are. Thank you, Loren, for gifting us all with our own history.

So many good people doing so many good things. I can name so many others, such as the voters in the Turner School District, who approved a bond issue to build a new Junior High School on the site of the former High School. The Bonner Springs/Edwardsville school district, which, recognizing the growing need to prepare our young people for the technological demands of employment today and tomorrow,

has opened a new Career and Technical Education facility. I also want to highlight that the Quindaro Townsite was recently named a National Historical Commemorative Site by an act of Congress, and this came about because over the decades there were KCK citizens who kept working to show all of us how important the history of this underground railroad site means to all of us. And let's not forget the voters of Kansas City Kansas, who last summer demonstrated their commitment to the progress of Kansas City Kansas and voted to renew the Public Safety and Neighborhood Infrastructure Dedicated Sales Tax.

In all of these examples, we see the people of our community, young and old, from every ethnic group, from all demographics, in every part of our county, taking honest, straightforward considerations of the challenges and opportunities we face, and working together to make things better. Their work should say this to each one of us: if we approach each challenge with an open mind and heart, with a desire to serve the common good, and not just our own self-interest, we will grow our community person by person, neighborhood by neighborhood, day by day.

So now let us take consideration of what I believe is the fundamental challenge facing our city and county. If you attended last year's state of the government, you will recognize many of the same themes I presented then. I stated at that

time that I believe that the mission of local government, the mission of the Unified Government, is to improve the quality of life of our citizens and of our businesses and institutions. Moreover, that quality of life is most directly impacted by the quality of neighborhood-based services. And at the same time that we are providing more and better services, we need to do it in the most affordable way.

I talk to citizens and business owners every single day, and most of the time the conversation runs to this: When will my street be repaved? There is a vacant house in our neighborhood that looks bad: is the City going to take it down? People are speeding down our street and we have children playing outside: Can you send the police out to catch them? Why don't we have more programs for our rec center? Our street floods: when are you going to bring us curbs and sidewalks and storm sewers? Why doesn't the City stop people from dumping trash on the street? Each one of these conversations that these folks have with me bring forward valid requests for more and better services from the City.

And as often as not, these requests are followed up with: when are you going to lower my taxes?

If we just take a brief look at some of our funding needs, clearly we can see what we need for just basic infrastructure. These

needs persist, they are not going anywhere. We have to recognize this challenge and find ways to improve our infrastructure and our services. And we cannot do any of this without funding. Where could the money come from?

We can and will need to borrow money to meet many of these needs, but there are limits to what we should borrow. Currently, of the 38 mills that the city levies on property values, 17 mills are used to service our existing debt.

We could raise property taxes, but the Commission has consistently voted to reduce the City mill levy, reducing the rate by about 15% over the past three years. That has moved the UG from having the highest rate among the top 25 first class cities in the state to about middle of the pack.

So again, the challenge for our City is “how do we bring necessary services to our citizens to improve the quality of life in a manner that is fiscally sustainable”.

The answer is to continue to broaden and diversify the tax base.

How does that work? Give us an example. Well, we don't have to go far to see what a broader, more diverse tax base can do for our County.

Take a look at what has been accomplished. Take a look at the STAR bonds payoff.

Also, if we look at the Industrial Revenue Bonds that the Commission has approved in the past, we see additional revenues that continue to come on line.

As we look at other benefits of these incentives, we see that household income has also improved. This is from WYEDC.

This large scale commercial and retail development will continue. Our City was recently awarded a 13.2 million dollar federal BUILD grant, and a 7.5 m dollar commitment from KDOT to reconfigure the I-70 interchange at the Turner Diagonal, a huge capital investment that the UG would not have been able to undertake on its own, which will open up new development, perhaps as much as \$125 m in investment and new job opportunities. There is great hope for the potential of \$100 million in investment in the former Indian Springs site, further generating growth in the center of our City. Negotiations continue around the 18th and I-70 area to bring more businesses and increased vitality to that corridor. And the American Royal project continues to move forward, as they

have announced that ground breaking will take place within the next year.

But to return to a theme, we cannot rely solely on large scale development. It is necessary, but insufficient in itself, to enable us to meet the fundamental challenge.

We must double down on neighborhood rejuvenation.

Some positive signs in this regard. After decades of disinvestment and depopulation, we have more recently seen an increase in our population, which translates into more property tax revenues, more sales tax revenues, and more revenues from the PILOT.

We can see from this map how property values have increased.

But there are clearly more opportunities for redevelopment of our traditional neighborhoods.

In our City, we have about 3100 vacant residential and commercial structures. A vacant house in a neighborhood reduces the value of other homes within 500 feet by 2.1%

In our community, vacant structures result in \$51 million reduction in appraised value, and that is \$450,000 in lost tax revenue.

Vacant lots themselves reduce our community's value by over \$290 million, and that is \$2.5 million in annual property tax revenues.

Consider this: the health of our older neighborhoods directly affects the health of our entire city and county. We may not live in a neighborhood that has vacant houses, but we all share the increased tax burden.

The good news is that, as we bring improvements to vacant structures and lots, we see immediate improvements. There are financial improvements, to be sure, but there are other improvements in important ways. For instance, in a study published in the American Journal of Health, it was discovered that there is a 39% reduction in gun violence in and around remediated buildings.

And a 5% reduction around remediated lots.

Now, as residents of our city, we know this is true intuitively, but data backs it up.

And this work of remediating vacant structures and vacant lots is already going on and improving our community. I encourage you to take a drive down the area around Waterway Park.

Since 2004, 77 new homes have been built, with over 200 new residents, resulting in an appraised value of \$11.7m. If we can fill the remaining vacant lots around waterway park, we should see an additional increase in revenues of about \$130,000 per year.

But it is not just new builds, but it is also remodels. All across our community you see houses being remodeled, bringing increase in population, and a broader, more diverse tax base.

There is more on the way.

Greater Pentecostal Temple, for instance, has launched 42 in 24. That is, build or remodel 42 homes in the area of 9th and Splitlog. Their mission is this: To serve as a catalyst to engage people in their communities, develop people to their fullest potential and foster an environment to attract investment, wealth and pride in our neighborhoods.” Well said.

Both of these examples, the infill housing around Waterway park and the 42 in 24, were not generated by the Unified Government. So what is the role of the UG? Our role, our responsibility is to find ways to improve our policies and services so that we create neighborhoods that are more beautiful, safer, and affordable.

And that is happening.

Last year, the Unified Government Land Bank Rehab program was awarded the League of Kansas Municipalities Inspire, Create and Innovate Community Award. This program takes homes that are tax delinquent, wipes away the delinquent taxes, sells them to qualified rehabbers who then invest their own time and money and bring these houses back to life and back onto the tax rolls. The program has resulted in 31 complete rehabs, for an additional 1.2m in appraised value. 44 more are in process.

Through the SOAR initiative, 76 dangerous structures were demolished, and 95 structures remain on the dangerous building list, down from 205 in 2017.

The UG completed a tax sale, bringing in \$814,000 in revenues to our City.

Our Parks and Rec crews improved the look of our neighborhoods by mowing a total of over 1000 individual addresses, not once, but multiple times, for a total mowing count of 5784.

Our Rapid Response Lot Abatement team completed 1224 lot remediations.

The UG commission approved a new noise ordinance to improve the ambience of our neighborhoods.

Currently, the UG Commission is reviewing our Land Bank policies to make sure that we are seeing our land bank properties as burdens on our expenditures, but as assets to be managed to generate growth.

Due to the work of our Police and Sheriff's Department, our neighborhoods are safer.

In 2018, our community experienced an 11.25 decrease in violent crime and 10.8 % reduction in property crime. In areas targeted by Project ACT, we saw a 21.6% decrease in violent crime and 27.7% reduction in property crime over an 18 month period.

KCKPD worked with the US Marshal's Service on project "Triple Beam", which resulted in 205 arrests, almost half of those arrested being known gang members, who are involved in the vast majority of drive-by shootings.

We will be rolling out the Community Connect video program which will allow businesses to share security camera video seamlessly with our police department.

Our Fire Department achieved an ISO rating of 2, which results in reduced insurance rates to all property owners. Just three weeks ago we broke ground on a new fire station to provide improved service to the Piper area.

All of these are simple improvements that improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

That is our mission, and it is happening, in large ways, in small ways, but of course there is so much more to do.

We will continue to move forward to improve the quality of life of the residents who live and work and play in KCK and Wyandotte County, who go to school here, who invest their lives and their families here. And as we move forward, let us keep in front of ourselves the examples of so many people across this community who are doing so much. Let us keep in front of us the example of Donnelly College, which for seventy years has opened our hearts and minds to those who needed an opportunity to attend college; let us keep before us the

example of our Coronado students, who opened their hearts to our astronauts and opened their minds to search out answers; let us look to the example of Loren Taylor, whose respect for the stories of our diverse communities from our past can inspire in us a love for them today.

And in closing, let us look to one more example for how we will continue to move forward.

St. Mary's Catholic Church at 5th and Ann was the mother church in the diocese of Kansas City, Kansas. The first church building was a small wood building build in 1858, and seven of the founding families were members of the Wyandotte tribe. A second, larger church was dedicated in 1866, and the current building was started in 1881, and dedicated in 1903. It took a long time to do development in those days: it still does!

From that small beginning, the church grew and served many generations of families. In this slide, we have a photo from 1953, the wedding of my father, Lloyd Alvey from Turner, to Harriet West, from Strawberry Hill. Harriet's grandparents were also married at this parish. But like many churches in our traditional neighborhoods, the number of parishioners declined and with it, of course, collections to pay the bills, and so St. Mary's was closed in 1980, in 1982 it reopened as a soup kitchen and was one of the largest soup kitchens in the metropolitan area, until 1997 the soup kitchen moved to better facilities. For a short while, it provided a place to store supplies

for the Croatian Relief Services, and then became vacant again. It sat empty until Matt Tomasic, a Strawberry Hill native, purchased it in 2007, and began to look for the best re-use of this beautiful structure. And he found it in the Police Athletic League. 407 young people are signed up for boxing, art classes, a community garden, fishing, a football clinic, and more to come. St. Mary's Church/Police Athletic League was recently awarded the Excellence Award for best Adaptive Re-use from Historic Kansas City.

In all of these examples we see how we have always made progress: by opening our hearts and minds to all who come here, as they come here; by seeking ways to serve the needs of one another, rather than our own self-interest; by doing the small things well, and better each day; by simply always working to improve the quality of life of our citizens.

I end with just this: thank you to each one of you: each of you is doing your part to improve the quality of life in KCK and Wyandotte County. On behalf of all the people of our community, thank you.

